

Inuit – housing essay



The housing used by the Inuit people depended upon the time of the year. In the summer they lived in tents. But in the winter they needed to protect themselves from the cold so they built and lived in a winter home they called an igluvigak.

Most people refer to the Inuit winter home as an igloo, but the Inuit people called their homes igluvigaks. The summer tents that the Inuit people lived in were called tipis. A tipi is a cone-shaped house. The women were responsible for building the tipi.

Often the tipi was built near water so they could easily fish and hunt water animals. The women would begin to build the tipi with at least twelve long poles that they would stand up in a cone shape and tie them together at the top. Once the poles were secured, the women covered the poles with caribou skins. The doorway of a tipi would face the rising sun in the east. They would make a fireplace in the middle of the tipi. The smoke of the fire would escape through the hole at the top of the tipi.

Tipis were easily moved. It didn't take the women long to take down and set up a tipi. Another summer tent that the Inuit lived in was called a tupiq. A tupiq looked very similar to the shape of a tent. If wood was not found the Inuit people would use whalebone or antlers that they had tried to straighten.

The back of the tupiq resembled a tipi. That was where the family slept. The front of the tupiq was covered in thin strips of skin so that light could enter. The tent was secured to the ground by heavy stones. During the winter some

Inuit people would turn their tent into a winter home. They did this by covering them with shrubs and a second layer of skin.

The shrubs and the second layer of skin provided insulation. Then snow walls were built around the tent to keep out the wind. A popular winter home that the Inuit people lived in was an igluvigak. The word igluvigak means “ snow house”. Unlike a tent, the igluvigak does not have to be held up with logs. To build an igluvigak, the people would begin by marking an outline of a circle in the snow.

Then they carefully cut blocks of snow with a special snow knife made of wood, ivory or bone. The blocks were placed on the circle outline. Then they would shave the top of the block off so that it had an upward angle and it was also slanted inward. The Inuit people would continue to lay and shave the snow blocks in a spiral that eventually formed a dome. They called the last snow block a keystone.

The keystone was pushed up through the inside to the tip of the igluvigak. A tunnel for the entrance was made to help keep out the cold.