



Montana
Office of Public Instruction
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Indian Education for All
Montana State Parks Lesson Plan
First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park
 January 2010 (revised)

Title

Buffalo and the Blackfeet

Content Areas

Social Studies, Reading

Grade Levels

3rd-5th (benchmarks listed here are 4th grade)

Duration

2 50-minute class periods and 2 homework assignments (may be done in class if you have extended class times)

Overview and Objectives

First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park (formerly called “Ulm Pishkun”) is the site of one of North America’s largest buffalo jumps. One of the many tribes who used this buffalo jump in recent times is the Blackfeet tribe. In this lesson, students will learn about the history and archaeology of First Peoples Buffalo Jump, and describe the components of a buffalo jump. Students will delve into the “buffalo culture” of Plains tribes, with specific focus on the Blackfeet and the important role bison played in traditional Blackfeet culture, spirituality and economy. Students will read information from a variety of sources about the Blackfeet in order to comprehend the value Blackfeet bands placed on bison and to learn the many ways bison were used by Plains tribes. Finally, students will learn that in spite of the near extinction of the American bison and the enormous changes American expansion brought to the Blackfeet people and way of life, buffalo and buffalo-related cultural elements continue to be important aspects of Blackfeet cultural identity today.

Montana Education Standards/Essential Understandings

Indian Education For All

Essential Understanding 1: There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

Essential Understanding 3: The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persists into modern day as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

Background: Tribal languages, cultures, and traditions are alive and well throughout Indian Country. Indigenous languages are still spoken, sacred songs are still sung, and rituals are still performed... These histories and traditions may be private, to be used and understood only by members of that particular tribe. Educators should be aware of this issue when asking students about their histories, ceremonies and stories. Educators should also be consistent with policies surrounding “religious/spiritual activities” and ensure that Native traditions and spirituality are treated with the same respect as other religious traditions and spirituality.

Montana Content Standards

Social Studies Content Standard 3: Students apply geographic knowledge and skills (e.g., location, place, human/environment interacting, movement and regions) *Rationale: Students gain geographical perspectives on Montana and the world by studying the Earth and how people interact with places. Knowledge of geography helps students address cultural, economic, social and civic implications of living in various environments.*

Benchmark 3.3. Students will describe and illustrate ways in which people interact with their physical environment.

Social Studies Content Standard 4: Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships. *Rationale: Students need to understand their historical roots and how events shape the past, present and future of the world. In developing these insights, students must know what life was like in the past and how things change and develop over time. Students gain historical understanding through inquiry of history by researching and interpreting historical events affecting personal, local, tribal, Montana, United States, and world history.*

Benchmark 4.1. Students will identify and use a variety of sources of information to develop an understanding of the past.

Benchmark 4.5. Students will explain the history, culture and current status of the American Indian tribes in Montana and the United States.

Social Studies Content Standard 6: Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact(s) of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies. *Rationale: In a multicultural society, students need to understand multiple perspectives that derive from different cultural vantage points... This understanding allows students to relate to people in Montana, American Indian tribes, the United States and the world.*

Benchmark 6.1. Students will identify the ways groups meet human needs and concerns and contribute to personal identity.

Benchmark 6.4. Students will identify characteristics of American Indian tribes and other cultural groups in Montana.

Literature Standard 4: Students interact with print and non-print literary works from various cultures, ethnic groups, traditional and contemporary viewpoints written by both genders.

Benchmark 4.1. Students will select, read, list to, and view a variety of literary works.

Benchmark 4.2. Students will respond to traditional and contemporary works representing diverse perspectives, cultures and issues (including American Indian works).

