The Plains Indians

Sioux was the largest and most powerful tribe on the 1ns. They called themselves the Lakota (or Dakota or ota depending on their dialect), which means 'allies'. Sioux 1 abbreviation of an Algonquin word for 'enemy'. There ere three main groups of Lakota: the Eastern, the Middle, and Western or Teton, which is the group we will study. Within Teton there were important sub-tribes: Oglala, Brule, Sans s, Minnekonjou, Two Kettle, Hunkpapa, and Blackfeet.

The start of the 19th century the Lakota were nomads. They little contact with Whites, but their lifestyle had been 1ily changed by the horse, first brought to America by the openers. For most of the year the sub-tribes, or smaller bands, idle wander the plains. Large gatherings of many bands were te common, especially for religious festivals. Most of the ota regarded the Black Hills of Dakota as sacred land. This is the area of many of the great gatherings.

The home of the Plains Indian is from 12 to 20 feet in diameter and about 15 feet high. The fire is built in the centre and the smoke escapes through the aperture at the top. It is usually in cold weather too full of smoke to be bearable to anyone but an Indian. The beds are piles of buffalo robes and blankets, spread on the ground close to the outer edge. They serve as sleeping places by night, and seats by day. In this small space are often crowded eight or ten people. Since the cooking, eating, living, and sleeping are all done in the one room, it soon becomes inconceivably filthy.

A description of Indian tipis by Colonel Dodge, an American, in a book written in 1877.

The tipi is a much better place to live in. Always clean in winter, cool in summer, easy to move. Nobody can be in good health if he does not have all the time fresh air, sunshine, and good water. If the Great Spirit wanted men to stay in one place, he would make the world stand still, but He made it always to change.

Chief Flying Hawk of the Oglala (1852 – 1931).

Some of the tipis were reduced to bare skeletons of poles; the leather coverings of others were flapping in the wind as the squaws pulled them off. One by one the tipis were sinking down, and where the great circle of the village had been only a few moments before, nothing now remained. The covers of the tipis were spread on the ground, together with kettles, stone mallets, great ladles of horn, buffalo robes, and cases of painted hide, filled with dried meat. Squaws bustled about in busy preparation. The horses were patiently standing while the lodge-poles were lashed to their backs. Each warrior sat on the ground, by the decaying embers of his fire, unmoved amid the confusion, holding in his hand the long trailing rope of his horse.

From "The Oregon Trail" by Francis Parkman, 1847. Parkman was a young White American who spent 1846 travelling in the West. He lived for some weeks with the Lakota band described in this extract.

Activities...

1. Which do you think gives the most reliable description of a tipi, Source B or Source C?
2. a. Using all the sources, describe a tipi and a travois.
   b. What were their advantages for nomads?
3. What can you say about the different roles of men and women among the Lakota?
4. How might a family like that shown in Source D react if they were offered a modern house instead of their tipi?