



Canada's Natives LONG AGO



NORTHWOODS PRESS
— DONNA WARD —

Publications by Donna Ward

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Geography, Province to Province (Canadian Geography for Elementary Grades)

Canada in the Twentieth Century High School Course

Canada, My Country (Geography & Social Studies for Early Grades)

Courage and Conquest: Discovering Canadian History (Settlement History for Elementary Grades)

Prime Ministers of Canada Notebook

War of 1812 Unit Study

Cover Photograph:

Todd Bitler (subject) is an early 18th century woodland Indian re-enactor, living historian and artist. As a Native re-enactor and living history teacher he creates a character that is authentic and believable. Yes, his nose really is pierced through to allow the feather access.

Website: www.nativeworkshop.com or go through Easy Links at donnaward.net

Jeff Brown (photographer), Corporal, Amherst's 15th Regiment of Foot. Website: www.thekingscompany.ca or go through Easy Links at donnaward.net.

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Written by: Donna Ward

Line Illustrations: Marjorie Cassidy

Cover Design: Images Graphic Design

Graphic Design: Dolores McElroy, Dragonfly Design

Printed and Bound in Canada

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Revisions: 2000, 2007, 2015

Published by: Donna Ward/Northwoods Press, www.donnaward.net

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Ward, Donna, 1958-

Canada's natives long ago : for elementary grades

Rev. ed.

ISBN: 978-1-927474-06-8

1. Indians of North America - Canada - history - Juvenile literature. 2. Inuit - Canada - History - Juvenile literature.

I. Cassidy, Marj, 1929-. II. Title

E89.C2W3672000

971.00497

C00-930713-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who Are Canada's First People?	5
Recommended Resources.....	6
Beginnings	7
Religion	8
Meeting the Europeans	10
Canada's First Peoples Today	12
Inuit of the Arctic	13
Recommended Resources.....	14
The People	15
First Hunt	17
Food.....	18
Shelter	19
Moving and Hunting.....	20
Work and Customs.....	21
Arctic Rose.....	22
Activities	23
Inuit of the Arctic Workpage	24
Eastern Woodland Farmers.....	25
Recommended Resources.....	26
The People	27
The Ever Present Enemy.....	29
Food.....	30
Shelter	31
Travel and War.....	32
Work and Customs.....	33
Joseph Brant - Thanendanegea	34
Activities	35
Eastern Woodland Farmers Workpage.....	36
Eastern Woodland Hunters	37
Recommended Resources.....	38
The People	39
Rabbit Fur's Dream	41
Food.....	42
Shelter	43
Moving and Hunting.....	44
Work and Customs.....	45
Activities	46
Eastern Woodland Hunters Workpage.....	47
Natives of the Subarctic	49
Recommended Resources.....	50
The People	51
Starvation Winter.....	53

Food	54
Shelter	55
Moving and Hunting	56
Work and Customs	57
Thanadelthur	58
Activities	59
Natives of the Subarctic Workpage	60

Natives of the Plains.61

Recommended Resources	62
The People	63
Buffalo Hunt	65
Food	66
Shelter	67
Moving and Hunting	68
Work and Customs	69
Who's Who?	70
Activities	71
Natives of the Plains Workpage	72

Natives of the Plateau.. . . .73

Recommended Resources	74
The People	75
Salmon Days	77
Food	78
Shelter	79
Moving and Hunting	80
Work and Customs	81
Activities	81
Natives of the Plateau Workpage	82

Natives of the Pacific Northwest83

Recommended Resources	84
The People	85
Captive	87
Food	88
Shelter	89
Travel and War	90
Work and Customs	91
Activities	92
Natives of the North Pacific Coast Workpage	93

Project Resources & Answer Key.. . . .95

Maps	94, 96
Food	98
Shelter	99
Methods of Travel	100
Workpage Answer Key	101
Index	102
Birchbark Basket Pattern	103

Inuit of the Arctic



Sample



First Hunt

“Ashevak” my mother shouted. “Ashevak wake up!” She shook me urgently. What was wrong? I heard the dogs barking. What a noise! So dark! My heart jumped when I remembered all the men had gone away walrus hunting. Only the women and children were left. I was still young and had not often used a gun.

My mother was putting on her parka. Something was outside. She wanted me to go with her. I knew from the sound of the dogs it was something bad. It could be wolves, or a bear, or perhaps some spirit monster!

