

The inuksuit

An *inukshuk* (the plural is *inuksuit*) is a structure of piled stones designed to resemble a human figure and traditionally constructed by the original people (Inuit) of Arctic regions such as northern Canada.

The structures, erected to look like a person from a distance, were used as markers of sacred places or as guideposts. They could act as stone landmarks, milestones or directional markers along trails. They are among the most important objects created by the Inuit, who were the first people to inhabit portions of Alaska, Arctic Canada and Greenland. The *inukshuk* has become the main cultural symbol for the Inuit people.

The word *inukshuk* means “something that substitutes for the actions of a person”.

The *inuksuit* had a variety of functions.

1. An *inukshuk* could be used as a hunting and navigation aid, providing a coordination point, an indicator and a message centre. Even today, the appearance of a familiar *inukshuk* on the landscape is a welcome sight when a person is a long way from home.
2. It could warn of impending danger, particularly on open water. The arrangement of the stones contained messages and information. A common type of *inukshuk* is a single stone positioned in an upright manner.
3. It could be used as a memorial marker.
4. It could mark a sacred place.

Inuksuit appear not only on the physical landscape, but also in legends and stories, in the movements of fingers playing string games and in a winter-sky constellation.

Many Inuit who spent most of their lives on the land retain a strong attachment to *inuksuit*, which they believe were built by their ancestors. Some of these “old” *inuksuit* are mentioned in *aya-yait*, the travelling songs passed from one generation to the next, to help travellers remember a series of directions for long trips.

Sources: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inukshuk>> and <<http://www.inukshukgallery.com/inukshuk.html>>

