

# Native Lifestyles on Show in Britain

**A**n 11-m canoe, an authentic Cree Indian tent, and a model of a 1950s Inuit igloo are among the highlights of an 18-month exhibition that opens December 2 at the Museum of Mankind in London, England.

The exhibition describes the lifestyles of aboriginal people in Canada's northern regions, emphasizing the continuing importance of hunting, gathering and fishing in a subsistence economy. While aboriginal lifestyles have changed dramatically in northern Canada over the past 30 years, the exhibition demonstrates the strength and continuity of Indian and Inuit cultures, and the abiding relationship between aboriginal people and the land.

The international partnership that made the exhibition possible is almost as unique as the presentation itself. The idea of introducing Indian and Inuit lifestyles to a European audience first emerged in early 1986, at a meeting between Jonathan King, chief curator of the British Museum, and Georges Erasmus, Canadian co-chairman of Indigenous Survival International (ISI). Mr. King recognized that the Museum of Mankind, which houses the British Museum's ethnographic collections, had yet to mount a major exhibition on aboriginal life in the northern part of North America. Mr. Erasmus, whose organization promotes a traditional subsistence economy based on modern wildlife conservation principles, was only too happy to help out.

The result is a spectacular display that reflects the commitment and ingenuity of partners on both sides of the Atlantic. ISI's Dave Monture describes the show as "a major conservation exhibit and public education project that will show [aboriginal] people the way they are, and address the realities of the northern economy. It will be a first for many Europeans, who don't normally have an opportunity to learn about Canada and northern people." The exhibit will demonstrate how aboriginal use of the wildlife resources of Canada's north is consistent with a deep respect for animal populations — a central tenet of Indian and Inuit religion and spirituality.

At the entrance to the exhibition, visitors will see an 11-m Attikamek canoe and two *inuksuit*, stone figures traditionally used by Inuit hunters during a caribou drive. An introductory display on the climate, languages, people, and prehistory of Canada's north will include 21 miniature Dorset carvings, as well as an information panel explaining the Dorset and Thule Inuit cultures and depicting migration routes and main sites.

A series of historical displays will trace the changes in aboriginal life that took place as a result of colonization and the European fur trade. Highlights of the historical display include samples of Huron Indian embroidery, Cree Indian jackets and moccasins, Inuit harpoons and bows, and a nineteenth century Inuit parka, as well as a 5-m Baffin Island kayak.



The contrast between old and new is dramatized by full-scale reconstructions of two Inuit dwellings — a 1950s igloo and a prefabricated 1980s bungalow. The snow house is shown in actual use in late winter or spring, with a sled and dog team in the background. The bungalow features a range of modern appliances, from a refrigerator and modern stove to a personal computer with Inuktitut syllabics, and is built to the current specifications of the Northwest Territories Housing Program. But the furs, carving tools, and clothing on the porch convey the elements of Inuit culture and tradition that have survived to the present day.

While the exhibition itself is expected to attract a wide audience, it has also become the focal point of a number of related activities. To coincide with the exhibition, ISI is planning a major art

**Native lifestyles emphasize the importance of hunting, gathering and fishing while respecting the abiding relationship between people and the environment.**

exhibit and an indigenous theatre and film festival emphasizing wildlife themes.

As well, the Canadian government is funding the preparation and distribution of 100 000 educational kits, including maps, charts, videotapes, and a teaching guide, for distribution to schools in the United Kingdom. Funding was made available to ISI for the museum project from a variety of sources including Canada's federal government and the governments of Ontario, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.