I was so scared I was shaking. I pulled my parka and boots on at the same time, and scurried through the tunnel to the night outside. It was so dark! There were no stars, or moon, only clouds and darkness. I ran across the brook to catch up with my mother and some others.

“Ashevak!” cried my brother’s wife, “Where is your boot?” I stopped to look. I had forgotten one of my boots without even knowing. Now I really shivered.

“Come, come!” yelled my mother. “It is a polar bear after the meat.”

Like a blast, the smell of rotten meat hit me. The wind was blowing the smell over us. Then we saw it against the horizon, a huge he-bear. It was clawing and tearing away at the dogs’ rotten meat in the cache.

The night was so dark I could hardly see the gun as I knelt to shoot it. Even if my arms were not shaking, it would have been hard to kill the bear for I could barely see down the barrel of the gun. I shot! The bear ran away. My mother and I watched until we could not see it any more and we went back home.

I climbed back into bed and slowly warmed up. It was a very bad thing to go out without my boot on. I never slept. As soon as dawn came, I hurried out. It was light out now; so, I wasn’t afraid, even though I was by myself.

There he was! He had come back to eat at the cache. The bear was down in a hollow—I had to go very close. If I missed, the shot would scare him away, but if I injured him, he could charge. The stench of rotten meat enveloped me, but this was good, for the wind did not carry my scent to the bear.

I crouched down and very carefully aimed at that big, old head. The bear was greedily ripping at the meat. Boom! I shot him. He fell down instantly. That was my very first polar bear. I was fifteen years old.

Based on a true story.¹

¹ Peter Pitseolak. *People From Our Side*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1975, p. 100.

Food

For the majority of Inuit groups the sea provided most of what was needed to survive. The small ringed seal which lives under the sea ice could be harpooned throughout the winter. The seal supplied the people with food, oil for heating and cooking, and hides for boots, clothing, and tents. Walrus and whales were also hunted.

Cache: a secure place for storing food or tools

The most valuable land mammal was the caribou. In the fall, hunters intercepted the caribou on their southern migrations. In autumn caribou hides were in their best condition and suitable for winter clothing.



For some inland groups on either side of Hudson Bay, caribou meat was a main winter staple. Other sources of food were the muskox, polar bear, waterfowl and ptarmigan. Birds'

eggs, and a few berries and plants provided variety. Most of the food was eaten raw, because without wood, there was little fuel for cooking.

Food was stored in a cache, a hole in the frozen ground. Rocks piled on top kept it safe from marauding wolves or bears. In the summer, meat was dried to preserve it though sometimes decaying meat was preferred.

Some of the foods relished by the Inuit of long ago, such as blood soup, raw liver, or the partially digested stomach contents of a caribou, seem repulsive to us. However, they contained the nutrition the Inuit needed to stay healthy on a diet that did not include fruits or vegetables.

...one delicacy called for a whole sealskin, complete with the blubber layer, to be stuffed with small sea birds and left under rocks until the contents had turned to the consistency of cheese.¹

¹ Alan D. McMillan. *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988, p.254.

Life in the Far North, pp. 12-15; *Kids Book of Aboriginal Peoples*, pp. 26-27.

PROJECT BOOK

Colour the correct project picture of the food of this cultural group. Draw additional pictures and/or write things you learned about the food and the gathering of it. Glue notes and pictures in your project book.

SHELTER

The Inuit are an incredible people known for their resourcefulness in using what nature provides. In past days, they used what was available from the land to make secure homes.

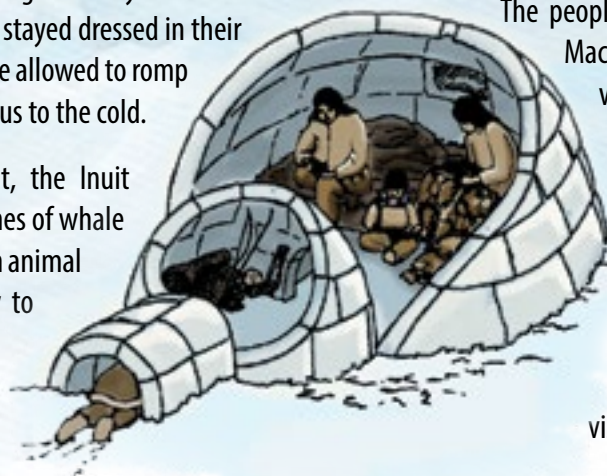
The Mackenzie Delta Dene, in the western Northwest Territories, lived in igloos which were partially underground. Poles laid across the top of the walls and draped with skins formed the roof. Then the first winter storm covered and insulated the dome with snow.