Materials and Resources Needed

Archaeology of First Peoples Buffalo Jump—an excerpt from “Where the Buffalo Fell” by Bruce Auchly, Montana Outdoors, 2003. (Attachment A)

“The Piegan Blackfeet and the Pishkun (Buffalo Jump)” by Lance Michael Foster, posted on January 18, 2008, on Montana Archaeology Blogspot, a public archaeology resource, at <http://montanaarchaeology.blogspot.com/2008/01/piegan-blackfeet-or-pikuni-in-their-own.html> (Attachment B, Part 1)

“How the Blackfeet Got the Buffalo Jump” by Hugh Welch, from “Blackfeet and Piegan Literature,” retrieved from the website of the American Indian Heritage Foundation at: <http://www.indians.org/welker/blacfeet.htm> (Attachment B, Part 2)

“Students find tribe's buffalo stone story hidden away” by Betsy Cohen, *Missoulian*, June 22, 2008. (Archived at: <http://www.psifly.com/cr2/index.php?topic=21432.0>) (Attachment C)

“First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park” at <http://www.browningmontana.com/ulmpishkun.html> (You will need to access this website to obtain this article and photographs.)

Diagram of the uses of the buffalo by Plains Indian tribes. See *Montana, Stories of the Land* by Krys Holmes, Montana Historical Society Press, 2008, page 32. Available online at <http://www.mhs.mt.gov/education/Textbook/Chapter2/Chapter2.asp> (Scroll down to page 32)

Student Worksheet (two pages) (Attachment D)

Drawing paper and pencils

Activities and Procedures

Teacher Preparation:

Class Period 1: Introduction to First Peoples Buffalo Jump and the Blackfeet

For this class period you will need:

- ✓ “First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park” (Print a copy for each student; also view/read as a class if a projector is available, from <http://www.browningmontana.com/ulmpishkun.html>)
- ✓ Attachment A—Archaeology of First Peoples Buffalo Jump from “Where the Buffalo Fell” (1 copy for the teacher to read to the class)
- ✓ Attachment B (Parts 1 and 2)—How the Blackfeet Got the Buffalo Jump (enough copies for teacher and students)
- ✓ Attachment D, page 1—Worksheet (You will only need page 1 for this period.)

1. Introduce the First Peoples Buffalo Jump (formerly called Ulm Pishkun) to your class by telling them where it is located in Montana and asking them if they know what a buffalo jump is. (They probably will have a

general idea.) Then tell them: Some of the things we are going to learn today about First Peoples buffalo jump are:

- how old this buffalo jump is and when it was last used?
 - who used this buffalo jump and some of its history and archaeology
 - the different parts of a buffalo jump
 - the Blackfeet (Piegan) word for buffalo jump
2. Pass out the worksheets and let students know they will not be filling in all of this information today. (Questions will be specified per reading/listening assignment) Pass out copies of “First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park” from <http://www.browningmontana.com/ulmpishkun.html> to each student. (Steps 1 and 2 together will take about 5 minutes)
 3. Read aloud with your students “First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park” if possible, viewing it from the website with a laptop and projector. (10 minutes)
 4. Students should begin filling in their worksheets, applying the information they have obtained from the first reading assignment, answering questions A, B, C, and D. (5 minutes)
 5. Distribute and read aloud Attachment A, an excerpt from “Where the Buffalo Fell.” Some of the words in this article have been underlined, as they may not be familiar to your students. Please provide a one or two word synonym or definition for them as you read. (10 minutes)
 6. Have your students complete questions E, F and G on the worksheet. (5 minutes)
 7. Pass out all pages of Attachment B. Students will be reading these two versions of the story about how the Blackfeet got a buffalo jump. They can use the remaining time in this class period to get started. If necessary, allow them to take the two stories and worksheet home to finish reading. On the worksheet, they should give a thorough answer to question H (comparing the two stories). (15-20 minutes or remainder of period)

Class Period 2: The Iniskim and Uses for a Buffalo

For this class period you will need:

- ✓ Page 2 of the Students’ Worksheets.
 - ✓ Attachment C: The Story of the Iniskim (Article called “Students find tribe’s buffalo stone story hidden away” from the *Missoulian*)—for each student to read.
 - ✓ Buffalo Diagram from page 32 of Montana, Stories of the Land. (Print as large as you can from the website listed in the materials and Resources Section) one per student.
 - ✓ Drawing paper and pencils for homework or extended in-class assignment.
1. Check to make sure that each student is done with questions A-H (page 1) of the worksheet and collect this assignment. Pass out page 2 of the worksheet. (5 minutes)
 2. Read the article from the *Missoulian* (Attachment C) and have students answer questions I and J on page 2 of the worksheet. (10-12 minutes)

