



Algonquin Nation Secretariat

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Anicinabe Aki Project 2005.

Some notes re: Algonquin material culture.

Draft

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Answers to Questions about Material Culture¹

1. Wigwams.

The general Algonquin term for a dwelling of any sort is *Wikiwam* or, more commonly, *Mikiwam*. An older word for a winter dwelling was *Nasawahigan* (*Nasa'ogan*). The form of the latter resembled the tipi familiar from the western plains. The first step in constructing a *Mikiwam* was to make a frame out of poles, usually spruce. These poles were known as *Mikiwamatik*. Very often, they were bent to form a circular or oval shape. The covering of a lodge was called *Apakwei*. Sometimes wood (*mitik*) was used for covering, though sheets of birchbark were also very common. Once they were in place, the sheets would be sewn together with spruce roots. The advantage of birchbark was that it was portable. The framework of the dwelling would be left behind (for future use) and the sheets (*Wikwasapakwei*) rolled up and carried to a new location. The door of the dwelling was usually a moose hide or trade blanket. In wintertime, snow would be banked up around the outside to provide extra warmth.

Algonquin people made lodges of various sizes. In more southerly regions, they could be quite large, housing several related families. There would be a door and a fire at each end, with a smoke hole over each fire. Because space was at a premium, most supplies were stored outside in a cache, though provisions needed during the day were kept on a high rack near the door. The floor of the dwelling was covered with cedar or spruce boughs, and then with mats, over which bedding (blankets or hides) was placed at night. During the day, the bedding was rolled up and used as seating or placed along the walls.

¹ Note to readers: In preparation for the tourist season at the Ft. Temiscamingue-Obadjiwan NHS, the Timiskaming First Nation & Parks Canada staff framed some questions about Algonquin material culture. This was done in order to provide Anicinabe Aki team members & Parks Canada interpretive staff with some baseline information gathered from historical records. James Morrison was asked to assemble the answers (the questions themselves are included at the end of this report). Any comments or further questions would be welcome.

Each family had a right to a certain part of the lodge. Food preparation, however, was usually done by the senior woman in the family, who would then distribute the food to the other members. Algonquin people did not eat raw meat. Instead, it was either roasted or boiled. *Abwanak* was the name for the roasting stick on which the meat was placed. The principal cooking vessel was the *Akik* or kettle. The term *Paminekwe* means “take care of the kettle”. The term *Kapatekwe* means “take the kettle off the fire”. The principal utensils were the *Mokoman* (knife) and the *Emikwan* or wooden spoon, of which there were many sizes (the latter word has passed into Canadian French as *micoine*). Forks were not used. Food was eaten on *Ona’gan*, which were wooden plates or bowls. The same bowls were also used for a popular game of chance called *Pagessan* (le jeu au plat).

2. Canoes and Paddles.

The word for canoe is *Tchiman*. As part of a compound word, however, canoe is rendered as *on* (plural *onak*). *Amonakise*, for example, means “to fall out of the canoe into the water”. And *Sikanibono* means “to empty the water out of a canoe by turning it over”. The canoe-maker (usually a man) was called *Tchimaniked* or *Tchimanikewinini*. Algonquin canoes were originally made of birchbark, *Wikwas*. The word *Andokwam* means “to go get bark to make a canoe”. And *Pishanakekwe* means “to take the bark off a tree”.

The generic word for paddle is *Abwi*. A woman’s paddle is *ikwe’abwi*. The word *Abwike* means “to make a paddle”. Algonquin paddles were tapered from top to bottom, with the bottom of the blade slightly wider than the top part. The grip was wide and thin. *Abwisak* means “paddle wood”. Paddles were carved from a variety of materials, including maple, birch, ash, cedar and spruce. Cedar paddles were lightweight and resistant to rot, but hardwood (especially maple) paddles were preferred, because they didn’t break as easily and allowed for a much more powerful stroke in the water. Algonquin paddles were not usually decorated.

