

The Cloth Parka

Introduction

Making cloth parkas is fun if one has done some sewing before and if simple designs are used. The cloth parka is a traditional item of clothing for Alaska Natives and is popular with non-Native people living in Alaska as well. It is a practical way of staying warm and combines both Native and Western design techniques. The parka always has a hood, and a zipper is used for the front closing, although some sort of additional fastening should be included for anyone who might have trouble with a zipper when the weather is extremely cold. Loop buttonholes or frogs could be used with buttons.

To avoid wasting expensive materials one should take time to make a test pattern. Only experienced seamstresses should make the parka without a test shell.

The beginner should use easy-to-sew materials and simple trimmings. A very effective parka can be made without any trimmings except a ruff. The ruff keeps the face warm as well as being decorative.

Dressing for Arctic Weather

Ideal Clothing for Extreme Cold Must Be:

Insulated. Insulation saves body heat by layers of air enmeshed in the fibers (e.g., down or synthetic) stitched between layers of fabric. It is the air pockets between the two layers of the garment that act as an insulation.

Adequate to cover the entire body. Blood comes close to the surface at ankles, neck, head and wrists and cools rapidly. Unless this portion of the body is kept warm, the feet and hands soon freeze. The

face can stand some exposure if forehead and cheeks are protected with a ruff of long, shaggy fur around the face. A scarf over the mouth is not good, as it soon becomes frosted and icy.

Roomy. A loose parka permits easy circulation of blood, saves heat and wears better. A good parka has large armholes and is loose across the shoulders but is belted and snug at the hips.

Mittens should be loose enough to double your fist.

Boots or mukluks should be large enough for extra socks and inner soles and loose enough to wiggle your toes.

Adjustable to the temperature. If a parka is too warm, it causes sweating; the parka then becomes damp and chills the body too rapidly. One advantage of the Eskimo type parka is the ease with which one may throw back the hood and loosen the belt when the weather warms up.

Porous. The body constantly gives off moisture. If this moisture cannot evaporate, clothing becomes damp. Properly designed clothing will hold some moisture without feeling wet, yet is porous enough to allow perspiration to evaporate slowly without chilling the body.

Lightweight. Cloth parkas should combine warmth with light weight.



Windproof. Wind carries off body heat unless clothing is wind-proofed. Use very closely woven canvas or water-repellent cloth over the insulated lining. Do not use rubberized or other vapor proof cloth.

Well constructed. Good workmanship, too, is important. Use well made seams and fasteners. Avoid drafty neck openings. Use a hood attached at the neckline, snug belts and wrist bands, and a zipper front that closes all the way to the neck.

Materials

Test shell: Three to 3½ yards of 45-inch muslin or lightweight cotton. After getting the shell to fit satisfactorily, the material can be used to determine the amount of fabric to buy for the outer cover, the lining and the trim. The test shell material can be used for the interfacings.

Outer covering: The fabric you buy for the outer covering, or shell, should be determined by your personal preference. It may be as fancy or practical as you want. Fabrics to consider for the outer covering include poplin, tarpoon cloth, denim, velveteen, corduroy and natural or synthetic fur.

Lining: The lining will provide the parka's warmth, so choose a lining based on how and where you will be wearing the parka. Will the parka be a practical winter coat that will be worn daily in extremely cold temperatures? Or will it be a fancy, special occasion coat that will be worn less often? Fabrics to use include quilted linings made with polyester or Thinsulate fabrics and any natural or synthetic fleece.

Ruff: The ruff may be made with natural or synthetic fur. Common furs used are wolverine and wolf.

Zipper: The zipper should be the double-opening parka type so it can be opened at the lower end and still be closed at the top. Parka zippers come in brass or heavy plastic. The brass zipper is preferred for parkas worn at extremely cold temperatures.

Grosgrain ribbon for the zipper: Ribbon should be four times the length of the zipper if it is 1 inch wide.

It takes two pieces to hold each tape on the zipper. If the ribbon is 2 inches wide it could be folded; then only two lengths are needed. It is also possible to use the outer covering fabric (except synthetic fur) to hold the zipper by using lengthwise strips properly finished to be neat and not bulky.

