

PART 1B

NORTH OF BEAUMONT

Evidence of rich, dynamic aboriginal communities has been found at the Edmonton Rosedale site and at Rabbit Hill (among other locations) in Edmonton, dating back some 12,000 years ago. As one of the highest points in the area, Rabbit Hill knoll offered hunters an excellent view of bison and deer in the river valley below. The river also provided special rocks (quartzite cobbles and chert pebbles) that break in predictable fashion and can be fashioned into sharp-edged points, scrapers, and knives. (15)

Occupation along the North Saskatchewan River valley dates from over 8,000 years ago. Many generations of indigenous peoples camped near the “bend in the river” that is Edmonton. It is reasonable to imagine rows of tipis as the first homes in Larch Park. (15) Area native peoples fished and followed bison herds, dried the meat, and made clothing and shelters from the skins. They moved along established routes and traded with other tribes through a complex network that spanned the continent. (15)

The Edmonton area was traditional meeting ground for many, such as the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakoda Sioux, Blackfoot and Metis. “Amiskwaciy Waskahikan” is the Cree name for Edmonton, meaning Beaver Hills House, a name given long before settlers arrived. (77) Beaumont area farmer John Walter found artifacts on his property northwest of Beaumont including the following three images.



Figure 14: This “Knife River Flint Alberta Point” (as described from the photograph by an MA student at the Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Alberta) is a “stemmed” point made from Knife River flint, a material that comes from North Dakota. The flint was traded and otherwise brought into Alberta for millennia because it is excellent material for stone tool manufacture. Alberta Points date back about 9,000, making them a rarer find indeed.



Figure 15: Thought to be from the Besant or Avonlea (the peoples who introduced bow and arrow hunting to the prairies) cultural groups, this projectile point is potentially from 1,000 to 2,500 years old.



Figure 16: Called a grooved maul, this hammerhead would be attached to the end of a handle and used to pound meat for pemmican tent pegs, etc. Being heavy, they were not usually carried around as a band traveled. Instead, they would be left behind at campsites and picked up when people came back that way again, with just the need to attach a new handle. The grooves on the rock took a long time to make so they were stashed very carefully.

Artifacts are whispers from people whose voices have long since faded from (recent) memory.”
(Royal Albert Museum, Ed)

Many artifacts such as stone spear, arrow, cutting and scraping tools have survived.

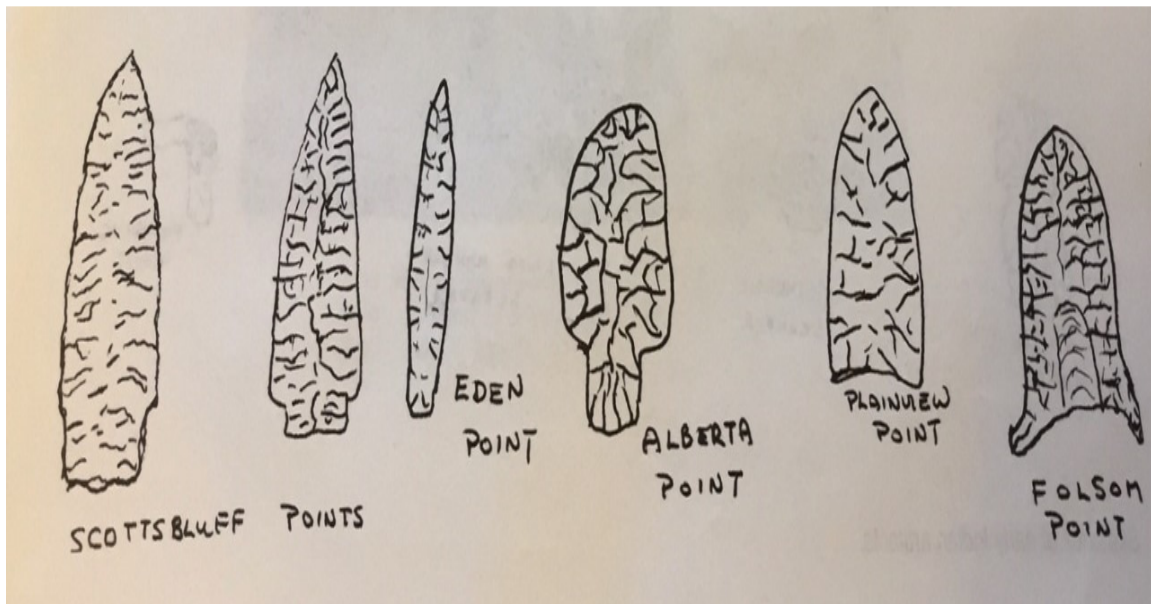


Figure17: Alberta projectile point in centre. (27)

“The chief evidence of their passing (aka ancient aboriginal cultures) can be seen today in their beautifully worked projectile points of stone. One such is the “Alberta Point” which confirms the presence of man in this area, the forbearers of the tribes to follow thousands of years later. “(27)

SOUTH OF BEAUMONT

The Tsuut'ina Nation (Sarcee) is a member of the Dene tribe. Originally a northern people, according to oral tradition they split from the Dena and moved to the plains probably near the end of the 17th century. They retained their language despite close contact with their Cree and Stoney neighbours, and allied themselves with the Blackfoot for protection from more aggressive bands.

The new, more southern territory they occupied stretched from Lethbridge to Edmonton and west. They camped along forest edges through winter and met on the open prairies to hunt bison, collect berries, hold ceremonies, and renew bonds with other tribes. And were known to frequent the Beaver Hills east of Edmonton.

