

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

January 2007

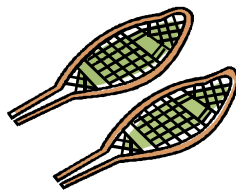


Snowshoes

In the northern regions of the world, snow covers the ground for almost half of the year and plays an important role in the functioning of ecosystems. The snow insulates plants and animals against the cold and recharges the soil, lakes and rivers when it melts. It also poses challenges by covering food sources and making travel difficult. Animals living in these regions have adapted to snow in many different ways; changing the colour of their fur and feathers, migrating to warmer locations, growing extra fur or fat and sleeping through the winter, to name a few.

People living in these northern regions have also had to adapt to the challenges of snow. The First Peoples of Canada (including the Inuit, Dene, Cree and Ojibwe) created a variety of ways to do this: the toboggan, dogsled, sleeping bag, parka and snowshoes.

Because people carry a lot of weight on a narrow surface (feet), we sink into the snow, making travel tedious and slow. Animals, such as the lynx, snowshoe hare and ptarmigan, have long, wide feet that keep them above the snow. It is likely that observations of these animals led the First People to design snowshoes, and for thousands of years snowshoes have helped them survive in snow-covered regions.



Come and join a snowshoe adventure at the marsh this winter!

Did you know?

That snowshoeing burns 45% more calories than regular walking.



That traditionally the webbing was made of moose or caribou hide.



That modern snowshoes are made of aluminum instead of willow or birch.



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Snowshoe types

Several different types of snowshoes were developed by the northern peoples to suit their needs, which were defined by type of terrain and snow.



Pickerel or Alaskan style snowshoes were used in the flat, open areas of the southern plains and above the tree line in the north, where wind hardens the snow. The long, narrow profile helps keep the snowshoes straight and allows for easy walking. The rounded toe allows them to carry more weight.



Ojibwe style snowshoes, which are very similar to the Pickerel style, have pointed toes which prevent the snow from piling up on the snowshoe.



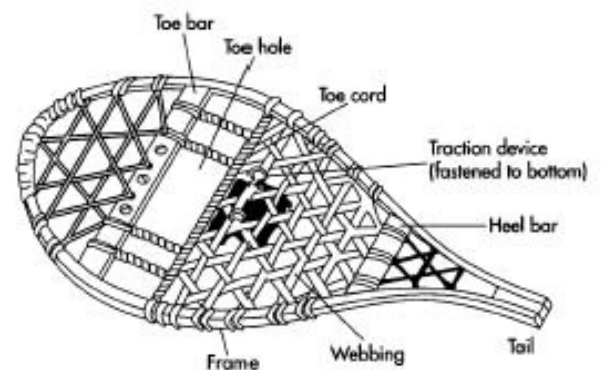
Bearpaw style snowshoes were used in the northern forests, where snow accumulates and does not get wind packed. These snowshoes are shorter and lack a tail, making turning and maneuvering in treed areas much easier. They are also much wider, making it easier to stay on top of the softer snow.



Algonquin style snowshoes were used in the southeastern forest areas of the Great Lakes, where the terrain is varied. These snowshoes are wide enough to stay above the soft snow in the forest, and long enough to stay straight while traveling in open areas.

Parts of a snowshoe

All snowshoes have the same basic parts, no matter what the style.



Snow

Most people generally think of all snow as being the same. However, to people that live amongst snow and depend on it for food, travel and sometimes shelter, such as the Inuit of northern Canada, there are many different types of snow. The Inuit have a rich vocabulary to describe different snow conditions, making it easier to describe and understand the area where they are traveling, hunting or staying. Here are some examples:

- Api* (ah-pee) - snow sitting on the ground
- Pukak* (pookak) - loose, recrystallized snow on the ground, with deep snow above
- Upsik* (upsick) - hard, windpacked snow
- Siqoq* (seecok) - snow drifting in the wind
- Mapsuk* (mapsuk) - overhanging snowdrift