The longer stern paddle, which served as a rudder (*gouvernail*) for the canoe, was called *Atikweigan*. It was also known as the *Otakewabwi*, a word derived from the verb *otake*, to steer. The *Otakewinini* was the steersman of a canoe. The word *Nimitamonak* means “front of the canoe”. The bowsman, therefore, was the *Nimitamaamowinini*, which is also the Algonquin word for guide.

3. Snowshoes.

The Algonquin word for snowshoe is *Akim*. Both men and women made snowshoes. The word *Akimak* means “snowshoe wood”, which is also the Algonquin word for ash (*frêne*), which was the preferred material for making snowshoe frames. The cross-pieces, usually made out of cedar or red pine, were called *Okwik*. The strings of leather webbing used for lacing snowshoes were called *Ashkimaneiab*. These strings were made of *babiche* (a Canadian French word derived from the Montagnais term for raw leather), which was cut from hides of moose, deer or caribou (and on rare occasions, sturgeon).

As with canoes, there were several steps involved in snowshoe manufacture. The most important were the following:

Waginakwe, bending the wood (*plier le bois*)

Okwikike, making the cross pieces (*faire les traverses*)

Panipakwaige, making holes in the frames (*percer les mortaises*)

Ashkime, making snowshoe webbing (*faire le tissu*)

Wapitakime, lacing snowshoes (*lacer le tissu*)

There were many different kinds of snowshoes, adapted to the many different types of terrain or snow conditions. For example, narrow snowshoes with long tails were used for long-distance river travel, while short round snowshoes were used in deep snow. The names of some of these different snowshoes are as follows:

Nonimikatikwek, round-headed snowshoes (raquettes à tête arrondie)

Ashawekatikwek, square-headed snowshoes (raquettes à tête carrée)

Kakakingwewakimak, cross-eyed snowshoes (raquettes aux yeux rapprochés)

Makwasakimak, bear-paw snowshoes (raquettes sans queue)

4. Baskets.

Algonquin people made a variety of containers. This was almost always women's work. The generic word for any container or box is *Makak*, though this term was usually applied to large boxes used for storing maple sugar. Most Algonquin containers were made of *Wikwas* or birchbark. A *Wikwemot* was a smaller bark container used for collecting or storing raspberries or similar items.

Another type of container was the *Watapi'onagan*, in which the pieces of birchbark were sewn together with split spruce roots (*watap*), of the same kind used in making canoes. These containers often had floral or other designs on them, which were created by scraping away the dark inner bark to reveal the lighter bark underneath.

Baskets were known as *Watapi'makak*. These, however, were only made in the southern parts of Algonquin territory, where suitable materials were available. Some baskets were made of willow branches. Others were made from the inner bark of the *Wikopiminj* or basswood tree. Basswood strips (*wikop*) of equal width were woven together in a lattice form to make the basket.

TFN List of Questions (Dawn Wabie)

1. Wigwam: What is a wigwam? Who builds the wigwams? What is used to make the wigwams? When did they make a wigwam? How did they make a wigwam? Who would live in a wigwam? Are there other types of wigwams? Are they lightweight?

2. Paddles: What is a paddle? What are paddles made of? What are paddles used for? Why the paddle is made the way it is? Who made the paddles? When would paddles be used? How did they make paddles? Are there other types of paddles? Did they decorate paddles? Are they lightweight?

3. Snowshoes: What are snowshoes? How are snowshoes made? What are they made of? What are snowshoes used for? Who made the snowshoes? When were snowshoes used? What types of tools are used to make snowshoes? What are other styles of snowshoes? Are they light weight? Are snowshoes used for any other purpose?

4. Baskets: What is a basket? What are baskets used for? How are baskets made? What are they made of? Who made the baskets? When were baskets used? Was there a particular time of year that they made baskets? What material is used to make baskets? What is used to seal the baskets to make them water proof? Are there other styles of baskets? What other used were baskets used for?

