

The Eskimo People!

For thousands of years, small groups of people have lived in the cold northern areas of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Siberia. The Eskimos have been the only people successful in finding food, clothing and shelter in these frozen lands.

The "Inuit", or Eskimos, of Alaska and Canada are the most well known. The word "Inuit" means "real people." The word "Eskimo" is an Indian word meaning "eaters of raw meat."

Winters are severely cold in these northern regions. The temperature often remains 25° below zero for weeks at a time. Yet the Eskimos are able to build homes and find food which allows them to live in this harsh climate.

Summer in the Arctic circle is much warmer than winter, but very short. When the snow melts, the "tundra" is exposed to allow some plants and grasses to grow.

Eskimos do not live in igloos made of snow, as most people think. Ice houses are built only as temporary shelters during winter hunting trips. The "igloo" is made from blocks of snow which are carefully cut and formed into a small round house with a hole in the top for a chimney.

Permanent homes are usually built of wood and whalebone and covered with seal skins and earth. Family members sleep on raised platforms in one large room. Seal oil is burned for warmth and light.

The clothing used in these harsh climates is very warm and protective. The Eskimo people must protect themselves from the severe cold with parkas, boots and mittens made from fur and animal hides. Snow goggles are used to protect their eyes from the glaring snow.

Finding food has always been a struggle for the Eskimos. At times, they patiently wait for hours in the cold to capture a walrus, seal or polar bear. Eskimos kill animals only for food or other useful products like oil, hides, and fur. In the summer, they catch fish, rabbits and even wild reindeer!

Eskimos use snowshoes to travel short distances on land. Long-distant travel is done with dog sleds. Huskies are the only animals that Eskimos have domesticated. The dogs are carefully trained to work as a team to pull the sleds long distances.

Two different types of boats are used to travel by water. The *kayak* is a one-man canoe which is extremely light and waterproof. It is made of driftwood and sealskin that fits tightly around the waist of the person inside. If the boat overturns, he or she will stay dry. The *umiak* is a large boat in which the entire family can travel. It is made of driftwood, whalebone and walrus skin.

Eskimos are generally warm and gentle people. Families usually live together in peaceful harmony while outsiders are made to feel welcome. Little has changed in their lives in modern times. They understand that each person depends on the others for his or her survival in the cold, harsh arctic climate.