

The Four Seasons of the Ojibwe

Long ago, life for the Ojibwe would follow the circle of seasons. There was a pattern in their movements which could be plotted on a map. Ojibwe people moved from place to place with a purpose and moved in a way that could be predicted. Everything was done in the proper place and at the proper season within the circle.

- **Dagwaagin**—In early fall, families would travel by canoe to rice lakes and marshes and worked together to harvest wild rice. There were late chokecherries and early cranberries to pick, dry and store away. The men spent a great deal of time hunting. Fall was the season to shoot ducks and geese. As much food as possible needed to be gathered and stored away for the long winter. The men began to prepare for the trapping of fur bearing animals. The women set out nets to bring in a winter supply of fish.
- **Biboon**—In the winter the village would break up into small family groups and move to their winter camps in the forest. This custom arose because there was not enough game in any one place to feed more than a small number. Men went out each day to hunt deer and other large animals. While the men were out hunting, the women preserved deer meat by drying it over low open fires. At night the women made and repaired clothing/moccasins and worked on beadwork designs. Grandmothers wove fish nets and hunting bags, made cordage, helped with the cooking, brought in fire wood, and took care of the young children. The men made snowshoes and repaired their hunting gear. Winter was also the time for telling traditional stories. Stories were told to children to entertain but also to teach them. When boys and girls were not helping their elders, they had many ways of having fun. They slid down hills on toboggans or large pieces of bark, held snowshoe races and snowball battles. A favorite winter pastime was snow snake. In this game, players slid smooth, flattened poles over the snow to see whose pole would slide the farthest. This game was also played by grownups.
- **Ziigwan**—As spring approached, Ojibwe families moved to sugar bush. This was an area where many sugar maple trees could be found. They would meet up with friends and relatives that they had not seen since their move to winter camp. This was a time of greeting and catching up on all the news. Each family had their own part of the sugar bush, tapping the trees for sap and boiling it down to make maple sugar. As before, the men went out to get food. This time of the year they spread nets to catch flocks of wild pigeons. Before the ice was off the lakes, the men speared fish through holes in the ice. After the ice melted the men fished with large nets. Early spring was a good time to trap fur bearing animals as their fur

was the thickest and glossiest. Spring is also the time birch bark could be taken to make canoes. In every band there were older men and women who were especially skilled in canoe building. They were helped by younger members who learned the craft from them.

- **Niibin**—Summer is a time to think about planting gardens. Ojibwe families would move back to their summer village after sugar making when the leaves of trees were beginning to unfold. The men fished and hunted and the women and children planted corn, pumpkins and squash. This was also a time of gather berries and plants that families used for food, medicine and materials to make utilitarian baskets, mats, etc. Summer was a time for visiting friends and ceremonial feasts and dances. Summer was also a time to play games like lacrosse, foot races, wrestling, jumping, shooting matches and other contests.