

# *Nomad*

## *Introduction*



*Figure 1: A Bedouin family sits in front of their tent in the Sahara.*

Nomads are wanderers. The word nomad comes from the Greek *nomados*, which means “wandering around in search of pasture.” Today the term refers to all wandering peoples who move in cyclical or seasonal patterns during the year. There have traditionally been three types: hunters and gatherers; pastoral nomads, or herders of animals; and craftsmen-handymen-traders. To these may be added the modern migrant farm workers

## *Hunters and Gatherers*

A tribe or group of tribes who do not produce food must survive on what nature provides in the way of plants and animals. Such people cannot normally stay in one place indefinitely. When the food supply is exhausted, they move on to another source. This was the way of life for many Indian tribes of North America before Europeans arrived. Some of the San (Bushmen) of Southern Africa also are hunters and gatherers.

After the animals within walking distance of a camp have been hunted successfully or frightened away and the plant food depleted, the tribe moves on. The stay in one place may be a few days, or it may be several weeks or half a year. These nomads do not wander aimlessly, however. They must know the territory in which they range: the location of the water supply, the types of plants, and the kinds and habits of game animals. After a period of time the tribe establishes rights over a territory.

Hunters and gatherers may be said to subsist: they usually acquire enough of the necessities to survive and no more. Since they produce no food, they cannot provide for an expanding population. Therefore, the size of the tribe remains fairly constant over long periods of time.

## ***Pastoral Nomads***

Pastoral nomads are producers of food, and the size of their tribal or ethnic units increases accordingly. These groups raise livestock, and they move about within their established territory to find good pastures for their animals. The Turks, Mongols, and many other invaders of Europe during the Middle Ages were pastoral nomads, as were the Arabian armies who carried the banners of Islam throughout most of the Mediterranean world in the 7th and 8th centuries.



*Figure 2: Mongolian ger, or portable dwelling, made of felt on a lattice frame.*

Although nomadism of all kinds is in decline, the pastoral type persists in several parts of the world. The Sami, usually misnamed Lapps, are the seminomadic people of Lapland who take their herds of reindeer to the mountains in the summer and to the lowland woods in winter. Besides the Sami of Lapland, there are pastoral nomads in Central Asia, Siberia, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. Some of these groups depend on hunting as well as herding. The Urianghai of the Altai Mountains in Siberia, for example, breed reindeer, but they also depend on hunting for food. On the fringes of grasslands families who lose some of their animals engage in agriculture from time to time, but usually as a last resort. In Southwest Asia and North and East Africa, pastoral nomadism and settled agriculture have always been interdependent. The camel-breeding Rwala Bedouin of Arabia do not engage in agriculture, but they depend on grain and other products from their neighbors in exchange for camels. The Maasai of Africa live in much the same way.

The migratory patterns of pastoral nomads depend on climate and the nature of the land. Some Kazakh groups of Central and East Asia travel hundreds of miles from winter quarters in the south to summer pastures in the north. They carry their portable, dome-shaped tents, called yurts, as well as herd their horses, sheep, cattle, goats, and camels. Other Kazakhs travel only a few miles from winter quarters at the foot of the mountains to summer pastures at higher elevations.

In Arabia the Bedouins camp near towns or oases during the hot summer months and then move into the desert after the rainy season. They have no fixed pattern of migration as do the Kazakhs, but each group has its established territory. Seminomadic groups such as the Sami have permanent dwellings where they plant crops before moving with their animals to summer pasture. In southern Somalia, some groups of people live in fixed villages and send their herds out with the men

twice a year—to the plateau grasslands in the rainy season and to river banks during the dry season.

### ***Craftsmen – Handymen – Traders***

Some nomadic peoples maintain closer relationships with permanently settled agricultural societies and cities. These nomads persist in their mobile way of life but make their livings by selling goods or services in cities and towns. In India and Pakistan, for instance, there are nomadic peoples who make and sell baskets and other simple products or who hire out as day laborers. Probably the best-known nomads of this type are the Roma (Gypsies). They originated in India and subsequently migrated to most parts of the world, especially Europe

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