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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.

Religion / Ceremonies

- Nanabush and Wisahkecahk were the hero and trickster figures of the Algonquian culture -The Athapascan culture's hero was often associated with migratory waterbirds and the sun, both of whom are seen to fly through the heavens.
- The Hero, in many Subarctic myths, was the first person to become powerful.
- For them, power and knowledge were combined.
- The culture hero also had survival skills and outwitted evil medicine persons and fought dangerous animals, and thus made the world a safer place in which humans could live.
- Gwich'in people believed in animal spirits, spirit beings, bushmen (wild Indians with supernatural attributes). Their hero-trickster was the Raven.
- Most people had some medicine power, which was enhanced by a body of beliefs, such as customs observed after killing an animal.
- Dietary and various social observances marked birth, puberty and death.
- Children learned the importance of good relations with the spirits of animals and other natural phenomena and how they could affect the well-being of a person.
- Medicine people conducted the shaking tent ceremony, where spirits of people or animals were conjured for curing and prophecy in a tipi.
- Western Athapascan medicine men and women charged high prices for their services and asserted prerogatives or took liberties among their people.
- Among the Innu, certain traveling men and women used scapulamancy, a form of divination done by interpreting the pattern of cracks on a caribou shoulder blade heated by fire to determine the trail ahead.
- The Beaver people of the Peace River region had prophets who were said to have experienced death and flown like swans to a spirit land beyond the sky.
- They created religious dances based on songs they brought back from their journeys to heaven.



The Raven, a common trickster figure of Algonquian culture

Art

- Han Artistic endeavours were manifested primarily by decorations on clothing and accessories and in songs.
- People expressed their worldview in singing, dancing, oratory and extensive oral narrative.
- Like many other Subarctic people, they sang to the accompaniment of single-headed hand drums.



Naskapi Coat



A Dogrib Hand Game in 1939

Dogrib Hand Game

- The game incorporated music, drums, two teams and the game of trial and error.
- Two teams lined up on either side of a tent, kneeling, facing each other.
- Each member of one team had a token in one of his fists. The objective of the other team was to guess which fist held the token for each member. The guessing team picked a captain to do the guessing, and every time he got a guess wrong, the team holding the tokens got a point. Each guess that was right eliminated the man in question from the token team. After one round was finished, the remaining men from the token team put the token in their fist again, and the guessing team got to guess again. Once all the men had been eliminated, then the teams switched positions. The point of the game was for the token team to gain the top number of points twice in a row, meaning no men were eliminated for two rounds in a row.

Clothing

- Northern forest natives wore soft-tanned hide Moccasins, leggings, shirts and coats in the summer.
- Hair had been removed from the hide by scraping and treating it with animal brains.
- A short V-tailed summer slipover caribou skin tunic was worn by the Pacific Athapascans, and was decorated with dyed porcupine quills, dentalium and beads made from seeds.
- Sometimes leggings with moccasins were attached to

the slipover.

- Subarctic people tended to wear lighter clothing and whenever they stopped, to keep warm, they'd build a fire.
- Winter sleeping robes were made of rabbit skins cut into strips, twisted and woven together.
- Gwich'in women tattooed their chins and on ceremonial occasions men styled their hair with red ochre mixed with grease and sprinkled with down.



Yukon Costume

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