Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SHOES FROM AROUND THE WORLD G140B

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 of people 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 still considered 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 need re-stitching when they fall apart.

Nothing is used except for one piece of wood, which doesn't need 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.



This large shoe 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. The square shaped toe is called a chisel toe.





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.

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Child's Wooden Clog from Holland



This tiny clog has been made in a similar way to the adult Dutch shoe. It also has a chisel toe and a hole in the side so that it could be hung up. Look at the marks on the heel from the carving process. A simple decorative pattern has been carved into the top layer of wood.

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 right). These saunas were actually homes as well a tradition that was still evident 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 pictures here show 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. This massages the body, relaxes the muscles and encourages the blood to circulate better.



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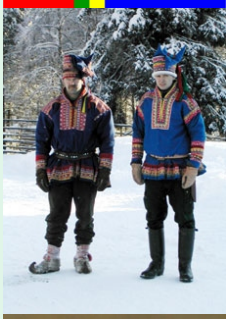
Child's Shoe from Finland



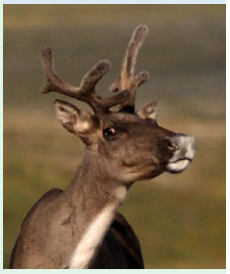
The small leather shoe comes from Lapland, a region covering the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. The region is shown on the map shaded green.



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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Lily foot sandal from China

The Chinese custom of binding women's feet started in the tenth century and wasn't banned until 1911. 1,000 years of pain in order to keep the feet as small and dainty as possible.





The process began when the girl was about five or six years old. Her mother first soaked the feet in warm liquid and herbs and then broke all her toes except the biggest. The broken toes were pulled under the foot and bound to the heel using cotton or silk bandages. The bandages were changed every few days and pulled tighter. Just try to imagine how painful this must have been. As well as the pain, many girls developed infections and even died from blood poisoning or gangrene. The pictures on the right show some horrific examples of feet binding. Women were still expected to perform daily duties, but in later life this became very difficult and they often fell and broke bones as they became frail and less steady.



Bound feet were a mark of class and attractiveness. If the feet were unbound, then the women would not find a husband. The ideal size was no more than 10 to 15cm and the shape of the foot was supposed to resemble a lotus bud. The name 'lotus foot' or 'lily foot' was introduced to add to the attractiveness. Beautiful shoes covered the lower part of the foot but the illusion was lost once the shoes were removed, as you can see from the pictures on the right.



According to our records at the museum, the tiny sandal was made for a lily foot. It is inlaid with pieces of mother of pearl and has an embroidered strap. The teeth on the bottom of the shoe would have made walking even more difficult. In fact, the name 'lotus gait' was given to the distinctive way women walked in order to compensate for their disabilities - it was like walking on stilts.



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Leather bootee from Africa

This leather bootee was made in the traditional way. It has been hand stitched using only four pieces of soft brown leather and has no hard sole.
Unfortunately we don't have any information as to which country in Africa it comes from.



Leather shoe from India

This traditional Indian shoe might have been worn for a wedding or party. The beautiful embroidery adds elegance and is even found inside the shoe.

This style of shoe is called a *jutti*, *kussa* or *mojri*, depending on the area of India they come from. They usually have a pointed piece of leather at the heel and can be decorated with beads, silver thread and extra strips of leather, like those curling up from the toe.

