



Teepee

A teepee (tipi, teepee) is a Plains Indian home. It is made of buffalo hide fastened around very long wooden poles, designed in a cone shape. Teepees were warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Some were quite large. They could hold 30 or 40 people comfortably.

The 15-foot poles were sometimes hard to find. Some people became really good at making sturdy poles. They used them for trade. A typical trade would be one horse for five poles.

A teepee used a hide flap as a doorway. Weather permitting, the entrance faced east, towards the rising sun. If the weather was miserable or a storm was brewing, the people positioned the flap opening in whatever way would best serve the comfort of the occupants.

Sometimes, the people arranged their teepees in a circle, with all the opening flaps facing the centre open space created by the circle of teepees. The younger kids could play in this open space, under the watchful eyes of their mothers.

Women were in charge of the teepees: It was up to the women where to place a teepee. The teepee was their castle, and they were in charge of anything to do with it, including building it, erecting it, breaking it down for transports.

She was in charge of behaviour inside the teepee, as well. If she said, "Go to sleep," everyone had to go to sleep or leave the teepee. She was in charge inside the teepee. It was her teepee.

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Men were in charge of the outside of the tepee. It was up to them to bring back the skins necessary to cover the poles. It was up to them to either bring back horses or hides to trade for poles, or to make the poles themselves. The men often painted the outside of the tepee they called home. The painting was often symbolic of their achievements. Each tribe had their own style.

There was a small fire in the centre for cooking and for warmth when needed. Tepees had an open space at the top, a little off centre, to let the smoke out. When it rained or snowed, the men were sent outside to wrap an extra piece of hide around the top of the tepee. The men always left a little room for the smoke to get out.

The Plains people used little furniture. They slept on buffalo skins on the floor of their homes.

If the entrance flap was open, it was an invitation to enter. If the flap was closed, you needed to announce yourself and wait for an invitation to enter a tepee, even if you lived there. A guest always sat to the left of the head of the family, who always sat the farthest from the door flap. These were rules that everyone knew and everyone followed.