3. Pass out copies of the buffalo diagram or display it in front of the class using a laptop and projector. Point out to students that there are many different *kinds* of uses for buffalo, such as transportation. (Example: The bullboat was a bowl-shaped boat made out of a whole raw buffalo hide with the fur still on stretched over a wood frame, and bullboats were used to transport goods and belongings across wide rivers.) Using this diagram, students should complete the worksheet in class. Please point out to students where it says “buckskin” on the diagram, and let them know that this can be any tanned hide, with or without fur on. (20-25 minutes)
4. Once students are finished with their worksheets, tell your class:

“All of Montana’s tribes (present day and historically) hunted buffalo, and the tribes east of the Rocky Mountains depended on it above all other resources. Bison were nearly exterminated in the 1870s and early 1880s—and the tribes who depended on them suffered very greatly when this happened, as it changed their way of life.

“Today, some of the tribes in Montana have their own small bison herds, including the Confederated Salish-Kootenai, Apsáalooke (Crow), Northern Cheyenne, and Assiniboine and Sioux at Fort Peck. A small number of bison also live on wildlife reserves and ranches throughout the west. The only wild herd of American bison live in Yellowstone National Park. Bison are still very important to today’s tribal people and to non-Indians as well.”

5. In-class or homework assignment: Draw an illustration of a buffalo jump with all of the five components or parts included in it. Don’t forget the bison! (Teacher can display these drawings in the classroom or hallway.)

Evaluation

Class discussion and participation, listening, completion of worksheets.

Extension Activities and Additional Resources for Further Learning

- Invite a tribal historian or traditional artist (like a hide painter or parfleche maker) to speak in your class and demonstrate some of the uses of buffalo.
- Visit the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana, to learn more about the Blackfeet and other Northern Plains tribes.
- Take a field trip to First Nations Buffalo Jump near Ulm, Montana, or the Madison Buffalo Jump near Logan, Montana.
- Visit the website of the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta, Canada.
- Have your class learn more about the tribal and non-tribal efforts to protect America’s remaining wild bison and why bison are at risk of extinction.
- Check out the Glenbow Museum’s website for more information on buffalo jumps, teaching tools, curriculum and other bison resources.

Attachments (Attachments are listed in the Materials and Resources)



Attachment A—Archaeology of First Peoples Buffalo Jump

(Excerpt from “Where the Buffalo Fell” by Bruce Auchly, Montana Outdoors, Sept-Oct, 2003.)

Scientific Significance

In the early 1990s, Montana State University faculty and students set out to determine the archeological significance of the pishkun. Those field laboratories uncovered significant cultural deposits, which led to a better understanding of how Indians used the site to obtain bison for food, clothing, and shelter.

For example, scientists now believe that the bison harvest took place during the cooler months, from early fall through early spring. Plains Indians probably spent day's slowly herding bison atop the bluff. Then, in a rush, they stampeded the wooly animals over the pishkun's precipice.

At the bottom of the cliff, other members of the group finished off the wounded animals with arrows and spears. Archeologists believe that the earliest hunters merely stripped the flesh off dead bison. But in roughly A.D. 500, as indicated by carbon-dated stone tools and fire pits, it appears the meat was processed into pemmican, a mixture of pulverized jerky and dried wild fruits held together by melted fat.

Scientists carbon-dated three projectile points found during the MSU dig. The oldest point dated to about A.D. 1000. Hundreds of other points were not dated but came from an archeological period stretching from A.D. 300 to 1300.

Many questions about the pishkun's use remain unanswered. For example, no one knows how many people took part in stampeding the buffalo off the cliff. One archeologist has said there had to be several dozen at least, and he wouldn't be surprised if hundreds participated. One thing is certain, however. Pishkuns were essential for early Indian survival. Buffalo were simply too big and too fast to kill any other way. Yet driving bison off a cliff was difficult, dangerous, and unpredictable. Buffalo, which weigh up to one ton, likely crushed many hunters waiting at the cliff base.

