

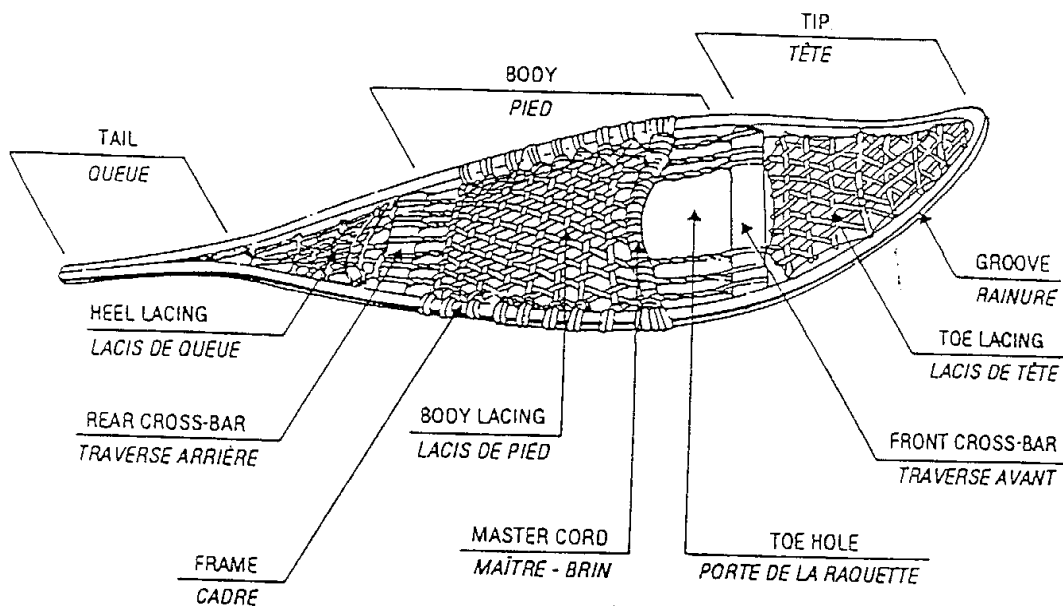


# Step Outdoors

- **Beavertail Snowshoe:** The familiar tear drop-shaped shoes are designed for wet snow conditions found in eastern North America. It is flat except for a slight upwardly curved toe, to allow easier walking, so the toe is not caught up in the snow. The wide width of the toe region provides stability and allows hill climbing. The tail is long and acts like a rudder so the snowshoe stays straight with each step. It also acts as a counterweight at the back of the snowshoe aiding the foot to pivot in the toe hole, making it easier to walk.
- **Ojibway Snowshoe:** Narrow with a toe curved noticeably upward, this snowshoe allows running and following dog teams across the plains and other flat terrain. It also makes travel through clear forests easy. The long toe and tail make turning in dense forest difficult. Pom-poms on the snowshoes are partly decorative but they also serve as a colour contrast with the snow helping to prevent snow blindness, and will help to muffle the noisy scraping sound of cold wood. This snowshoe was traditionally the most popular with trappers and foresters in Manitoba.

## 2. What are the parts of the Snowshoe?

Using a snowshoe and the following diagram, identify and discuss the purpose of the various parts of a snowshoe.



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- **Frame and Lacing:**

The frames of most snowshoes are made of White Ash, Sugar Maple or Yellow Birch. The front and rear cross-bars are often large and flat, but modern snowshoes have square-shaped bars for extra strength. Wooden snowshoes need a coat of shellac or other water-sealant protection applied every year.

The lacing or webbing used is traditionally from an adult Moose hide, today cow and steer hides are often used. In the toe and tail areas, lighter rawhide, such as calf Moose or Elk is used.

The rawhide used can either be split or full hide. Full hide is smooth on both sides, and split hide is thinner and has an open, porous side which can absorb water. If you use the snowshoes often, or travel on wet snow, choose a full hide lacing. The lacing is tied to make a 'Master Cord' across the snowshoe near the middle. Between the master cord and the front crossbar is the 'Toehold', into which the toe of your boot should pivot.

- **Bindings:**

At first, rawhide was used to secure the snowshoes onto the feet, but it often tightened up and cut off circulation to the foot. Rags were used next, then lampwick, but both were cumbersome. Leather bindings with a metal or plastic buckle work the best.



## Footwear for Snowshoeing:

- Moccasins are the best footwear to use with traditional snowshoes. They do not damage or stress the lacing or webbing. Soft soled boots such as the modern 'Sorels' work very well, as they do not have a hard heel to damage the hide.