If you wish, the pattern may be reproduced on large sheets of wrapping paper from the scale drawing of the parka shown in the back of this publication. Each square on the drawing represents 4 inches. Draw 4-inch squares on a suitable size sheet of paper. Number each square as shown on the drawing. Place a small mark on your pattern wherever the edge of the pattern crosses the square to correspond with the drawing. Then connect each point with a straight line or smooth curve to match the pattern on the drawing.

Fittings

Make a lightweight cotton or muslin shell to test the pattern and solve any fitting problems before cutting the parka. Whatever alterations are made in this shell will be made in the pattern. There will be no need for further fitting if the test pattern is carefully made and construction details worked out.

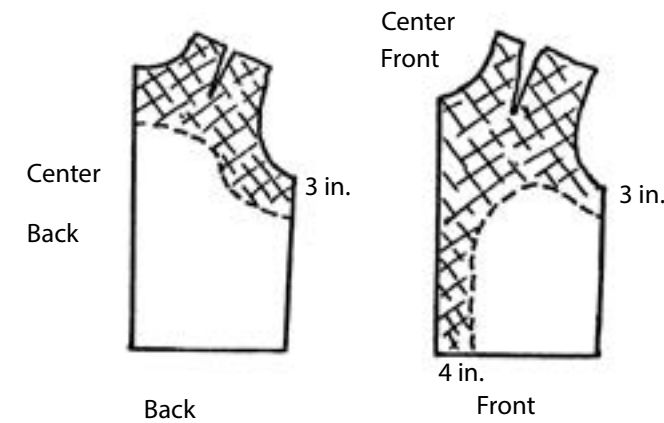
Outer Shell

After testing the shell and its alterations you may prefer opening the seams and using the altered cloth for a pattern. Be sure to get the proper sleeve length including the hem, the body length including the hem, and a comfortable hood size around the neck area and over the forehead. The neck band can be used to lengthen the hood, or additional depth can be added at the neck edge and the band omitted.

Interfacing

The interfacing strengthens the neck, shoulder, armhole and armhole edges as well as the front edges. This is especially necessary if knitted fabrics are used.

Use the trial shell for interfacing. This will mean very little waste of material. Cut the lower section away and use the upper areas as shown in the illustrations.



Interfacing

Lining

The lining is cut the same size as the outer shell except for sleeve and body length. Since the outer cover allows for hems, make the lining short enough to keep from showing below the outer cover.

A good idea is to shorten the sleeve and the body part about 1 inch. The lining can be attached by joining the outside edges almost entirely by machine, leaving only about 10 or 12 inches to complete by hand. By this method, the lining holds up the hems.

Bands and Trimmings

The bands can be trimmed as desired and then added to the sleeves before sewing together. The trimming at the hip area will have to be added after the side seams are sewn.

Trimmings on some fabrics can be put directly on the garment pieces without using the band pieces. The sleeves and hip areas have to be lengthened properly so that bands are not needed when this type of design is chosen.

If trimmings are used on fabrics such as velveteen or poplin, they can be



applied directly to this outer shell before joining to the lining. The imitation fur pile parka might use decorative details similar to those on the fur parka.

Zipper

A piece of the outer shell fabric, such as poplin or corduroy (not a fur pile fabric), can be used instead of grosgrain ribbon to attach the zipper because sometimes the ribbon wears out sooner than the outside covering. Aim to use a selvage edge and make it double. This extra piece keeps the zipper free of the front edge seams where the lining and outer shell are joined. A new zipper can easily be put in without taking the whole front edge apart. This method keeps the zipper from tangling in the fur or pile fabric; plus, it is a great saving of time and patience in repairing.

Pockets

Pockets can be made of the lining material and placed in the side seams. Patch pockets can also be used. Make them a convenient size, and test the size and the location on the test shell. It may be wise to line them for warmth.

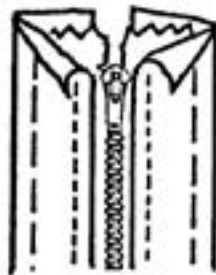
Steps for Assembly

A good order to follow in assembling the cloth parka is listed as follows:

1. Attach the interfacing to the wrong side of outer covering in the front and back sections with ½-inch seams. Make the darts either separately or through both the interfacing and covering at one time, depending upon the fabrics used.
2. If side seam pockets are used, attach them to the side seams about 7 or 8 inches below the armpit seam. Take the regular seam allowance and sew only from A to B as shown on pattern. Do these four pieces (two for each pocket) on the front and back side seams. Keep the length exact so that the remaining side seams can be joined exactly, but as a later step in construction. If patch pockets are used, attach them now.
3. Sew the shoulder seams.

