Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

SHOES FROM AROUND THE WORLD G140

This box contains a variety of shoes from five different countries around the world.

Wooden Clog from Holland



Wooden clogs were traditionally work shoes. Being naturally water resistant, they were ideal for protecting the feet when working in wet and muddy fields. The wearing of clogs in Holland dates back to the fourteenth century and was popular right up until the early twentieth century when materials such as rubber became more widely used. But some Dutch farm and factory workers still wear clogs, proving that they are practical and safe shoes.



The clog is carved from one piece of wood, usually willow or poplar, making it very strong. There aren't any seams to let in water or that need re-stitching when they fall apart.



Nothing is needed except for one piece of wood, which doesn't have to be treated in any way. Some clogs are varnished or painted for decoration, but this is not necessary for any practical reason. Once carved, the clogs are left to air-dry for six weeks so that all the moisture from the wood is drawn out and the shoes harden. The picture on the right shows a man using old techniques to carve a pair of clogs.

The large shoe in the box looks uncomfortable and heavy, but clogs are actually considered very comfortable and also good for your feet. Straw was traditionally placed inside to keep the feet warm and dry and the curled up toe makes walking easier.



What are the holes in the side for? Clogs were always hung up in pairs by threading a piece of string or leather through the small holes. They are displayed in exactly the same way today in shops and are very popular souvenirs for tourists. (See the picture on the right).

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Wooden Clog from France



The French clog has been made in a similar way to the Dutch one. Look at the marks on the heel left from the carving process. The outside has been painted black and a simple decorative pattern has been carved into the top layer of wood. It is more delicate than the Dutch clog and would have been worn by a woman. There are two nails on either side of the shoe, which probably held a strap in place.

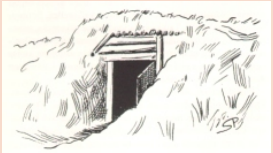
The French clogs are called sabot and, according to one story, this is where we get the word sabotage. Apparently, French factory workers threw their sabot into the machines to stop them working. They sabotaged them!

Sauna Shoe from Finland





A sauna is a small room or hut that is heated to around 80°C. Sitting in the sauna is believed to have many health benefits, especially when followed by a cold shower or a swim in a lake. The sauna comes from Finland, where it is thought of as a necessity, rather than a luxury. In fact, saunas are such a huge part of life in Finland that there are over 2 million across the country serving a population of just 5.2 million. There is even a sauna in the Finnish parliament building!



The use of saunas in Finland is believed to be over two thousand years old. The very earliest saunas were simply pits dug into a slope, which were heated using hot stones (see drawing on the left). These saunas were actually homes as well - a tradition that could still be seen up until the nineteenth century.



This shoe is made from strips of birch bark, which have been woven together. The shoe was worn in and around the sauna. Weaving with birch bark is a traditional craft in Finland and is not just for shoe making. The picture here shows many other items made using the same technique.



Birch is also used to make a *vasta*, used to hit the skin whilst in the sauna (on the left). This massages the body, relaxes the muscles and encourages the blood to circulate better.

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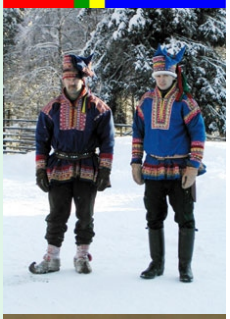
Child's Shoe from Finland



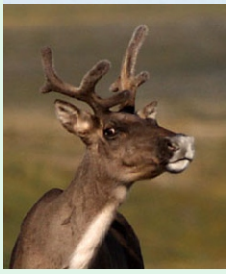
The small leather shoe comes from Lapland, a region covering the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. The region is shown on the map shaded green.



Lapland is also known by the name Sápmi and is the home of the Sámi people. The Sámi have been known as Lapps in the past, but this is now considered an offensive term. The flag of the Sámi is shown on the right.



The Sámi have their own culture, identity, traditional dress and language - although there are regional variations. The *gákti* is the traditional brightly coloured jacket worn by them. Each region has its own *gákti* and they are a good way to determine where a person comes from. The picture on the right shows two men wearing *gákti* from Rovaniemi in the north of Finland.



Reindeer

The Sámi were originally reindeer herders and relied on the animal for meat, clothing and shelter. Only a small number of people still live in this way as there have been great changes to the Sámi way of life in recent decades. Today you will find many additions from modern life such as Sámi schools, theatres and television companies but, there is also a strong sense of identity and a need to keep old traditions alive.



The shoe in this box belonged to a child from the area of Lapland that covers the north of Finland. It is made from leather, which probably came from reindeer hide. The toe is turned up at the end to make it easier to walk in snowy conditions. The turned up toe also helped to hold skis in place when they were bound to the foot in really deep snow.



When making winter shoes the fur of the reindeer was sometimes left on the outside for warmth. The fur also added extra grip on the sole when walking on slippery, frozen ground. (See picture on the the right). In the picture above of the two men in gákti, one is wearing furry winter shoes with turned up toes and the other is wearing Wellington boots.

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Leather Sandal from India



These shoes are called chappals and are very popular across Pakistan and India. Some have a loop over the toes like these and others have a strap between the toes. Traditionally they are made from leather and are decorated with colourful dyes and patterns.

Chappals are still made by hand in many regions today. It can take anything from three hours to a day to make a pair, depending on the style and decoration. One cow hide produces enough leather to make twenty pairs. After the shoes have been stitched together they are oiled to keep the leather supple. Some have seeds added to the sole, which give a crunch with every step - a very clever way to scare off snakes when walking through a forest.

Sandal from Singapore

This sandal is a modern design that is based on a traditional style called the geta. The geta comes from Japan, but can be seen in other countries across Asia. It consists of a wooden board, called a *dai*, which acts as the sole. The *dai* is then raised off the ground by two teeth, seen in the picture below. The teeth make a 'clacking' sound when walking. The whole sandal is held in place with a 'V' shaped thong, which goes between the toes like a flip-flop. This modern version has a single patent leather strap across the toes and a curvy-shaped *dai*.



