

A History of Igloos

No one knows who built the first igloo but it's easy to figure out why it was built. In the great frozen expanses of the northern latitudes where trees and other building materials are extremely scarce or non-existent, an igloo built of snow (and sometimes ice) was the only practical means to create a shelter in pre-historic times. The practicality was due to more than using the only materials available - using an igloo for shelter also meant that heavy tents didn't need to be packed by hunters and migrating tribes. In addition, igloos were warmer and withstood heavy weather better than any other type of shelter on the frozen, wind-blown tundra. They were easier and faster to build than many other kinds of temporary structures, often even where wood was available, so igloos served many purposes with the added benefit that they could be left behind with no real loss. Snow is free and plentiful in the northern latitudes for most of the year and, since it was easy and fast to work with, it was often the construction material of choice.

The earliest known Eskimo cultures existed approximately 5,000 years ago in Alaska and those cultures likely evolved from the Siberian cultures that existed as long ago as 10,000 to 15,000 years. Those cultures may have included peoples that came from various parts of Asia including Korea, Mongolia, and Russia. Igloos have probably been built for literally tens of thousands of years by people that eventually ranged literally half-way around the world.

The Inuit people have inhabited the far northern reaches of Canada (and eventually Greenland) since they migrated from Alaska around 1,000 AD. They became a distinct culture from the Eskimo sometime around 1,500 to 2,000 years ago. That distinct culture evolved from the people thought to have crossed the then-frozen Bering Straights (from what is now known as Siberia). Those people were known as Eskimos. Although the Inuit people invented the word "iglu" (or "igloo" as we know it) they are not actually Eskimo (or "Esquimaux") and it is respectful to refer to them only as Inuit to honor their distinct identity as a First Nations People.

The word "igloo" comes from the Inuit word for "house". As far as the Inuit are concerned, the word "iglu" can refer to any type of house or home, but the term "igloo" has come to mean "snowhouse" to the rest of the world.

So, when you build your own igloo it's fun to remember this long and wonderful heritage.

MADE IN CANADA

...Where Igloos Were Invented