4. Make the outer shell of the hood.
5. Attach the hood to the neck edge of the parka.
6. Join the side seams from armpit to top of pocket. Then the remainder of the side seam from hem edge to lower point of pocket.
7. Turn the pocket to the front on the inside of the parka and sew around its edge.

8. Attach the zipper to the ribbon being used down the center front. Sew the zipper tape between two pieces of ribbon so that it will only be attached by this one row of stitching.



Then sew the other edges together and attach to the front edge of the parka. Pin the zipper and ribbon in place to test for accuracy of placement and to be sure the zipper tab is outside and everything works correctly.

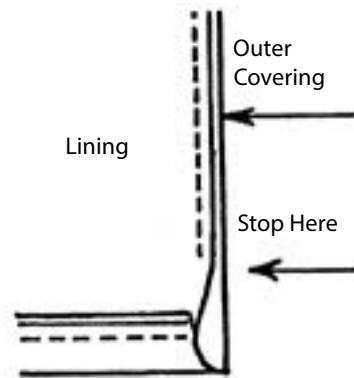
9. Attach the sleeves.
10. Join the lining pieces in same order as the outer covering, except that the pockets will be omitted.
11. For warmth under the zipper area, a strip of the lining fabric 4 inches wide and about 20-24 inches long can be hemmed or bound and sewn to the lining. Attach zipper under the outer cover on the right-hand side so it will fall across the middle front under the zipper. Sew in from front edge at least 1 inch. Snaps on the loose edge will hold it in place when the parka is being worn. Attach this so it will work correctly. It might extend up to the edge of the hood at the chin if it seems necessary.
12. Attach all the outer edges of the lining and parka right side to right side. This is more easily done in several stages. In general, one makes the outside covering and the inside lining and then joins the outside edges in some manner, such as the following:

- a. Join lining to the front edge of hood. Turn right side out and then reach between the layers of the hood and connect the seams