Beginning in the early 1700s, when horses brought to the New World by Spanish conquistadors made their way to the Great Plains, Indians began to hunt bison more effectively from horseback. For more than a hundred years after the arrival of the horse, Ulm Pishkun and others throughout the region fell into disuse.

Then, in the 1890s, Ulm Pishkun was quarried for sandstone, some of which ended up in Helena churches. In the mid-1900s, people began to see worth in the millions of ancient buffalo bones buried up to 15 feet deep at the pishkun's base. Between 1945 and 1957, up to 150 tons of phosphorus-rich bones were removed and used for fertilizer and to make munitions. The site, long considered holy by American Indians, was further desecrated by souvenir hunters digging for arrowheads.

An attempt to mine more bones in the late 1950s was foiled by Earl Monroe. The local rancher leased the state land and made it off limits to mining and scavenging. In the early 1970s, the lease was obtained by the Montana State Historical Society, which transferred it to Fish, Wildlife & Parks to designate as a state monument.

And there things sat for 20 years, a desolate patch of prairie that attracted little interest other than for an occasional arrowhead hunt or teenage [party].

Fortunately, a few local visionaries began lobbying to clean up the site and turn it into something the state could be proud of. After MSU scientists confirmed the pishkun's archeological significance in the early 1990s, FWP

began to expand and consolidate the park's land base. Through a series of land swaps and purchases, the park grew to its present size of 1,424 acres.



Attachment B, Part 1—How the Blackfeet got the buffalo jump

[The Piegan Blackfeet and the Pishkun \(Buffalo Jump\)](#) by Lance Foster (see citation notes at the end)



The [Piegan Blackfeet](#) (or Pikuni in their own language) of Montana were the southernmost branch of the Blackfeet Confederacy, which also included the Siksika (Blackfoot proper) of Saskatchewan and the Blood or Kainah of Alberta in Canada. They are linked with the Late Prehistoric archaeological culture called the Old Women's Tradition and probably also the even older Besant Culture.

The Blackfeet were of the Algonquian linguistic family, and were warlike toward most of their neighboring tribes, since they had horses for raiding and were supplied with guns and ammunition by their Canadian sources. Piegans also displayed hostility toward white explorers and traders. Several smallpox epidemics decimated their population, and their old way of life ended with the destruction of the buffalo herds on which they relied. Now they are gathered on reservations on both sides of the border.

The Helena Valley (aka Prickly Pear Valley) where I live was once part of the lands the Blackfeet hunted. They reportedly called this valley "Tomah" or "Tona" which meant "game pocket" or "game cache" as game animals like buffalo, elk, deer, and pronghorn antelope were always plentiful here. One Blackfeet man had a vision while camping here about the future and the coming of the white man. And we all grew up learning a story about the Sleeping Giant on the northern horizon...someday when the world is about to end, the Giant will rise from his earth-bed, shake the mountain crumbs away, and stride across the land. I heard this one when I was a boy in 5th grade here in Helena.

Origin of the Buffalo Jump and the Buffalo Dance **(see note at end of text)*

(This traditional Blackfoot story of How the Buffalo Dance was given to the people mentions the "Buffalo Jump," or as the Blackfeet called it, the pishkun (PEESH-koon), one of the most important types of archaeological sites here in Montana. Such jumps have been used for over 5,000 years in this region. You can visit such jumps today in Montana at [Wahkpa Chug'n](#) near Havre, [Madison Buffalo Jump](#) near Three Forks, and the [Ulm Pishkun](#) (as of 2007, now called [First People's Buffalo Jump](#)) between Helena and Great Falls. One of the most amazing museums is not far across the U.S.-Canadian border in Alberta, an UNESCO World Heritage site called [Head-Smashed-In](#). This last site is especially good for connecting Blackfoot history to the use of the Buffalo Jump, and explaining its importance.)

When the buffalo first came to be upon the land, they were not friendly to the people. When the hunters tried to coax them over the cliffs for the good of the villages, they were reluctant to offer themselves up. They did not relish being turned into blankets and dried flesh for winter rations. They did not want their hooves and horn to become tools and utensils nor did they welcome their sinew being used for sewing. "No, no," they said. We won't fall into your traps. And we will not fall for your tricks." So when the hunters guided them towards the abyss, they would always turn aside at the very last moment. With this lack of cooperation, it seemed the villagers would be hungry and cold and ragged all winter long.