As hunter-gatherers, their only planted crop was tobacco. They could plant and then return to harvest after each summer hunt. The Tsuut'ina (meaning "many people") believed in supernatural powers that would come through a vision or dream, a belief common to many aboriginal plains peoples.

Traditional custom saw families usually arranging marriages and gifts exchanged reflecting family status. (138)

Chief Bull Head (known as Little Chief or Chula by his people) signed Treaty 7 and co-shared a reserve with Blackfoot and Kainai (Blood) treaty signers southeast of Calgary. A very tall man, broad-shouldered with a booming voice, he had survived smallpox and became known as an unparalleled warrior of many battles. With no bison left, Chief Bull Head very quickly, and through diplomatic negotiations, acquired reserve land west of Calgary. (137)

Figure 17: Chief Bull Head, Sarcee (Tsuut'ina) band, Alberta (139) (born 1833, Chief from 1865 until his death in 1911)

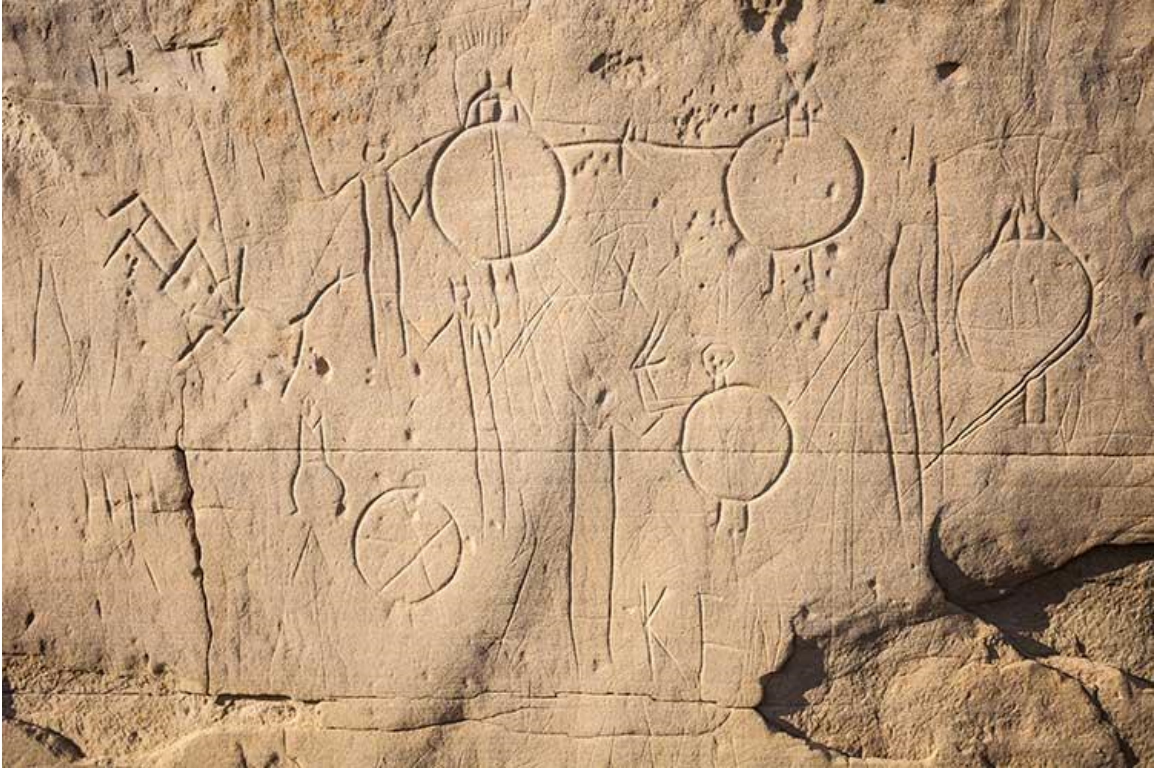




City of Vancouver Archives Item AM54-54 In P101.1 Major James Skitt Matthews
Figure 18: Sarcee band moving camp, Calgary, NWT circa 1886 (140)

In southern Alberta's Writing-on-Stone National Park, Blackfoot (Niitsitapi) people's petroglyphs show occupancy of that area for at least 3,000 years. Petroglyphs are rock carvings; pictographs are rock paintings, and both exist in this area. (29)





Figures 19/20: Petroglyphs at Writing-on-Stone National Park (29)

EAST OF BEAUMONT

Beaver Hills, to the east of Edmonton, was a particularly welcoming destination for indigenous peoples. Created by the retreat of glaciers 9,000 years ago, the moraine is an “island” of upland forest within the Alberta aspen parkland. Low lying wetlands and small lakes dot the area.

With an abundance of game, fish and plants, and a sheltering terrain, Beaver Hills became a place for travelers to rest and replenish their stores during long trips between the hills and the prairie every spring and fall.

Activity in the area dates back over 8,000 years, with 200 indigenous camp and tool-making sites unearthed. (88)

A visitor to Beaver Hills in 1857 counted 500 lodges with 1,900 people at the location. (105)

“Amiskwaciy” means Beaver Hills in Cree. (91)