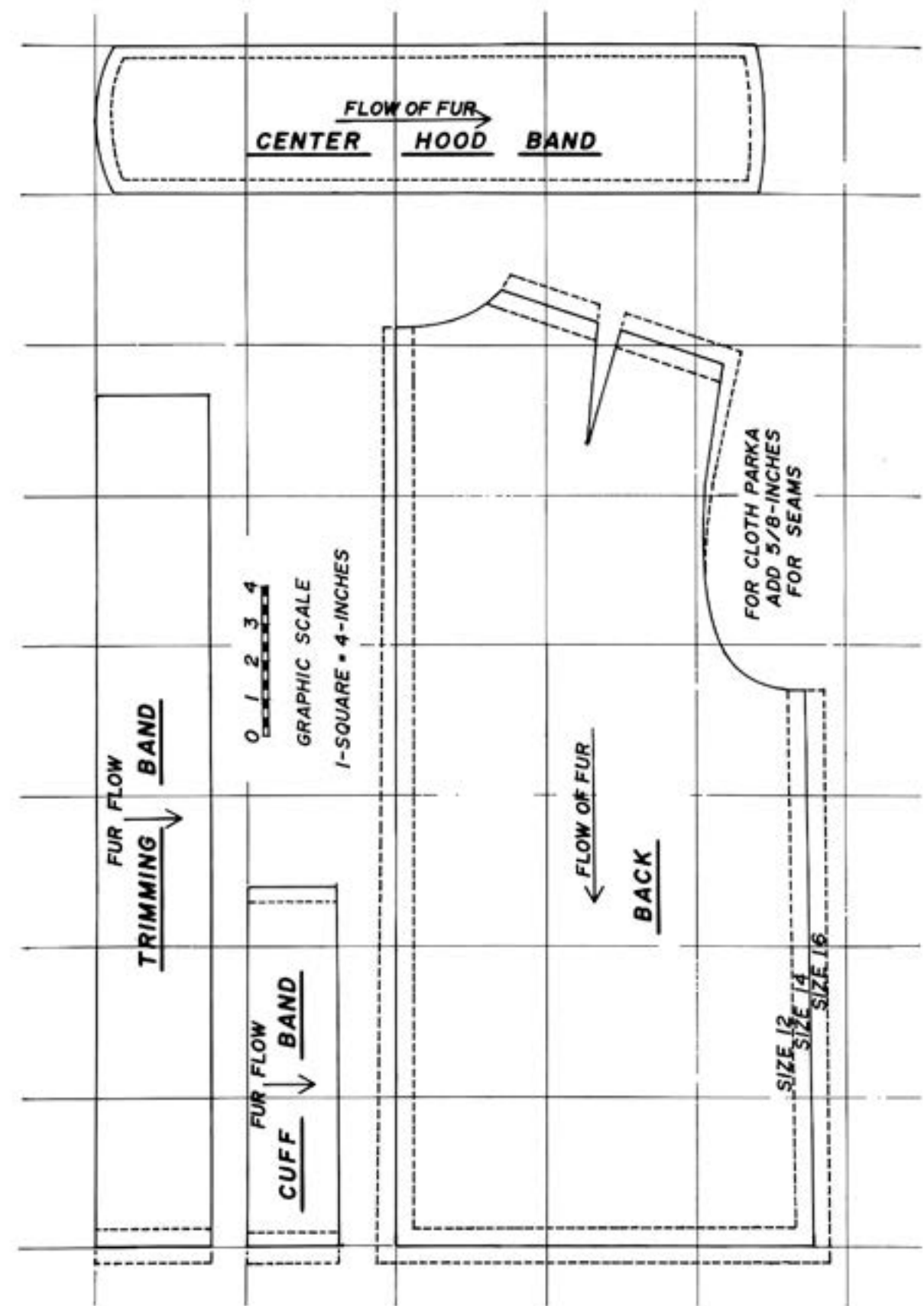
with large loose hand stitches. Use strong thread. This keeps the lining in place.

- b. Sew the lining down on the front edges.