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## ACTIVITY

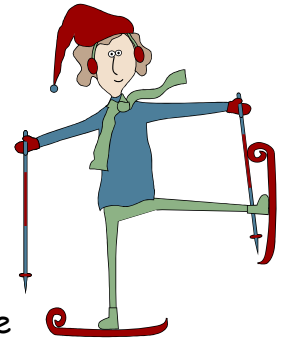
### Outdoor Hike:

Review the techniques of walking, running and getting up after a fall. Demonstrate the new techniques of turning around and hill maneuvering while on snowshoes.

### Advanced Snowshoeing Methods

#### Turning Around:

- **Step-turn** - is made by taking a semi-circular series of small individual steps until the snowshoes are positioned in the direction you wish to travel. Works well in an area with ample room to move.
- **Kick-turn** - ideal for changing direction of travel in tight spaces, such as along trails within forested areas etc. Kick one snowshoe up and around in a pivoting motion with your body. The snowshoe should now be facing in the opposite direction to the way you are standing. The next step is to swing the second foot up, out and around so that both snowshoes are facing in the same direction.



#### Climbing Up Hills:

- **Traversing:** the easiest method for climbing steep hills is by 'traversing' or walking diagonally up the slope of the hill. As you climb up, dig the uphill edge of each snowshoe into the sloping snow so the snowshoe forms a horizontal platform, like digging your own steps. This is called 'edging'.
- **Side-Step:** Another easy method for climbing steep hills. Step sideways up the hill first with the top shoe, edging as you go. Then bring the other foot up so the snowshoes are parallel.

#### Traveling Down Hills:

On snowshoes, lean back a bit and increase the weight on your heels. You may try snowplowing (walking pigeon-toed) or traversing (zigzag) down.

## EXTENSION

### History of the Snowshoe

Before humanity built snowshoes, nature provided examples. Several animals, most notably the snowshoe hare, had evolved over the years with oversized feet enabling them to move more quickly through deep snow.

The origin and age of snowshoes are not precisely known, although historians believe they were invented from 4,000 to 6,000 years ago, probably starting in Central Asia. Strabo wrote that the inhabitants of the Caucasus used to attach flat surfaces of leather under their feet and that the Armenians used round wooden surfaces instead.

Two groups of snowshoe pioneers diverged early on, setting patterns that can still be seen today. One group abandoned the snowshoe as it migrated north to what is now Scandinavia, eventually turning the design into the forerunners of the Nordic ski. The other went northeast, eventually crossing the Bering Strait into North America.

### North American indigenous peoples

Nearly every Native American tribe developed its own particular shape of shoe, the simplest and most primitive being those of the far north. The Inuit have two styles, one being triangular in shape and about 18 inches (45 cm) in length, and the other almost circular, both reflecting the need for high flotation in deep, loose and powdery snow. However, contrary to popular perception, they did not use their snowshoes much since they did most of their foot travel in winter over sea ice or on the tundra, where snow does not pile up deeply.

Southward the shoe becomes gradually narrower and longer, the largest being the hunting snow-shoe of the Cree, which is nearly 6 ft. long (more than 1.5 meters) and turned up at the toe. Even smaller models, developed most notably by the Iroquois, are narrower and shorter, reflecting the need for maneuverability in forested areas where wetter and shallower snow cover during winter made flotation less important.

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## Use by Europeans

Snowshoes were slowly adopted by Europeans in what became the United States and Canada, with the French *voyageurs* well in advance of British settlers. Superior French snowshoeing skill almost turned the French and Indian War, a conflict that



saw two engagements named the Battle on Snowshoes, to their favour.

But the British were quick learners. The Oxford English Dictionary reports the term being used in English as early as 1674. Sixteen years later, after a French-Indian raiding party attacked a British settlement near what is today

Schenectady, New York, the British took to their own snowshoes and pursued the attackers for almost 90 kilometers, ultimately recovering both people and goods taken by their attackers.

The "teardrop" snowshoes worn by lumberjacks are about 1-meter long and broad in proportion, while the tracker's shoe is over 1.5 meters long and very narrow. This form, the stereotypical snowshoe, resembles a tennis racquet, and indeed the French term is *raquette de neige*.

This form was copied by the Canadian snowshoe clubs of the late 18th century. Originally founded for military training purposes, they became the earliest recreational users of snowshoes.

## REFERENCES

Website: <http://en.wikipedia.org> - History of Snowshoeing