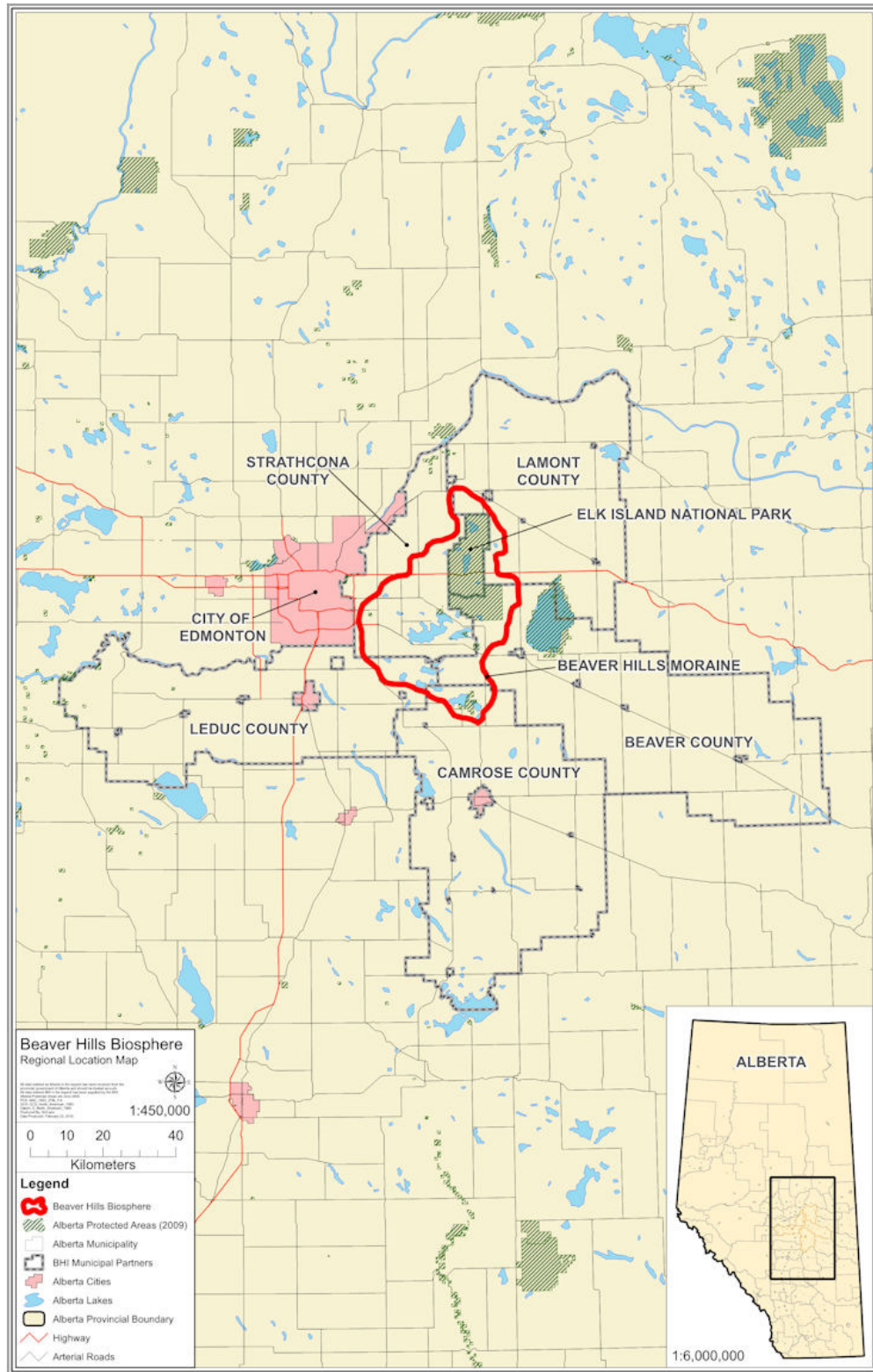


Figure 21: Map showing the Beaver Hills area in conjunction with surrounding municipalities. The area received UNESCO biosphere designation in March of 2016. (89)

WEST OF BEAUMONT

The Peigan tribe (Piikani), a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy, occupied a vast territory from Rocky Mountain House along the foothills and south into Montana, and spreading eastward.

Historically a large community, for unknown reasons they divided into two bands (the Northern Peigan and the Southern Peigan) before European contact. But both groups travelled together and were intermingled such that there appeared to be no clear division.

The Peigan spoke the same language as the other Blackfoot tribes, the Kainai and Siksika. Primarily bison hunters, they also sought other game such as deer and supplemented their diet with vegetables, nuts, and fruit. As bison began to disappear by the mid-1800s, the Peigan peoples moved further south and abandoned their more northern grounds. (119)



Figure 22: Peigan mother and child. Glacier National Park. Undated (130)

Stoney peoples (also called Nakoda Sioux or Rocky Mountain Sioux) have an oral history telling of a charismatic chief from the southeast who followed his vision and led his people to the shores of “Wakamne” (God’s Lake or Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta). (154)

The Stoney-Nakoda bands, commonly comprised of extended families living along the Rocky Mountain foothills, were bison and big game hunters. With the establishment of posts in Edmonton and Rocky Mountain House, they became traders of furs, hides and fresh meat. And were invaluable guides to traders, explorers (John Palliser, James Hector among others), surveyors and missionaries. (155)



Glenbow archives NA 1-700-84

Figure 23: Nakoda Sioux Nation mother and child.



Photograph by Byron Harmon, courtesy of the Library and Archives Canada/C-15039

Figure 24: Stoney-Nakoda men about 1906 (155)

First Nations peoples, while diverse in the practice of recognizing, celebrating, respecting, engaging, and honouring deities, nature, seasons, and events, shared many commonalities.