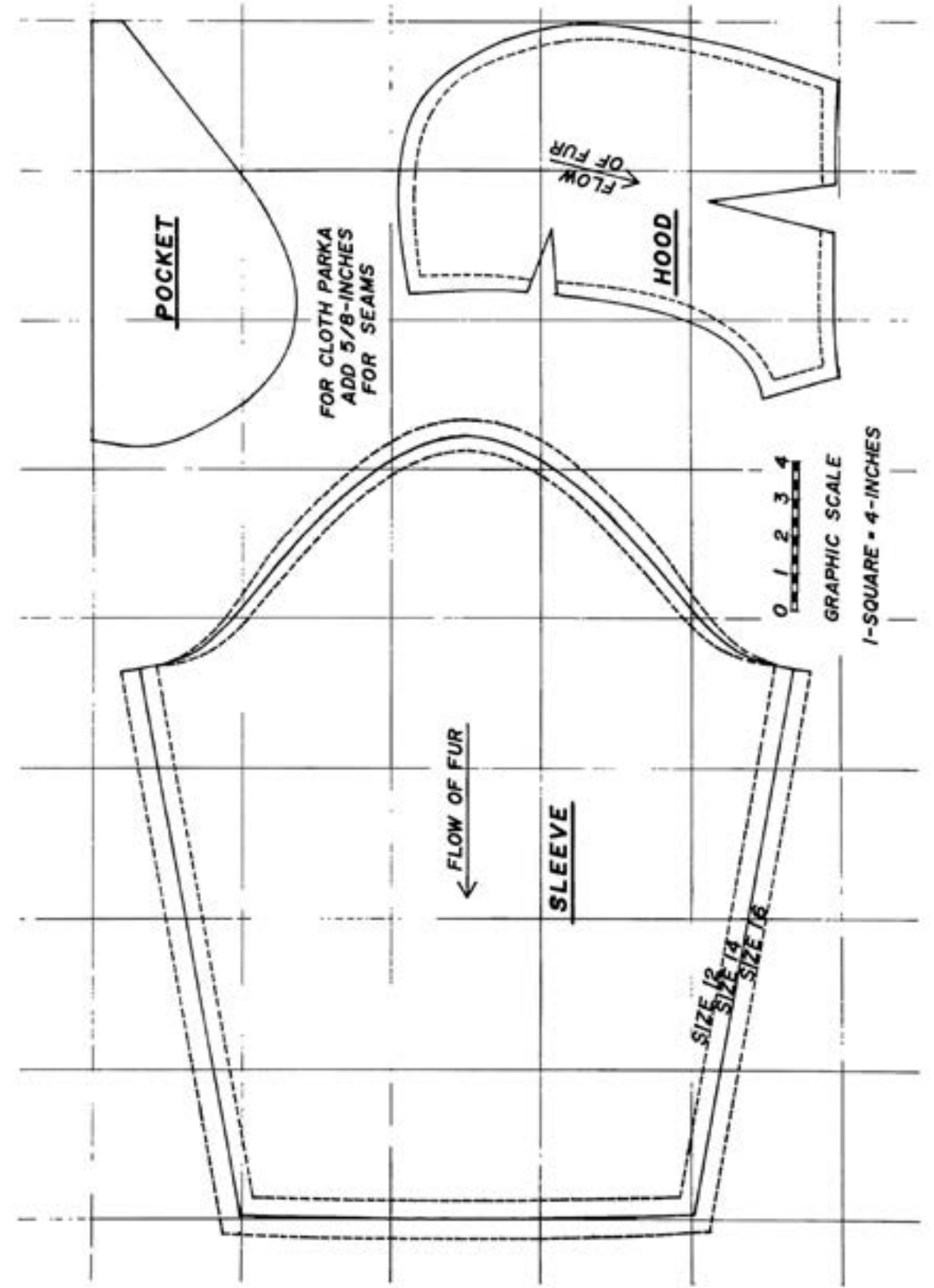
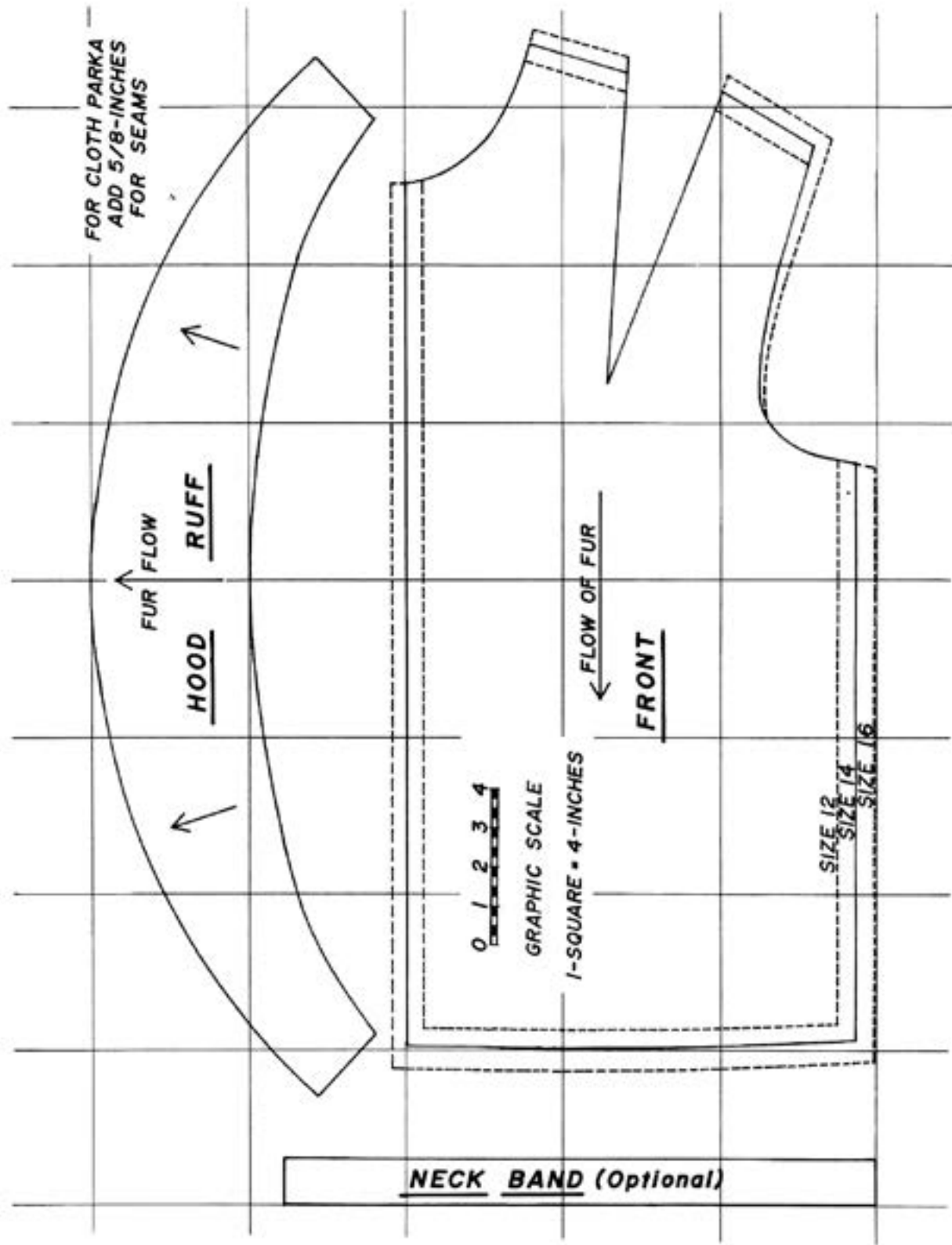
The zipper has already been attached to each front edge and the lining will be attached along the same line of stitching. Sew within 3 or 4 inches of the bottom edge of the parka. Leave corner free since it will be the last bit of stitching on this edge. Check the lining to be sure it is about 1 inch shorter than outer covering at sleeve edge and bottom hem edge.



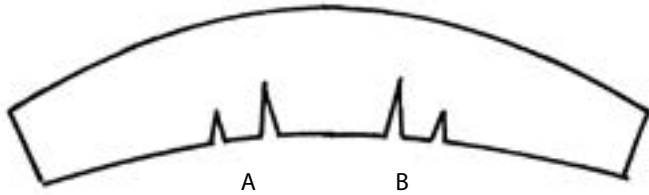
- c. Place the bottom edges of the lining and parka together, right side to right side, and sew from the corner to near the center back.
 - d. Sew the remaining front edge seam together, thus completing the lower corner. Turn right side out.
 - e. Repeat the second front edge as you did the first one. Be sure to leave an opening of 10 or 12 inches in the center back bottom hem to finish turning the last corner.
 - f. Hand catch the 10 or 12 inches left in the bottom hem.
 - g. Catch the lining to the sleeve hem by hand. Experienced seamstresses can sew the sleeve edge on the machine and turn them correctly. For beginners it is easier to do it by hand, turning in the raw edge of the lining and whipping it to the sleeve hem edge.
13. Put a hook at the top of the zipper on the hood area if you wish. A button and loop button hole could be used with some planning ahead before attaching the hood cover.



Continued on back page



14. Attach snaps on lining strip and on the shell under the zipper.
15. Assemble the ruff. The ruff should be edged with twill tape and lined. If the purchased ruff is straight-edged, it can be made to curve by



taking out V-shaped areas on the inner edge, i.e., at A and B, by cutting from skin side with a razor blade.

Never cut off the hairs; only cut through the skin. Sew together with $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch seam with overhand stitch. Attach $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch twill tape to the edge with overhand stitch, placing tape against fur side to stitch. Then turn it to skin side and fasten it down with rubber cement or catch it in place with thread.

Cut lining of crepe or satin and hand stitch it to the tape so it will cover the tape.

16. Attach the ruff to the hood edge thoroughly so it will lie down or stand up when worn.

Children's Parka

Suggestions for children's parkas are as follows:

1. Any simple coat pattern that fits a child loosely can be used by cutting off the front overlap and using the pattern to the center front only. Then use a hood that can be copied from the adult pattern by making a test.
2. A polyester-filled ski jacket (underwear) or fleece jacket could be used for the lining of a short parka.
3. The ski jacket zipper might be used if it is ripped out and sewn in so it will be attached to the outer covering right side out.
4. Army surplus materials can often be used if they are re-cut.

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