

The Pawnee lived in permanent villages of earthlodges. While hunting buffalo the Pawnee lived in tipis.

“The buffalo hide tent cover was a major family possession. It was made of at least eight tanned hides, with sinew from an equal number of buffalo to sew them together. The body of the tent was formed of seven skins and the eighth was cut up for gussets, loops for pegs around bottom edge, and a double thickness on both sides of the doorway. . . . It took at least two years to accumulate the eight skins—a summer and a winter hunt and then again a summer and a winter hunt and in each of the four hunts, two skins were saved for the tent.

“In order to cut out the pattern of the skins and give directions for putting them together and sewing them, a specialist had to be called in by the family. . . .

“About a week before the work was to begin, White Woman would have gone to see Lady Lucky Leader and have said to her, ‘Atira (my mother), I’ve come to ask you to make a new tent for me.’ ‘Well,’ she answered, ‘I have something to do right now, but I could do it a little later. Are you in a hurry?’ ‘No, a week’s time will be all right.’ ‘Well, then, have two good sharp knives ready,’ said the old lady.

“At the appointed day, she arrived at Victory Call’s lodge after breakfast. The skins and tools were taken outdoors, and while White Woman cleared up the breakfast dishes, the other three women went out with her and Lady Lucky Leader cut out the skins. She placed them in the most economical manner and then she assigned each of the women a particular seam to sew. Each woman had prepared herself with her own awl and a quantity of prepared sinew. Presently White Woman joined them and was also assigned a seam to sew. Before noon she had to retire to prepare the meal. They were served grease bread, coffee, and prunes. For supper she prepared boiled corn kernels, grease bread, and coffee. After supper, the old lady went home.

“The second day the same procedure was followed. . . . The third day was similar with the Old Lady going home after supper. By the evening of the fourth day the tent was completed. A process mentioned by another Pawnee informant, but not in this account, stated that before the cover was used, girls were sent inside to make a fire so that the skin would get permeated with soot, which would keep it from leaking in the rain or drying up in the sun.”

Source Information

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Anthropologist: Gene Weltfish

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