World View

In the traditional belief systems of first nations, creation included the visible, material world as well as the invisible spiritual world. All things were connected and, to live a good life, humans had to have respectful relationships with all creation – people, animals, the land, and sky. (9)

A person's lot in life was determined by the spirits, or animal powers who volunteered to be helpers and were acquired during an individual's vision quest. This was undertaken as a rite of passage at puberty, with rites involving prayer, fasting and isolation. A vision quest was undertaken to find meaning and spiritual fulfillment. (37)

Humour was highly valued and anything that provoked laughter was thoroughly approved of in traditional indigenous cultures. (117) Identification with the natural world is at the heart of almost all North American native peoples' beliefs. (19)

Of utmost importance was harmony between man and the cosmos. This called for ceremonies, rituals and taboos that had to be properly observed and performed to be effective. (39)

The "sun-dance", usually held in midsummer, was an important event in the concept of annual world renewal. It could be sponsored by an individual who wished to give to his tribe, or to thank or petition nature through the act of self-sacrifice, for the good of the group. Participants underwent a grueling ordeal over several days, a physical and spiritual test offered in sacrifice for their people. (9)



Figure 23: Sun Dance (or Thirst(ing) Dance) (94)

Tobacco, sweet grass, sage, and red cedar were sacred plants with a long history in plains aboriginal culture. Tobacco, wild or simple cultivated varieties, preceded European trade. But local plant use was vastly overshadowed once it became a commodity of very early European trade, obscuring its long tradition of use prior. It was considered to be a sacred medicine and could be mixed with other plants. Burned in ceremonial pipes, the smoke was not inhaled but drifted up to the Creator along with prayers.

Pipe smoking was considered a sacred ceremony and an essential key in most ceremonies and prayers. It was a traditional start to talks between groups or nations, ratifying alliances or attesting to treaties.



Figure 24: Medicine pipe, plains Cree

Tobacco is still given as a gift in advance of a request for guidance. Pipes themselves were objects of religious symbolism and virtually every family would have one. There could be significance to coloured pipes, indicating use for different ceremonies. (101)

Photograph by Pat Morrow, courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. This medicine pipe was acquired by Paul Kane in 1846 from a Cree chief at Fort Pitt (101)

Sweet grass smudging is a cleaning process in which the grass, often with sage, is burned. According to tradition, the sage rids a person of negativity while sweet grass draws positive energy. The grasses are usually braided together and dried, producing no open flame when ignited. “Smudge”, the smoke, is fanned onto people to purify and to let their prayers, thoughts and wishes rise with the smoke to the Creator who will hear them. (102)



Figure 25: Sweet grass braided for drying. (stock picture)

Sacred stories abounded in aboriginal cultures, as they were peoples of an oral tradition, not written. They were told to teach lessons, pass on traditional knowledge and for entertainment. A recurring, favourite theme was that of a “trickster.” Often getting caught up in his own jokes, the trickster and his teachings linked humans to the rest of the animal world, making it seem a safer place, perhaps through the humour. (103)

Some Cree have “Wisakadjak”, an adventurous and humourous trickster, with powers strong enough to have created the moon, or weak enough to be reduced to only flattery or deceit.

The prairie Siksika (Blackfoot) tell stories of Napi, their trickster possessing great powers. He is credited by some with creating the world. However, he is also foolish and could be cruel, deceitful, and destructive. (104)



Photographers Jane and Lucien Hanks

Plains peoples are credited with having held the first powwows – events that brought nations together in celebration of their cultures. Wearing adorned clothing, dancers performed songs and dances (with drums and rattles), some to tell a particular story or perhaps evoke healing. All were considered sacred. Drums represented the earth or circle of life and were considered important to the culture and spirituality of plains indigenous peoples. (57)

Medicine bundles were collections of sacred objects holding symbolic importance, unique to each distinct tribe. The bundles were accumulations of physical objects, which were a reminder of the spiritual blessings given the owner. (9)

Figure 26: Siksika traditional bison robe. Martin Breaker on the Siksika (Blackfoot) Reserve, south of Calgary, circa 1938-39 (120)



Figure 27: Some medicine bundles were owned by individuals. Others were kept for the tribe, associated with the spiritual well-being of the entire group. They could be looked at as portable shrines. (146)



Plains Indian
Medicine Bundle

Sweat lodge ceremonies were common across many indigenous cultures. The “lodge” was a dome shaped hut, with heated rocks placed in a pit at the centre. Water splashed on the hot rocks would rise as steam. This ritual of purification, healing and prayer was often facilitated by an elder or a healer (shaman). It would commonly precede an adolescent’s vision quest. (134)

The “walking out ceremony” of the Cree serves as a way to introduce children into their society, by celebrating every child’s first steps. Dressed ceremonially in the clothing of their future roles in life, a child would be walked out of the family tipi with, symbolically, a person who will be their guide and stand by them for life. These would mark their first steps taken outside the home and into the world. The ceremony highlights how the Cree valued the worth of each person in their community. (134)

Economy

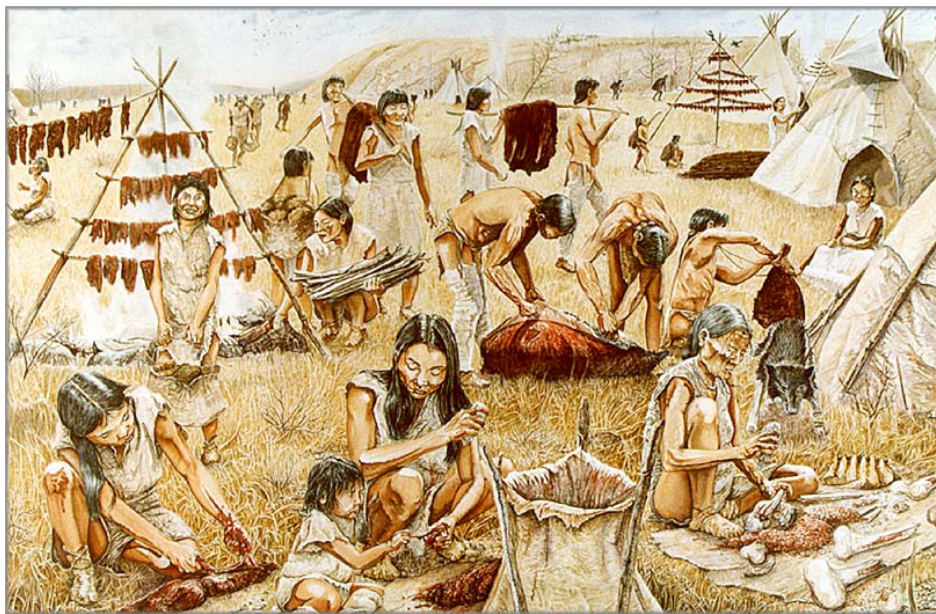
First nations on the prairies made their living from the land and the land shaped their lives. On the prairies, kin-ship-based groups moved in circular seasonal migration patterns, gathering with others for ceremonies, to trade and to coordinate bison hunts. In traditional nations, people did not accumulate wealth. Taking more than needed showed a lack of respect for the interconnectedness of nature. People did not seek to own many articles of clothing. They did not hunt for fun. They believed that creation repaid this respectful way of life by constantly renewing itself. (9)