5. Birch Bark Canoes: Spruce gum is always collected year round and kept for future use. Then Birch bark is harvested off the trees in mid-spring or early summer when the bark is ripe to pull off the trunk of the tree. The tree is not cut down to do this so that the tree will live and grow back the birch bark layers again. Then a tall straight cedar tree is selected from the woods. It is chopped down and hand split into ghun wales, ribs and the sheeting for the canoe frame. The birch is then laid down straight on the ground and the frame is laid on top of the birch bark, rocks are used to hold the frame in its place on the birch bark. Then sticks are stuck into the ground

forming the birch bark around the frame, at this time the birch bark is sewn to the ghun wales. The front and back birch bark pieces are then added and also sewn and attaching it to the middle of the canoe. When all the sewing is done and the full form of the canoe is visible, the bottom sheeting is then put in and the ribs at the same time. The cross braces are sewn in and the seats. When this is all done the canoe is ready for the final step. The final step in building a canoe is to put the pitch or spruce gum on all the outer cracks and sew seams to make the craft water worthy.

Parks Canada list of Questions (Josée) (English follows)

Liste de questions par rapport aux activités algonquines de la saison 2005 :

WIGWAM

- 1-Pourquoi la fabrication du wigwam versus le tee-pee.
- 2-Quel matériel était le plus utilisé et pourquoi? (Dans un des livres algonquins. La photo représente du pin gris et le descriptif de l'écorce de bouleau??). Est-ce possible d'utiliser un ou l'autre et pourquoi plus un que l'autre. Quels sont les autres matériaux (branche de ???)
- 3-Signification de la forme?
- 4-Est-ce que c'était chaud?
- 5-Est-ce qu'on y faisait un feu à l'intérieur?
- 6-Était-ce un campement permanent ou on le défaisait pour l'apporter avec nous?
- 7-Est-ce qu'on gardait les matériaux ou on en fabriquait un autre avec d'autres matériaux?

À L'INTÉRIEUR DU WIGWAM

- 1-Quel était le menu des algonquin
- 2-Est-ce qu'ils mangeaient cru ou cuit?
- 3-Méthodes de cuisson (quels outils utilisent-ils?), fourchettes, cuillères, chaudrons...
- 4-Qu'est-ce qui meublait le wigwam?

RAQUETTES

- 1-Étapes de fabrication
- 2-Matériaux utilisés
- 3-D'autres utilités que de marcher dans la neige?
- 4-Combien de temps ça peut prendre pour faire une raquette?

PANIER

- 1-Matériaux utilisés?
- 2-Utilités?
- 3- Étapes de fabrication?

CANOTS/PAGAIES

1-On connaît déjà les étapes de fabrication grâce à Karl Chevrier et son équipe. Mais si vous avez des informations à ce sujet, n'hésitez pas à nous les transmettre.

(Karl nous disait que pour construire un canot de 16-17 pieds, ça prenait 1 mois à deux personnes. Aussi, le canot est bon pour 100 ans, une génération. Le canot d'écorce demande peu d'entretien, seulement mettre un peu de graisses d'ours pour bien l'imperméabiliser. Les pagaies sont fabriquées avec du cèdre. C'est léger et c'est un bon bois qui ne pourrit pas au contact prolongé avec l'eau).

Question about the algonquin activities :

Wigwam:

- 1- What is the difference between Tee-Pee and Wigwam?
- 2- What is the material that natives were using and why?
- 3- What's cone-shaped meaning?
- 4- Was it warm inside?
- 5- Did you always make fireplace inside of it?
- 6- Is that a permanent camp or they were moving with all their material?

7- Were they keeping their material or they were changing it?

Wigwam's inside:

- 1- What kind of food the Algonquin were eating?
- 2- Were they always cooked their food?
- 3- How they were cooking their food? Which tools or appliances they used? Forks, spoons...cauldron?
- 4- What can we find inside a real wigwam (furniture)?

Snowshoes:

- 1- Stages of making?
- 2- Material used?
- 3- Can we use the snowshoes for an other activity?
- 4- How many time Algonquin took to make a pair of snowshoe?

Baskets:

- 1- Material used?
- 2- Stages of making?
- 3- Baskets were using for...

Birch bark canoe and paddle:

Actually, we know all the stages of building a canoe, but if you have some information about it, then you can share it with us.