



Canada's First Peoples

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Subarctic People

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The Subarctic people occupied a majority of Canada from the Yukon to Newfoundland, including parts of seven provinces and two territories.

The Environment

- 5 million km² of northern or boreal coniferous forest that extended from the arctic tundra to the mountains, plains or deciduous forest in the south and across North America from Labrador nearly to the Bering Sea.
- Three-quarters of the area lay on the Canadian Shield, Hudson Bay and Mackenzie River lowlands, full of lakes and rivers.
- The rest consisted of western mountain ranges, plateaus and the Yukon River lowlands.
- The soil was poor and often swampy.
- Winters were long and harsh but forest cover and snow provided shelter for people and animals.
- Temperatures often reach -40° C in winter but could rise to 30° C in summer.
- The animals: Moose, caribou, black bear, Dall sheep (northwestern mountains), beaver, hare ("rabbit") marmot, groundhog, wolverine, otter, marten, mink, weasel, muskrat, lynx, wolf, coyote, fox.
- In some areas, there were also Muskoxen, bison and wapiti.
- Fish were plentiful and included species of whitefish, pike, lake trout, grayling and suckers in the Arctic and salmon in the Pacific and Atlantic areas.
- Migratory waterfowl, like ducks, passed through the Subarctic seasonally.



Canadian Shield



Boreal Forest in Alberta



Mackenzie River

Settlements and Housing

- The Subarctic People used different kinds of houses, but all were small, easy to set up and take down, and move from place to place.
- Most Dene people lived in either plains-type tipis- skin

- tents supported by whalebones- or lean-tos of brush.
- Double Lean-tos covered in hide and brush were used.
 - Lean-tos were free-standing beams of wood or whale bone that were layered against a log or large rock, lashed together, and covered in brush and hide, resulting in a slanted roof and an opening for entering or exiting.
 - Hides kept the fur or hair on the side placed on the interior of the shelter, providing more warmth.
 - Some Dene used Pit Houses; layers of sod placed around a foundation built with whalebone or driftwood.
 - Since they were semi-nomadic, natives of the Subarctic had few possessions.
 - At fishing camps in the Cordillera there were roughly built log cabins called smokehouses.
 - The Innu lived in the round Wigwam.
 - A Montagnais person would dig a slanted hole about a foot deep, then lean alder branches around the opening of the hole, to make a shelter. The floor of the Wigwam was covered in Balsam boughs.
 - The northern Ojibwa lived in dwellings called ridge poles; conical lodges covered with birch bark.



Example of a double lean-to



Example of a lean-to



Family beside their pit house

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