(Bison are native to North America (and parts of Europe), have a hump behind their heads and small, sharp horns, Buffalo are native to South Asia and Africa, have no hump and long horns.)



Figure 28: Bison herd on prairie grassland. (64)

Small-sized nomadic groups could not stock up on much surplus food. The fact that, on any given day hunters could come back empty-handed, meant sharing and co-operation were required to ensure everyone got some. In these egalitarian societies, one did not need to be the successful hunter to eat. As possessions started to be accrued, sharing of *all* resources (at least somewhat equally) gave way to inequities within societies (see the arrival of the horse to the Canadian west).



M. Francois Girard

Figure 29: A “Late Plains” culture fall camp scene, depicting, in the upper left side, meat drying to be pounded into pemmican.

Pemmican, a dried, preserved food source consisting of meat, fat and berries provided high-energy nutrition. It was an excellent staple that lasted well and made for an outstanding journey food.

Paul Kane, an Irish-Canadian who travelled to the prairie west in the 1840's, described the process of making what he called "pimmi-kon."

Pemmican became an item of aboriginal commerce, traded to sustain a food supply for the European fur traders and explorers. Quantities weighing up to 45 km (100 lbs.) were sewn into bison hide bags, as a hard, compact mass. Each of these bags would hold the meat from 1 1/2 adult bison and were sent with fur traders and others travelling long distances. Remnants of pemmican bundles continue to be found as a result of land cultivation where previous aboriginal campsites existed. (28)



Figure 30: Pemmican (70)

Dogs and people, most often women, were used to haul supplies on travois, triangular frames of poles which themselves could serve as the framework for their homes. (41)

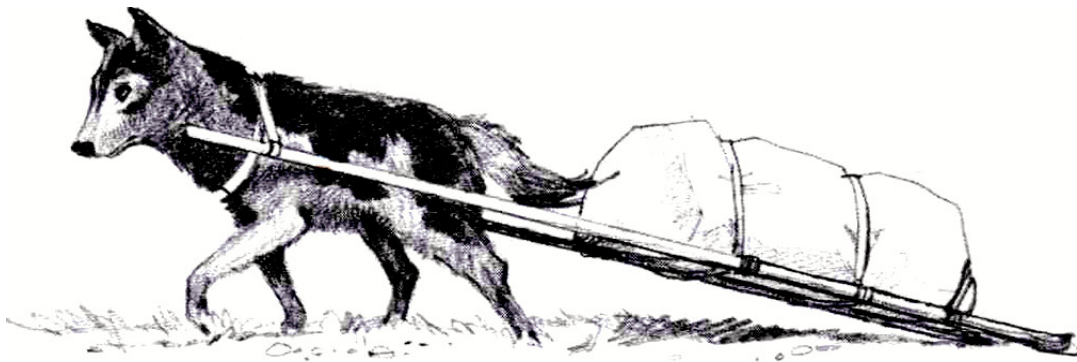


Figure 31: Travois/dog hauling household goods. (131)

Social structure

Living close to the land meant the interests of each person meshed with the interests of the group as a whole. Members had different roles, but all were important because they helped everyone.

Guidance came from Elders, people who were respected for their knowledge. Women traditionally organized the camps, cared for children, and gathered foods such as berries and roots and prepared game. Men were expected to hunt and defend the community.



Charles Horetzky/ Library and Archives of Canada C-005181 photograph.

Figure 32: Cree camp on the prairie, south of Vermilion Sept 1891. The small size of the 3-pole tipis would indicate a reliance on dogs to move from one location to another. (52)

When bison were concentrated in large herds, bands often came together for a few weeks in one large camp. Celebrations and a sun dance were part of the traditions of the hunt. After the annual hunt, bands separated again. In the fall they moved to well-protected areas in river valleys, foothills, and parklands to spend the winter. (9)

Government

Band and tribe leaders were chosen many ways. Some chose different leaders for peacetime than those chosen during times of conflict. Leaders were trusted and respected for their good judgment and fitness to lead by making decisions that benefited the group or by possessing meaningful knowledge. All contributed to decision making: men, women, young and old. (9) In traditional conflict or dispute resolution, an Elder might voice recognized values and suggest a way to come to an agreement. The people involved were then free to follow the advice or leave the community.

Talking circles were used to build consensus. Uninterrupted, each participant spoke to the group as a whole. Sometimes people passed an object from one to another as they took turns speaking. (9)

There were wars between indigenous groups, mainly to gain prestige, to obtain goods or for revenge. (9)



Figure 33: Coup stick.