Now one of the hunters' had a daughter who was very proud of her father's skill with the bow. During the fullness of summer, he always brought her the best of hides to dress, and she in turn would work the deerskins into the softest, whitest of garments for him to wear. Her own dresses were like the down of a snow goose, and the moccasins she made for the children and the grandmothers in the village were the most welcome of gifts.

But now with the hint of snow on the wind, and deer becoming scarcer in the willow breaks, she could see this reluctance on the part of the buffalo families could become a real problem.

Hunter's Daughter decided she would do something about it.

She went to the base of the cliff and looked up. She began to sing in a low, soft voice, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. If you come down and feed my relatives in a wedding feast, I will join your family as the bride of your strongest warrior."

She stopped and listened. She thought she heard the slight rumbling sound of thunder in the distance.

Again she sang, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. Feed my family in a wedding feast so that I may be a bride."

The thunder was much louder now. Suddenly the buffalo family began falling from the sky at her feet.

One very large bull landed on top of the others, and walked across the backs of his relatives to stand before Hunter's Daughter.

"I am here to claim you as my bride," said Large Buffalo.

"Oh, but now I am afraid to go with you," said Hunter's Daughter.

"Ah, but you must," said Large Buffalo, "For my people have come to provide your people with a wedding feast. As you can see, they have offered themselves up."

"Yes, but I must run and tell my relatives the good news," said Hunter's Daughter. "No," said Large Buffalo. No word need be sent. You are not getting away so easily."

And with that said, Large Buffalo lifted her between his horns and carried her off to his village in the rolling grass hills.

The next morning the whole village was out looking for Hunter's Daughter. When they found the mound of buffalo below the cliff, the father, who was in fact a fine tracker as well as a skilled hunter, looked

at his daughter's footprints in the dust.

"She's gone off with a buffalo, he said. I shall follow them and bring her back."

So Hunter walked out upon the plains, with only his bow and arrows as companions. He walked and walked a great distance until he was so tired that he had to sit down to rest beside a buffalo wallow.

Along came Magpie and sat down beside him.

Hunter spoke to Magpie in a respectful tone, "O knowledgeable bird, has my daughter been stolen from me by a buffalo? Have you seen them? Can you tell me where they have gone?"

Magpie replied with understanding, "Yes, I have seen them pass this way. They are resting just over this hill."

"Well," said Hunter, would you kindly take my daughter a message for me? Will you tell her I am here just over the hill?"

So Magpie flew to where Large Buffalo lay asleep amidst his relatives in the dry prairie grass. He hopped over to where Hunter's Daughter was quilling moccasins, as she sat dutifully beside her sleeping husband. "Your father is waiting for you on the other side of the hill," whispered Magpie to the maiden.

"Oh, this is very dangerous," she told him. These buffalo are not friendly to us and they might try to hurt my father if he should come this way. Please tell him to wait for me and I will try to slip away to see him."

Just then her husband, Large Buffalo, awoke and took off his horn. "Go bring me a drink from the wallow just over this hill," said her husband.

So she took the horn in her hand and walked very casually over the hill.

Her father motioned silently for her to come with him, as he bent into a low crouch in the grass. "No," she whispered. The buffalo are angry with our people who have killed their people. They will run after us and trample us into the dirt. I will go back and see what I can do to soothe their feelings."

And so Hunter's daughter took the horn of water back to her husband who gave a loud snort when he took a drink. The snort turned into a bellow and all of the buffalo got up in alarm. They all put their tails in the air and danced a buffalo dance over the hill, trampling the poor man to pieces who was still waiting for his daughter near the buffalo wallow.

His daughter sat down on the edge of the wallow and broke into tears.

"Why are you crying?" said her buffalo husband.

"You have killed my father and I am a prisoner, besides," she sobbed.

"Well, what of my people?" her husband replied. We have given our children, our parents and some of our wives up to your relatives in exchange for your presence among us. A deal is a deal."