It was the Inuit of the central region who lived in an igloo made entirely of snow blocks. The entrance was a tunnel leading to a snow porch which provided storage space. Here the outer clothing was brushed off and left. The tunnel then continued on to the interior of the home.

In the igloo caribou skins draped over platforms of snow served as beds and seats. The only heat was a small soapstone lamp which burned smoky whale or seal oil, therefore the temperature in the igloo rarely rose above the freezing point. Inside, people stayed dressed in their inner parkas however, babies were allowed to romp naked for short periods, impervious to the cold.


When the snow began to melt, the Inuit moved into tents made with frames of whale bones or driftwood and covered in animal skins. Donald Marsh, missionary to the Inuit, remembers spring in the Arctic.

Spring is a wonderful time in the Arctic. The sun actually begins to feel warm and the snow starts to melt... I recall a three o'clock morning visit from a family who burst into our home laughing hard because the igloo roof had fallen on top of them in bed. The next day they erected a tent shelter within the igloo as the final stage before moving out.¹



The people groups at the mouth of the Mackenzie River lived in large villages, as did the Eastern Inuit of Labrador. Central Inuit were more nomadic, hunting in small groups in summer and living in larger villages in winter. These groups often joined their igloos with tunnels to allow easy access for visiting.

¹ Ibid., pp. 37,39.

 *Life in the Far North*, pp. 18-21; *Kids Book of Aboriginal Peoples*, pp. 24-25.

PROJECT BOOK

Colour the correct project picture of the housing of this cultural group. On lined paper write different things you learned about their shelters. Glue the notes and the picture in your project book.

MOVING AND HUNTING

The Inuit had two types of boats for travel. The one-man kayak, the most ingenious Aboriginal boat, could slip through the water quickly and silently. The larger umiak was able to carry big loads such as whale meat and blubber, or a family and their goods moving to an Arctic island. Both boats were made of sealskin stretched over frames of whalebone or driftwood.

Families travelling across the land in the summer packed loads on their dogs and carried everything else on their own backs.

Travel was easier when snow and ice covered the land. Loads could be pulled on a dog sled called a komatik. In the west, where there were more trees, dogs were harnessed in pairs or one behind the other since the trails were narrow. When travelling on the open tundra, sled dogs were harnessed in a fan-shaped pattern.

The Arctic people had to travel to find food. On the sea, walrus, seal, and whale were hunted. Caribou were easier prey when they swam across lakes or inlets. The people knew the best locations to find food.



In summer, some Inuit groups hunted whales. Sealskins were tied and blown up like balloons and then attached to the ends of harpoons as floats. The hunter would manoeuvre his kayak close enough to the whale to thrust a harpoon into it. The floats dragged behind it and slowed it down. When it was exhausted, the whale surfaced and the hunters killed it with harpoons. A favourite treat, especially for the children, was raw whale blubber.



In the winter, the dogs' keen sense of smell helped the hunter search for seal breathing holes. Seals surface for air three or four times every hour. The hunter prodded through the snow with his harpoon to find the hole, and then carefully dug away the snow to expose it. A feather placed at the hole fluttered when the seal came to breath. A hunter stood motionless watching the feather closely, possibly for many hours, until a seal came to breath. Then he thrust his harpoon down the hole to kill the seal. Meat from a seal could feed a group for several days.

Life in the Far North, pp. 16-17; Kids Book of Aboriginal Peoples, pp. 28.

PROJECT BOOK

Colour the correct project picture of the method of transportation of this cultural group. Add some notes and glue the notes, project picture and any additional material or pictures in your project book.

INUIT OF THE ARCTIC ~ WORKPAGE

Draw lines to match the word to its definition.

aumiat

a place to store food or tools

igloo

a large skin boat

cache

one person of Inuit descent

kayak

a dog sled

permafrost

the hood in a mother's parka for carrying a baby

umiak

a one-man skin boat

komatik

an Inuit house of snow blocks

Inuk

ground permanently frozen below the surface



Complete this page and add it to your project book.