Proving his bravery, a warrior would use this long slender coup stick to touch his enemy in battle. Touching a *live* enemy showed the highest degree of bravery. (115)

The giving of gifts was a social and diplomatic obligation on ceremonial occasions and at special events. Gifts were essential for sealing agreements and alliances with other peoples.

Prestige (gained through generosity, among other virtues) was more important than the accumulation of wealth. Observations of hospitality also included the giving of personal acquisitions.

Gifts were the recognition that resources were meant to be shared. (35)

As diverse as aboriginal groups were socially, culturally, and linguistically, communication was essential. Sign language developed on the prairies, a crossroads for many indigenous nations.

Over thousands of years some 50 different aboriginal languages developed, belonging to 10 language families. All seem to have evolved since arrival in North America and bear no resemblance to any known from the “old world”. (17)

Education

Education conveyed knowledge that the community needed. Skills, values and perspectives were passed on by example, the oral tradition and observation of life on the land. Traditional education aimed to guide children. Stories, for example, illustrated positive and negative situations. Children were expected to draw their own conclusions. Mistakes were not punished but dealt with through instruction and advice. Children learned a strong sense of responsibility towards others and to the land, not only because they were told it was important, but because they saw and understood its importance. (9)

Photograph from the Glenbow Library and Museum Archives NA-2791-13



Sioux children from the 1860s.

First Nations have a long tradition of occupancy and responsibility for the land, rather than ownership in the European sense. (54) Some 10,000 years ago, campsites of peoples of different cultural traditions and economic adaptations were already scattered throughout North and South America. (34)

Seasonal migrations were not random. As winter approached, tribes went to wooded or river valley areas for protection from the elements. In spring, to avoid flooding and follow the bison herds, they moved to the prairies. This was not aimless wandering. Reliable food sources drew bands back to the same areas, year after year. (116)

By the year 200 CE (Common Era), people on the plains were thought to have lived in small, portable tipis and by 600-800 years ago, engaged in some agriculture. Groups moved between resource zones according to the dictates of the season, the fortunes of the hunt and diplomatic relations with neighbouring groups. (46)



Figure 34: Artwork by Gordon Miller depicts that aboriginal peoples used each bison in its entirety.(119)



Figure 35: Map of Canada's indigenous nations prior to European contact. (65)

Head-Smashed-In buffalo jump site, in southern Alberta west of Lethbridge, was used over a span of more than 5,000 years to hunt bison on a large scale. The area also served as a trading centre, co-operatively for the nations that used the site. (33)



Figure 36: When first in use, the cliffs were about 20m (66 ft) high. At present they measure half that height.

The name “Head-Smashed-In” comes from an incident that resulted in the death of a Blackfoot youth. Attempting to watch the hunt too close, he was crushed by animals plunging over the cliffs to the ground below. (59)

Both “jump” and “drive” hunting practices were used, depending on the conformity of the land. “Corrals” or “pounds” were a more complex method of hunting, but all forms often called for a high degree of co-operation and organization, not only within bands but also inter-tribally. There would be wide fluctuations in population, with considerable influx of bands from surrounding areas, during seasonal hunts. (36)



Artwork by Gerald Lazare

Figure 37: Depiction of funneling bison towards a jump. (58)

In the use of pounds, bison were herded along corridors made of rock, stick and brush, “drive lines”, which could stretch miles into the surrounding prairie from the enclosure itself. The flimsy wooden structure was draped in bison hides to create a dark surface that the poorly sighted animals perceived as a wall. (60)



Figure 38: Depiction of a pound. (60)

Indigenous cultures developed because of different life-style adaptations and languages, for example bison-hunting groups on the plains, fish, and animal harvesters of both the plains and parklands and reliance on caribou and other resources in the northern forests and tundra.

Their ancestors are represented today by the Cree, Ojibwa, Oji-Cree, Nakoda Oyadebi (Assiniboine), Siksikaitsitapi or Blackfoot Confederacy (Blackfoot, Blood and Peigan Sarcee, and Gros Ventre) and Dene people. (66)



Figure 39: Chipewyan men pictured on a caribou hunt. As tribes of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba's sub-arctic, they used several methods to hunt the large animals, including bows and arrows. (149)

(Lazare and Parker, National Wildlife Federation)

