

Make Snow Goggles

Discover traditional š } } to protect eyes from sunlight!

/ y μ %o] š U and D o ŋ é (Athabascan) peoples traditionally use snow goggles to protect the eyes from the glare of sunlight reflecting off snow. Narrow slits reduce incoming light, but provide a wide range of vision.

Traditional Technology: Snow Goggles

For thousands of years, people around the world have come up with ways to protect their eyes from bright sunlight. Iñupiat, Yup'ik, and Dené (Athabascan) peoples traditionally use snow goggles to protect the eyes.

As the amount of sunshine increases in spring, it is important to protect against snow blindness—a painful burning of the retinas caused by strong ultraviolet sunlight reflecting off snow and ice. Goggles have narrow slits that reduce the amount of light reaching the eyes, while still providing a wide range of vision.

Left: Andrew Tooyak Jr., of Point Hope, wears snow goggles made from caribou hoof. Image: Steve McCutcheon, 1970, Anchorage Museum.

People make snow goggles from a variety of materials, including wood, ivory, antler, baleen, birch bark, braided grass, or caribou hoof. The goggles are tied around the head with braided sinew, rawhide, or strips of fabric. Snow goggles come in many shapes, sizes, and styles. Snow goggles carved from walrus ivory have even been found in 2000-year-old archaeological sites!

Today, people in Alaska often wear sunglasses made from synthetic materials, but traditional snow goggles remain an important part of cultural heritage.

Ipiutak snow goggles, ivory.
ca. 100 BCE-800 CE. A67-011-0005.

St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik snow goggles
(iyegaatek). Smithsonian Institute, E280226.

Iñupiaq snow goggles ().
Smithsonian Institute, 077564.000.

Deg Hit'an Athabascan snow goggles
(). Smithsonian Institute, E005581

Discover more snow goggles:

Goto alaska.si.edu and search for "snow goggles".

Snow Goggles Printable

Instructions: Cut out the template. Hold up to your face to check the eye slits are in the right place, and cut to the correct size. Decorate your snow goggles. Make a small hole on each side where indicated, and tie a piece of yarn through each hole. Tie the yarn around your head to wear your snow goggles!