But after some consideration of her feelings, Large Buffalo knelt down beside her and said to her, "If

you can bring your father back to life again, we will let him take you back home to your people."

So Hunter's Daughter started to sing a little song. "Magpie, Magpie help me find some piece of my father which I can mend back whole again."

Magpie appeared and sat down in front of her with his head cocked to the side.

"Magpie, Magpie, please see what you can find," she sang softly to the wind which bent the grasses slightly apart. Magpie cocked his head to the side and looked carefully within the layered folds of the grasses as the wind sighed again. Quickly he picked out a piece of her father that had been hidden there, a little bit of bone.

"That will be enough to do the trick," said Hunter's Daughter, as she put the bone on the ground and covered it with her blanket.

And then she started to sing a reviving song that had the power to bring injured people back to the land of the living. Quietly she sang the song that her grandmother had taught her. After a few melodious passages, there was a lump under the blanket. She and Magpie looked under the blanket and could see a man, but the man was not breathing. He lay cold as stone. So Hunter's Daughter continued to sing, a little softer, and a little softer, so as not to startle her father as he began to move. When he stood up, alive and strong, the buffalo people were amazed. They said to Hunter's Daughter, "Will you sing this song for us after every hunt? We will teach your people the buffalo dance, so that whenever you dance before the hunt, you will be assured a good result. Then you will sing this song for us, and we will all come back to live again."

Source: excerpt from a post by Lance Michael Foster, posted on January 18, 2008, on Montana Archaeology Blogspot, a public archaeology resource, at <http://montanaarchaeology.blogspot.com/2008/01/piegan-blackfeet-or-pikuni-in-their-own.html> Retrieved on August 10, 2009.

** Note: the original post also contains the Hugh Welch story as "Version I," but it has been omitted from this citation as it is already included on Attachment A, Part 2 (below) from another source.*

Attachment B, part 2—Another Version of the Buffalo Jump Story

How the Blackfoot got the Buffalo Jump (Piskun)

by Hugh Welch

Awa chopsi pono Ka me ta (Horse Crazy)

One day Napi was out on the Plains and became hungry and pleaded to the Great Spirit to help him and give him something to eat. The Great Spirit heard his prayers and said, "Alright Napi, mound up the dirt as big as you can eat."

Napi started mounding up the dirt and the more he worked the hungrier he got, until he had a big mound and was tired out as he wasn't used to working so hard for something to eat, as the Creator usually fed him when he asked.

The Creator said " I see you have become greedy with me helping you too much so I will make the mound of dirt something you can eat, but you will have to learn to kill it", with that the Great Spirit turned the big mound of dirt into a Buffalo which charged Napi and he started running, more in fear of his life than thinking how to kill it, he ran across the Plains, the Buffalo close behind him. Finally he saw a tree and thought if I can make it to the tree I can get away from this beast and then plan how to kill it.

