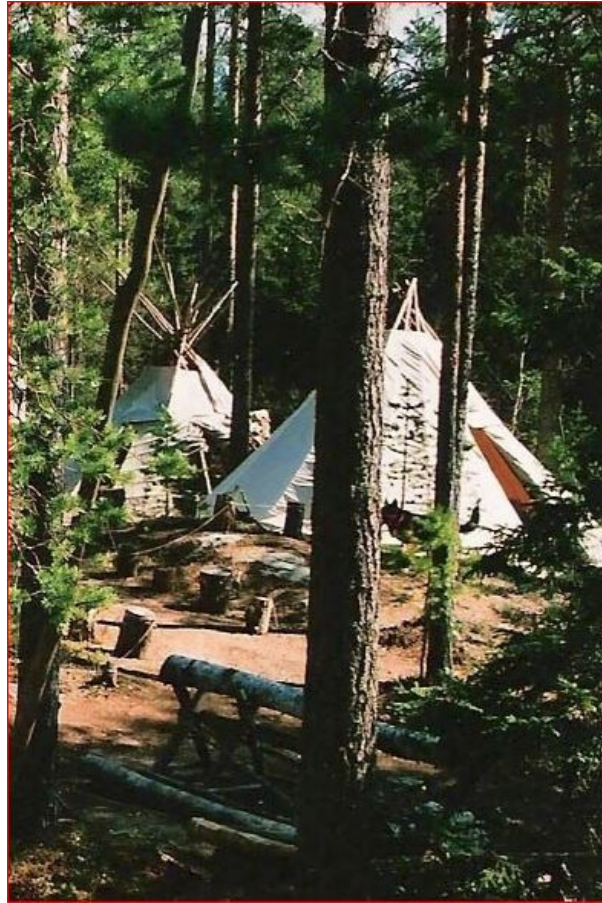


BUILDING THE WIGWAM AT VILLMARKSLEIREN, NORWAY

by
Rein Dammann

As the camp became more known among the companies who were our clients, the relatively small lavvus (Lapp tents) and teepees (Indian tents) we had were not big enough.



Tent structures. Image: Heidi Dammann

We needed a place where at least 100 people could gather and eat, a space that was fairly simple to heat in the winter. I made drawings of a huge sod house, and got permission from the community to build it, but we realized it would take very long time and cost a lot of money.

For weeks we wondered what to do. Oliver found the best solution: “Why don’t you build a wigwam? It can be as long as you want, and the ceiling in a wigwam is low, so it would be easy to heat. You can just put in a couple of full-size barrel stoves.”

We were surprised how much he knew about wigwams! He made a few drawings, and soon convinced us that this was the best solution for our camp. We are so glad that we listened to him on this.

Following Oliver's instructions, we soon started building a wigwam that was 20 by 65 feet, in the shape of a Quonset hut. For the framework, we needed to make at least 30 half-circle ribs out of poles tied together in the top.

The problem was that the poles had to be bent quite severely to make the round wigwam shape. Two thirds of the poles that we had cut, peeled and carried to the worksite broke when we tried to bend them. That would not do!

We were very frustrated, but again Oliver found the solution. "We have to build a huge steamer", he said.

We went to a ventilation company and bought a 20' aluminum pipe, with a diameter of about 12". We put a T-joint in the middle that ended in a barrel stove. We collected new poles, made a fire in the stove, and put four poles at a time into the steamer. After a couple of hours, they were bendable! We only broke one pole after that.

Oliver's design called for four long poles to be placed horizontally on each side of the wigwam. Unlike the poles for the half-circles, which required wood that was as soft and bendable as possible, these horizontals had to be dried ahead of time so that they would be stiff enough to hold all of the "half circles" in place, and the tent would be straight. For those, he chose spruce.



Trond Pedersen helps attach a horizontal member to the half-circle frames.
Image: Rein Dammann

When the framing was finally finished and properly tied together with hundreds of knots, we had two women measure the frame and make a canvas cover.



The wigwam in winter.
Image: Rein Dammann

The wigwam became the most important building in our camp. Such a tent had never before been made in Norway, and perhaps not in Europe. Our guests loved it, winter and summer.

Oliver helped us build two oil-barrel heating stoves to go in the tent. We also made a lot of tables and benches that fit in. At the most, we seated 122 people.



The wigwam in summer, ready for a meal.
Image: Bob & Dorene Schiro

It all worked just as we'd hoped. We never needed to build the big, complicated and expensive sod house that we originally planned—all thanks to Oliver.