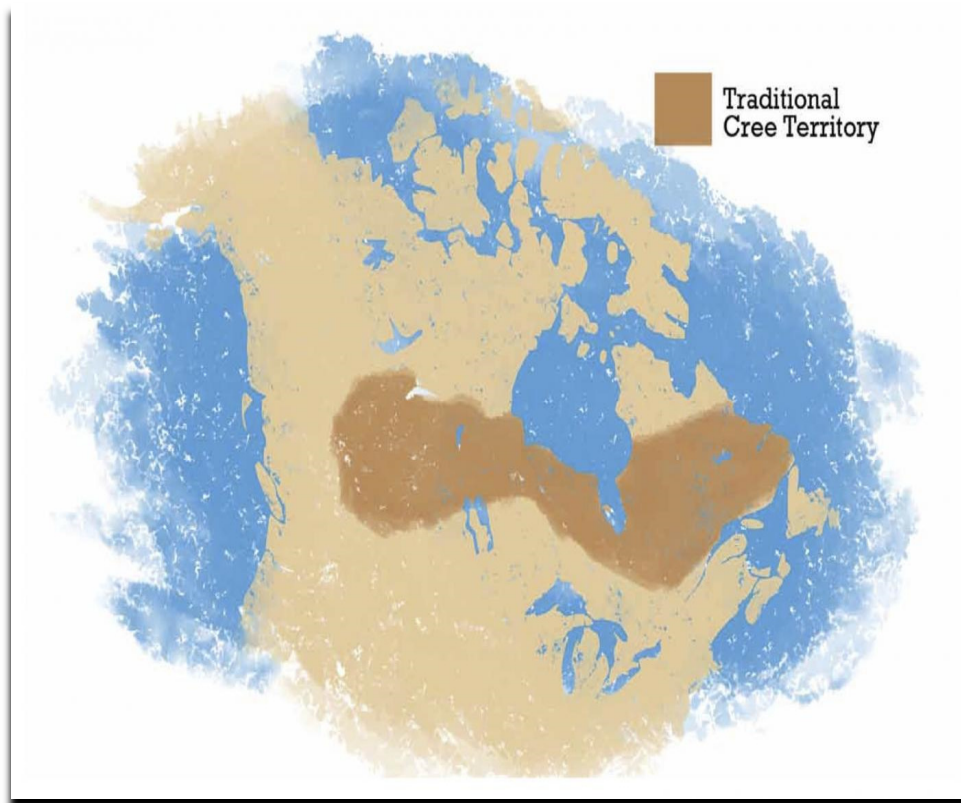


Figure 40: The Cree culture, with variations, spanned a significant part of Canada, including the Alberta and the Beaumont area.

Described as peoples of Canada's sub-arctic, their lands extended from the Ottawa River to the Saskatchewan River. (67)

The Cree were thought to have moved from the north and east into the southern Great Plains (and are now referred to as Plains Cree) and northwest woodlands (and now called the Woodland Cree). (21) There is documentation of their presence in west central Alberta by 1730 and likely as early as 1650. (55)

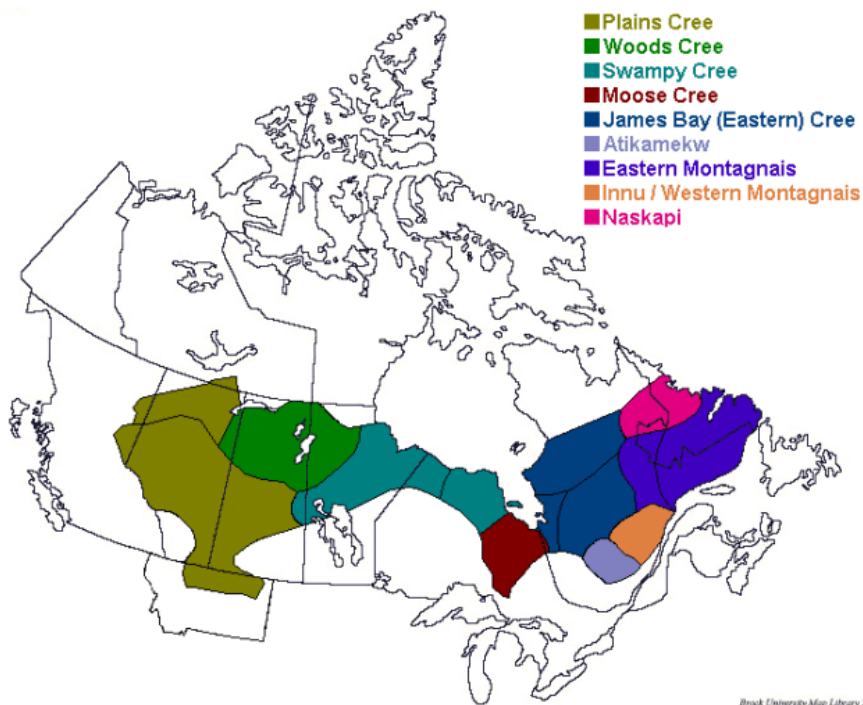


Figure 41: Cree languages. The largest first nations affiliation today is Cree. And Cree languages (5 dialects) are among the most commonly spoken. (65)

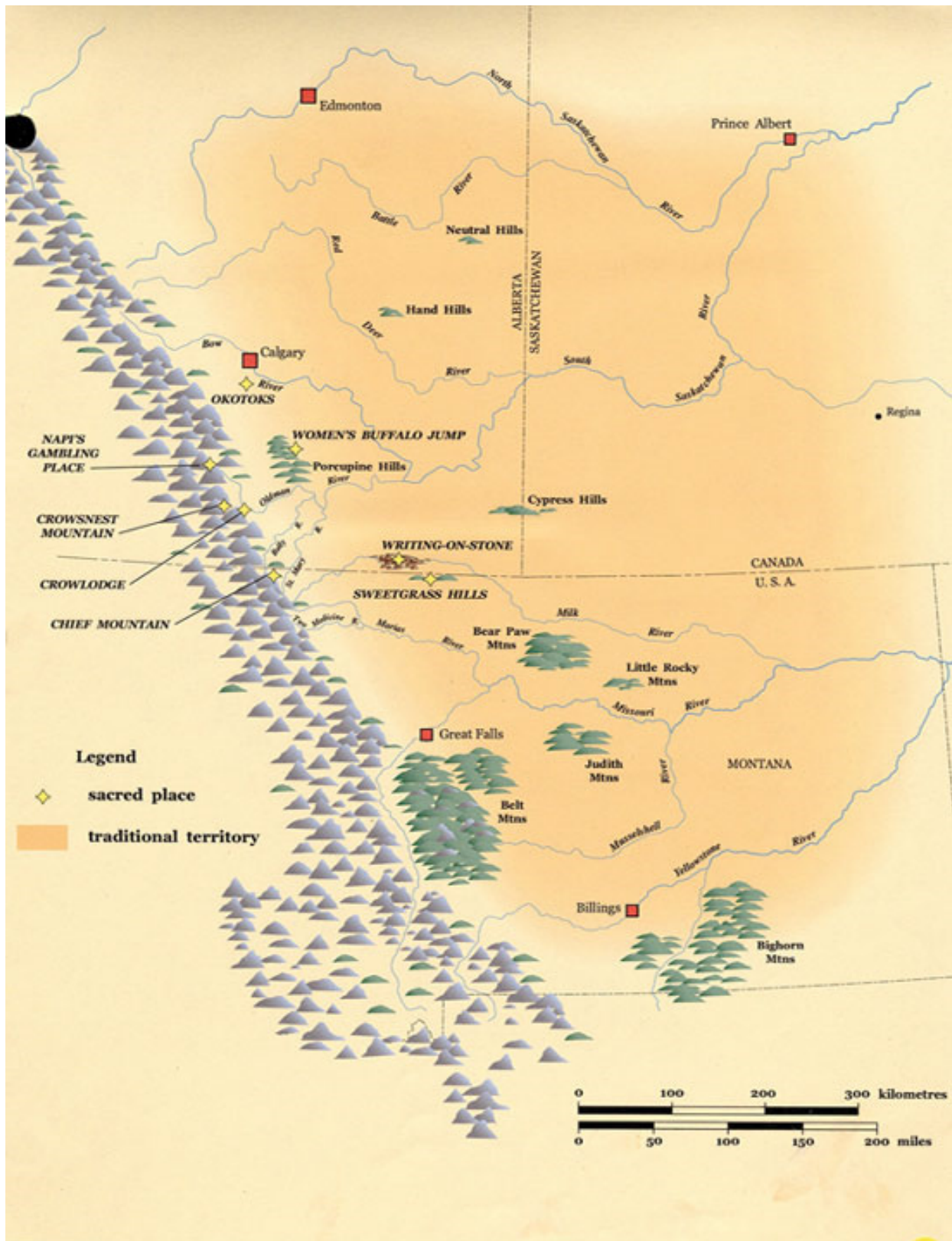


Figure 42: Traditional land occupied by the bands and tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy. (61)

Prior to the 1800s, the Blackfoot Confederacy was made up of 36 clans within 3 main tribes, the Piikani (Peigan), Kainai (Blood) and Siksika (Blackfoot, so named for their dark coloured moccasins stained from walking over areas of previous fires). (32) By about 1640 there was an estimated 20,00 to 50,000 indigenous population across the Canadian prairies. (66)

An early scholarly estimate of an aboriginal population of 221,000 across Canada back at the point of *first* sustained European contact has been criticized because it pertains more to initial *extensive* contact. Diseases brought by Europeans very early on, such as small pox, tuberculosis, influenza, scarlet fever and measles, would already have been decimating vulnerable aboriginal communities. While the numbers prior to European contact could have exceeded 2 million, perhaps 500,000 is the most accepted figure. (69)

Records from Statistics Canada, “Censuses of Canada 1665-1871: Aboriginal peoples” indicates the following populations, referring to the year 1871: (68)

The Prairie Cree 5,500 *The Wood Cree* 3,000 *The Assiniboine* 2,000 *The Blackfoot* 4,000
The Blood 1,500 *The Peigan* 2,000 *The Sarcee* 200

Centuries ago, the area that is now Alberta was a cultural mosaic. Nine tribes belonged to three distinct and different linguistic families.

Life was harsh and dangerous but also rich in spirituality and social norms. None of the plains first nations had a “writing” based culture. Memory and oral story telling were the ways the past was remembered and valued. Song and dance were central to uniting a people and creating bonds of kinship and membership. (49)

By the late 1800’s the Dene (or Athapaskan) speaking tribes (Chipewyan, Beaver and Slavey) lived in northern Alberta and the Sarcee in the south. The Siouan speaking tribes (Assiniboine, or called the Stoney peoples in Alberta,) principally occupied land along the foothills of southern Alberta. (25)

The Algonquian speaking tribes (the Plains Cree, Blackfoot, Blood and Peigan) occupied hunting grounds in the south and central areas from as early as the mid-1600s. (55)



Figure 44: Map of Alberta and Saskatchewan representative of the 1700s indigenous traditional lands, with a total population estimate of 33,000. (114)

The Siksika (Blackfoot) people were located in the Edmonton area.

The Saulteaux are also known as Plains Ojibwa. (114)

Horses were introduced to the Canadian prairies from an unexpected place. Horses were left behind when the Pueblo people of New Mexico overthrew their Spanish, horse-owning invaders in 1680. Those horses, abandoned during the Spanish retreat, were quickly absorbed into the local lifestyle, and traded *rapidly* across North America.

Arriving to the Canadian west, they quickly became the preferred beasts of burden for nomadic indigenous peoples by the mid-1700s. This time frame was at least 2 decades before the arrival of permanent European immigrants.

Moving limited loads, 75 lbs. by dog over a typical 5-6-mile daily distance, increased to a capacity of 300 lbs., and twice the distance, with the use of the horse. This change alone created a significant indigenous lifestyle change on the prairies.



More possessions such as decorated pieces of clothing, bison robes for winter and extra supplies of food could be kept. People were relieved of the burden to carry or pull heavy loads. And a new hunting advantage is attributable to the arrival of the horse to the Canadian west. (26)

Figure 45: The horse as a beast of burden.



As symbols of prestige, horses very quickly became animals of acquisition.

Raiding parties commonly sought to steal horses from other tribes or western settlers. (26)

Figure 46: Photograph from Samson Cree Nation Facebook post May 29, 2019



Edward S. Curtis

Figure 47: Photograph of 3 Peigan chiefs.1900 (150)

Sources cited follow at the end of Part 3.