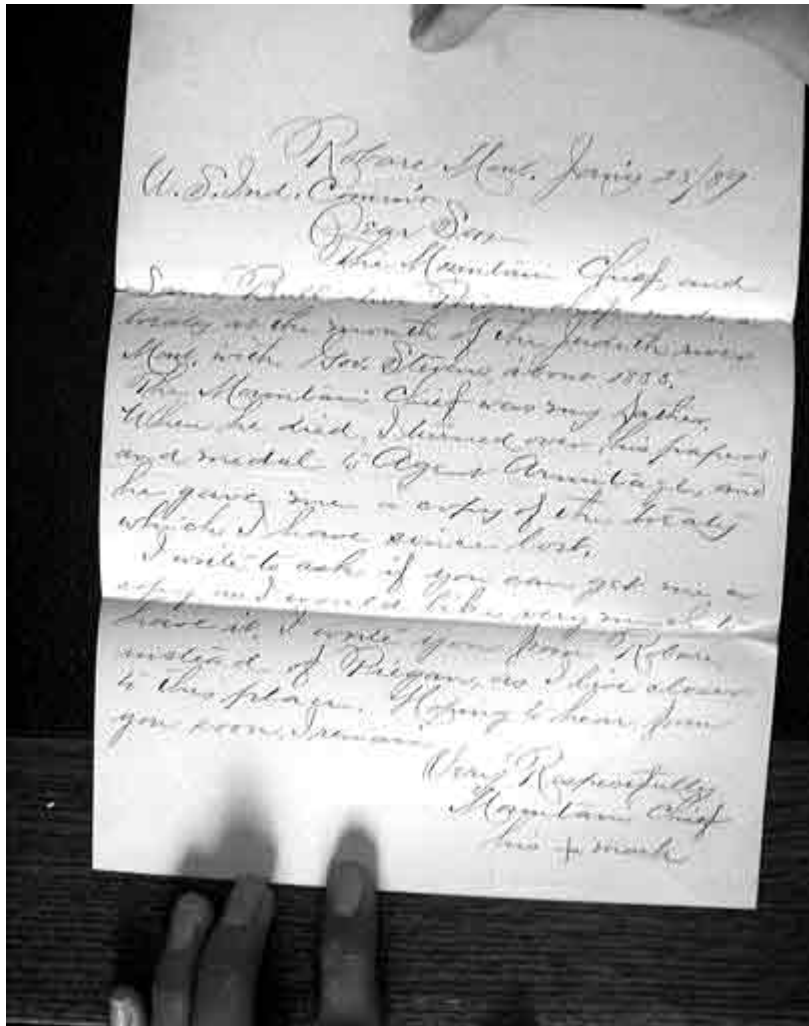
As he neared the tree he saw a big branch sticking out, low enough for him to reach but high enough to get away from the Buffalo. He was running as hard as he could and the Buffalo was gaining on him, just as he reached the tree and swung up the Buffalo ran under him and disappeared. After he got over his fright and came down from the tree he found that the tree was on the edge of a cliff and the Buffalo had ran off it and was lying at the bottom.

The Great Spirit spoke to him and said "Now Napi your greed almost got you hurt but I will give you another chance, I will put Buffalo on the Plains if you share your kills with your brothers the meat eaters and your people." Which he did and showed the people how to use the Buffalo Jump. One is at Two Medicine River, another on Milk River as well as many others all over the Blackfoot Hunting Grounds.

(Source: from "Blackfeet and Piegan Literature" on the website of the American Indian Heritage Foundation at: <http://www.indians.org/welker/blacfeet.htm>)

Attachment C—The Story of the Iniskim

Students find tribe's buffalo stone story hidden away by BETSY COHEN of the Missoulian (Archived at: <http://www.psifly.com/cr2/index.php?topic=21432.0>)



Glen Still Smoking II holds an 1889 letter he found in the Smithsonian archives that his great-great-great-great-grandfather Mountain Chief wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Still Smoking is one of five University of Montana student researchers who are spending the month of June in Washington, D.C., locating and copying documents relating to Montana's Indian tribes.
DAVE BECK photo

As far back as he can remember, Glen Still Smoking II has known the story of the buffalo stone.

Called iniskim by traditional members of his Blackfeet tribe, the small stone, usually a fossilized shell found on the Montana prairie, is used in a ritual for calling buffalo.

Often the stone is in the shape of an animal, and is considered an important medicine object, Still Smoking said. One of its magical qualities is how it is found.

"You don't look for it," the University of Montana student explained. "It chirps, it calls out to be found."

Several years ago, a buffalo stone called to Still Smoking's father, a stone he gave to his son. Still Smoking carries it with him, and he packed this special gift when he headed to the Smithsonian Institute earlier this month as part of a historic UM student research team tasked with locating, assessing, copying and bringing home the millions of documents and records pertaining to Montana's Indian tribes.

The students are three weeks into the month-long project; already, the five have discovered stories of their ancestors and their tribes. So it was with great awe and excitement last week when Still Smoking came upon a document from the mid-1800s, a 35-page, detailed retelling of the buffalo stone story and its meaning. What he learned is that the story he was told as a boy is very much the same story told on the faded parchment.

At the time, the discovery was the highlight of his trip, but then, two days later at the Library of Congress, Still Smoking and Helen Cryer came upon a 90-minute Blackfeet audio recording taken in 1898 by Walter McClintock. On this recording, one of the earliest recordings ever made, a Blackfeet named Cream Antelope tells the story of the buffalo stone.

“This whole experience has been pretty monumental for me,” Still Smoking said. “It’s the first time I have been on the East Coast - there are a lot of new sights, and I’ve already gone through three disposable cameras.”

“I can’t believe I’m here,” he said. “I’m learning quite a bit about my tribe and my people.”

The First Buffalo Stone

One time long, long ago, before we had horses, the buffalo suddenly disappeared. All the hunters killed elk, deer and smaller game animals along the river bottoms then. When all of them were either killed or driven away, the people began to starve. They were camped in a circle near a buffalo drive. Among them was a very, very poor old woman, the second wife of her husband. Her buffalo robe was old and full of holes; her moccasins were old and were torn to shreds by the rocks she walked over.

While gathering wood for the fire one day, she thought she heard someone singing a song. The song seemed quite close, but when she looked around, she saw no one. Following the sound and looking closely, she found a small rock that was singing, “Take me! I am of great power. Take me! I am of great power.”

When the woman picked up the rock, it told her what to do and taught her a special song. She told her husband her experience and then said, “Call all the men together and ask them to sing this song that will call the buffalo back.”

“Are you sure?” asked her husband.

“Yes, I am sure. First get me a small piece of the back of a buffalo from the Bear-Medicine man.” Then she told her husband how to arrange the inside of the lodge in a kind of square box with some sagebrush and buffalo chips. “Now tell the men to come and ask them for the four rattles they use.” It is a custom for the first wife to sit close to her husband in their lodge. But this time, the husband told the second wife to put on the first wife’s dress and sit beside him. After all the men were seated in the lodge, the buffalo stone began to sing, “The buffalo will all drift back. The buffalo will all drift back.”

Then the woman said to one of the younger men, “Go beyond the drive and put up a lot of buffalo chips in line. Then all of you are to wave at the chips with a buffalo robe, four times, while you shout like you were singing. The fourth time that you shout, all the chips will turn into buffalo and will go over the cliff.”

The men followed her directions, and the woman led the singing in the lodge. She knew just what the young man was doing all the time, and she knew that a cow-buffalo would take the lead. While the woman was singing a song about the leader that would take her followers over the cliff, all the buffalo went over the drive and were killed.

Then the woman sang a different song: “I have made more than a hundred buffalo fall over the cliff, and the

man above hears me.” Ever since then, the people took good care of a buffalo stone and prayed to it, for they knew that it had much power.

Attachment D—Worksheet for “The Buffalo and the Blackfeet”

Name: _____

Date: _____

A. What is a *pishkun*?

B. Where is First Nation (Ulm Pishkun) Buffalo Jump located?

C. When was it used as a buffalo jump and for how long?

D. List the 5 parts of a buffalo jump and describe the purpose of each one:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

E. What are some of the ways the tribes who traditionally used this buffalo jump, such as the Blackfeet, use the bison they killed?

F. What happened when non-Indians “found” this buffalo jump? (What are 3 things they did?)

G. How are these actions either similar to or different from how the Blackfeet and other buffalo-culture tribes used (or still use) the bison?

H. Compare the two stories about how the Blackfeet learned to use a buffalo jump. How are they different or alike? (You may use the back of this page if you need more space to answer this question.)

(Worksheet Page 2)

Name: _____

Date: _____

I. What is an iniskim and did the Blackfeet first acquire the iniskim?

J. Why is the iniskim important to the Blackfeet?

K. Plains Indian tribes, like the Blackfeet, had many *kinds* of uses for the buffalo. The list below refers to some of them. Using the diagram provided, list next to each of these kinds of uses some examples from the diagram and in parentheses write which part of the bison was used for this purpose. List one or more in each category.

Example: Transportation: bullboat (whole hide)

Ceremonial or ritual use:

Horse tack (gear):

Food:

Shelter:

Tools:

Household goods:

Storage containers:

Clothing:

Toys:

Weaponry:

Communication:

Tanning hides:

Fuel: