



# STORIES OF THE SIKSIKA



BLACKFOOT  
CROSSING  
HISTORICAL  
PARK





**STORIES OF THE SIKSIKA**

**WHO WE ARE, WHERE  
WE CAME FROM, AND WHERE  
WE ARE GOING.**

.....

**FRONT COVER:** The Prairie Chicken Dance is unique to the Blackfoot.

**INSIDE FRONT & BACK COVERS:** Blackfoot traditions, like our dances and regalia, tie our People to the land, and our land to the People.



**BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATIONS

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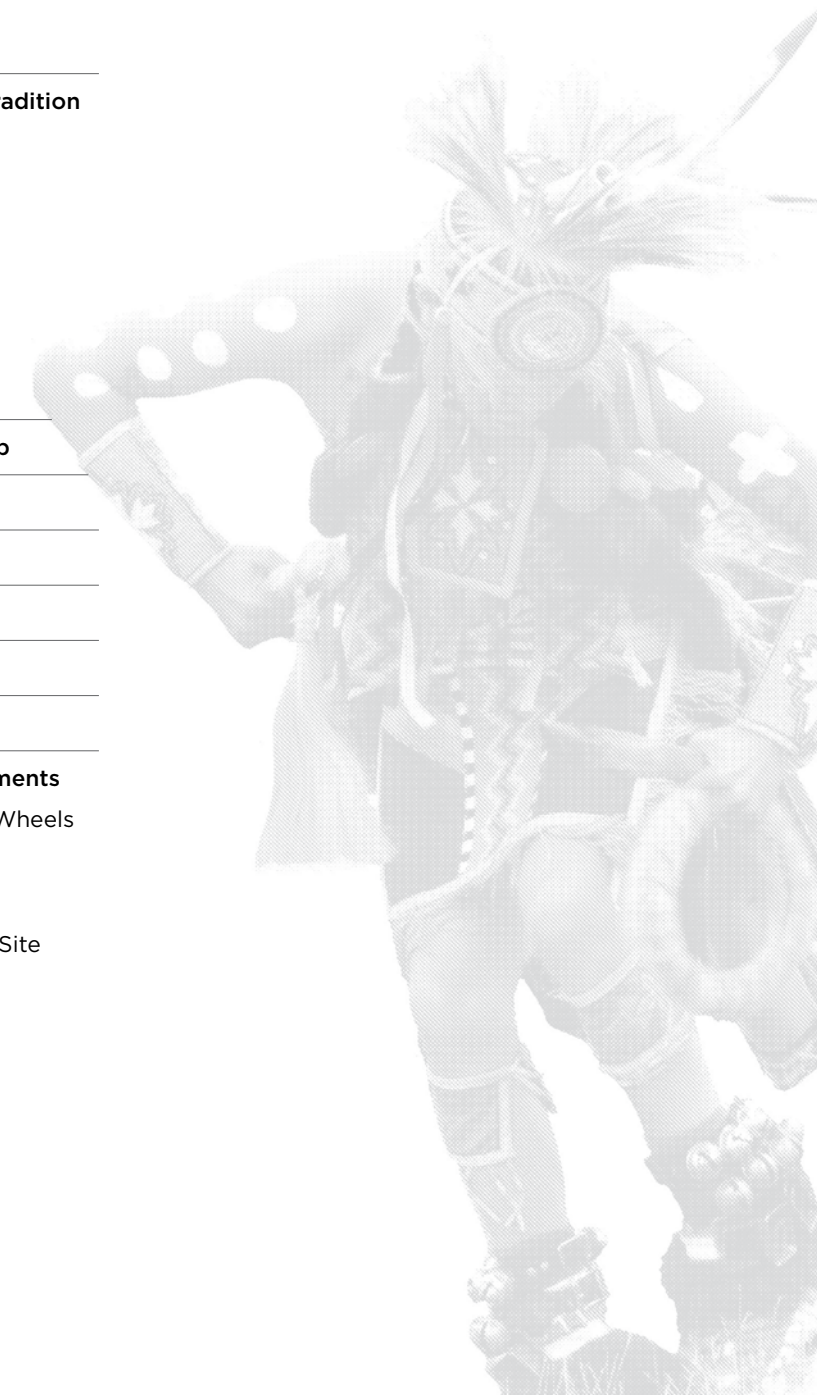
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The Blackfoot have never left our home. Across the centuries, we have moved with the seasons across our traditional territories. Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is another step in our long journey.







Siksika families, like the Water Chiefs, have traveled all over the world to showcase Blackfoot culture with pride.

"Water Chief and family at Winnipeg Stampede, Winnipeg, Manitoba," 1913, [PA-476-13] by Unknown Photographer. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.





Celebrating Siksika culture during National Indigenous Day on June 21, 2019 at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.



## WE ARE SIKSIKA

*We call ourselves Siksikaitsitapi or “Blackfoot-speaking people” because Siksika is translated as “Blackfoot” in English. Collectively, we also call ourselves Niitsitapi, or “Real People.” This is because we are equal partners with all the other beings in the universe.*

*The Blackfoot Confederacy is a group of Blackfoot-speaking First Nations, who have come together to interact with the Crown and the Canadian governments; Siksika is one of the nations in the Confederacy.*

## INTRODUCTION

Oki,

Thank you for your interest in learning about the rich and vibrant history of the Blackfoot people.

Our history has been passed down from generation to generation by the elders to our youth. From grandfathers to fathers to sons. From grandmothers, to mothers to daughters. Each successive generation learns by hearing the oral traditions, and in turn they have been encouraged to tell the stories as they heard them, so that they are not forgotten.

This book is more than just a book. It is a symbolic representation of our oral tradition. You may read and learn from it, but I ask you to carry out the intent of our oral tradition by telling these stories to someone, so that they may never be forgotten.

***Stephen Yellow Old Woman***  
General Manager,  
Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park  
(February, 2020)



.....  
This book is more than just a book. It is a symbolic representation of our oral tradition.





**TOP:** Story robe retelling, focusing on figure in the centre: a war chief, evidenced by his staff and shield, is depicted in a victorious homecoming.

**BOTTOM:** Running Rabbit adding more events to his winter count while others look on. He would have passed the robe down to family or another selected person (*Glenbow Archives, courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing*).



**OUR ORIGINS**  
A CULTURAL HISTORY

The stories of the Siksika are many. They have been passed down through the centuries from one generation to the next. Our long history is also an oral tradition that is interwoven with the land, plants, birds, and animals, especially iinii — the buffalo. To understand our history, you must first understand our stories.

**ISSKO'TSIKA: HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

Apisstotoki (Creator) created the cosmos and everything in it. Apisstotoki told Ksahkomitapi (Earth) that she was mother to all and that she would provide for all. Natosi's (Sun) rays were to give light and warmth to all during the day. Natosi's wife, Kokimmikisoom (Moon), was to give moonlight at night with help from her star children, the Kakatosiiks.

the Sky Beings or Above People, called Spomi'tapiiks. He told the Stahtsitapiiks that they would be animals who dwell underground. Those who live in the water would be known as Soyitapiiks.

Siksika spiritual leaders and ceremonialists explain the origin and function of the universe, as well as human relationship with nature, through ritual, and song. Our Elders welcome the sunrise through the sacred smudge of sweet grass or sage, seeking guidance for the day, as Natosi journeys over the tall grasses of the prairie.

Where others look for divinity beyond this world, we believe that it is already here — in nature and Ksahkomitapi.

When evening comes, the smudge is lit with more prayers, or aatsmoyihkaan, giving thanks for life. With humility, the Elders give thanks to Apisstotoki for the abundance of his creation.

After Apisstotoki created everything, he called everyone together into one spot, an act referred to as omoipssii. He said that they must never forget their heritage, and remember that they were the descendants of



**NITAWAHSIN-NANNI: WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND OF THE BUFFALO**

Wherever the iinii wandered, we followed them. The land of the buffalo is the land of the Siksika.

Today it is difficult to believe that buffalo moved across the plains in their millions, grazing slowly, in time with the seasons, moving into the foothills for respite from the cold winds of winter. Buffalo were plentiful. The Blackfoot way of life was intertwined with the lifecycle of the buffalo.

The buffalo were created by Apistotoki as a gift for our People. Everything we needed for life was provided by our four-legged larder. We lived in harmony with the buffalo, returning year after year to places that allowed us to harvest the meat of the buffalo through jumps or pounds. Our

culture and our way of life was shaped by the buffalo's journey.

**Blackfoot territory was defined by the buffalo.**

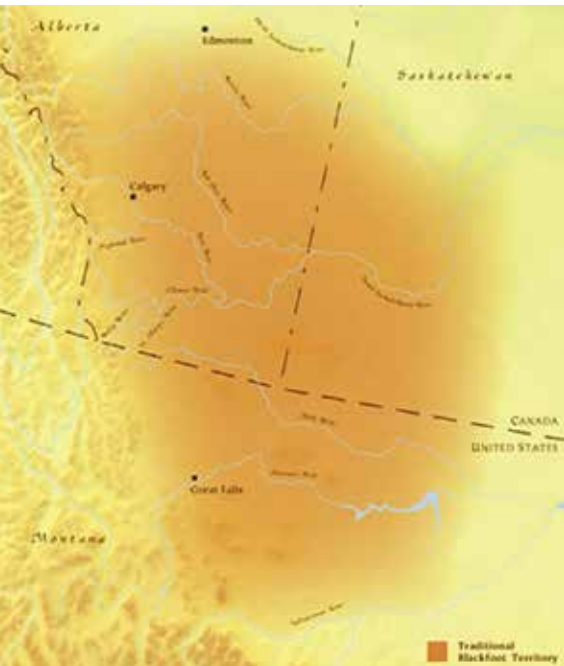
We travelled to the Battle, North Saskatchewan, and Red Deer Rivers in what are now the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. We journeyed to the Yellowstone River in what is now the US state of Montana. Our lands would once have been bigger than many US states today.

To the west, we went as far as the Backbone of the World, to what became known as the Rocky Mountains, which contained many sacred sites, such as Chief Mountain and Crowsnest Mountain (which is actually known in the Blackfoot

language as Raven's Nest Mountain). In the south, our ancestors also created sacred sites in Glacier National Park, such as Badger-Two Medicine. In the east are the Great Sandhills, our traditional burial grounds, as well as the Cypress Hills and Sweet Grass Hills, which were rich in lodgepole pines for our tipis and abundant in berries for our food supply.

We also have many other sacred sites to be found throughout our vast territory.

Based on the trade records, it is generally thought that in the 1700s there were 18,000 Siksika living in the Land of the Buffalo. To keep pace with the herds, we used dogs to pull wooden sleds, called travois.



**MAP:** Blackfoot traditional territory once extended beyond the modern boundaries we know today (*Glenbow Archives, courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing*).



**ABOVE:** The buffalo are still respected and much-loved beasts of the prairies. (*Photographer: Todd Munro*).

On these sleds were everything we needed — our tipis to live in, meat and pemmican stored in parfleche bags, and other camp utensils. These early days were known as the Dog Days, or Iitotasimahpi Imitaiks, because a dog could pull the travois. Later, when the horse was brought to North America, the travois got bigger, and we could move more quickly. We called the horse *elk-dog*, or ponokomita, because it was as large as an elk and as useful as a dog. The Horse Days, or Ao'ta'sao'si Ponokomita, began in the 1700s.

The arrival of the horse changed our way of life forever. Clashes with other tribes (such as Cree, Crow, Shoshone, Nez Perce, Sioux, and Assiniboine) became more frequent because warriors could cover ground much more quickly. Horses became a symbol of wealth and success — leading to many raids for horses.

With horses came rifles, firewater (alcohol), European illnesses, Western religions and settlers. European hunters destroyed the buffalo herds, leaving less and less for the Siksika. The Siksika retreated with the buffalo, our community dwindling due to starvation and disease. Just a few years after the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877, our population was at its lowest point in history. In 2018, the Canadian census reported that there were 7,500 Siksika.



**TOP:** A buffalo replica on display at the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.

**MIDDLE:** These tools are made from buffalo bones and were used to scrape fur and flesh off the hide.

**BOTTOM:** Buffalo hides kept our people very warm during colder seasons.







SIKSIKA NATION LOGO



PIIKANI NATION LOGO



BLACKFEET NATION LOGO



KAINAI NATION LOGO

**CONFEDERACY AND CLANS**

In the 1850s, the Blackfoot Confederacy controlled the northeastern Plains from the North Saskatchewan River in present-day Alberta, extending all the way to the Yellowstone River in Montana. The Blackfoot territory was flanked on the western side by the Rocky Mountains and on the eastern side by the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River.

The tribes or clans of the Blackfoot are the Siksika, Piikani (Peigan), and Kainai (Blood).

**The Kainai:** Many Chiefs, also called the Bloods.

**The Piikani:** including the Amsskaapipiikani in Montana and Apatohsippiikani in southern Alberta, also called the Peigan

**The Siksika:** the Blackfoot, also called northern Blackfoot.

We share a common language and cultural practices with some elements that are specifically unique to Siksika.

*Piikani Nation logo courtesy of Piikani Nation.*

*Blackfeet Nation logo courtesy of Blackfeet Nation in Montana (Amskapi-Piikani).*

*Kainai Nation logo courtesy of Blackfoot Confederacy.*



**A STORYTELLING CULTURE**

**OLD MAN MAKES THE PRAIRIE**

Old Man (Napi) was traveling about south of here making the people. He came from the south, traveling north, making animals and birds as he passed along.

He made the mountains, prairies, timber, and brush first. So he went along traveling northward, making things as he went, putting rivers here and there, and waterfalls on them, putting red paint here and there in the ground — fixing up the world as we see it today.

He made the Milk River and crossed it. Being tired, he went up a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the ground, with arms extended, he marked himself out with stones in the shape of his body, head, legs, arms, and everything. There you can see those rocks today.

From *Blackfoot Lodge Tales, The Story of a Prairie People* by George Bird Grinnell.

Napi was also viewed as a trickster. We have numerous tales about Napi's tricks and generally causing trouble for himself and for others. Napi stories that involve trickery, neglect and death are told to illustrate the weaknesses of man and provide lessons for living a good life.





**PAHSTSI-MISINA: STAR ROCK**

My grandmother took me for a walk across the river one day where the river was shallow. We walked along until we came to a big rock with little holes all over its surface. She said that when she was a little girl her mother took her to this very rock and told her that the rock came from the stars.

Her mother told her that when she was a little girl she witnessed a star that fell from the sky. It had a very long bright burning tail. The people in the camp witnessed this star flying over the camp, and as it went past them they heard a rushing sound and felt a wind. It went beyond them, suddenly hit the ground, and produced a huge bright light. Her mother was very afraid. The next day, her mother went with some others to

investigate where it had hit the ground. Some of the people called it "Pahstsi-misina," which means a sickness or a plague of some kind. It is a name given to comets that fly through the sky when a new sickness afflicts the people. This rock can be found in a depression directly south and across the river from the Muskrat Lake community in west Siksika.

*As told by Clement Bear Chief*

Buffalo Trail, Wolf Trail, Skypeople Trail — the Milky Way has several names in Blackfoot stories, speaking to the origins of species or telling the tales of various legendary figures.





## HEARTBEAT OF THE PEOPLE: RITUAL & TRADITION

### SACRED BUNDLES

Sacred Bundles are at the very heart of what it means to be Siksika. We treat them as individual beings, caring for them like children. We avoid disturbing them, and keep quiet in their presence. When in the tipi, bundles were kept on the west wall. But each day they were taken outside to hang on tripods which were moved to follow the sun.

All bundles are important to the Siksika clans; the beaver, medicine pipe, and Sun Dance bundles are among the most well-known.

Each bundle is derived from a spiritual encounter by a person in a dream or on a vision quest with the Spomi'tapiiks, who give sacred items to be kept within the bundles. Bundles are used in ceremonies to connect with the Spomi'tapiiks or to ask for help from Apisstotoki. Some bundles take the form of headdresses, shirts, shields, knives, and lances. Painted lodges are considered to be medicine bundles, and there are more than 50 of them among the main Siksika clans.

All bundles are important to the Siksika clans; the beaver, medicine pipe, and Sun Dance bundles are among the most well-known.

### WARRIOR SOCIETIES

Siksika tradition remembers when the centre of our existence was the buffalo hunt. Warriors and hunters were celebrated, and held an important place in community life.

The male warrior societies of the Siksika were referred to as Ihkanakaatsiks, meaning "All Comrades." The Ihkanakaatsiks controlled the buffalo hunts and guarded the camp.

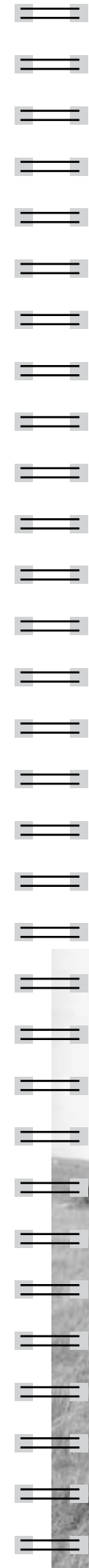
The original societies were known as the Horns, Kit Foxes, Catchers, Brave Dogs, Raven Carriers, Braves, and Prairie Chickens. Warrior societies prepared sweat lodges on the outskirts of camp. Select members of the societies were the keepers of the sacred bundles that mean so much

to our People. Like many aspects of Siksika culture, societies were largely persecuted by European settlers and religious leaders in the twentieth century.

In 1996, with the assistance of the Museum Community and the Province of Alberta, the Siksika retrieved the bundles of the societies from storage. The bundles came home and were ritually transferred to new members, and the Siksika Sun Dance once again brought together societies and families to thank the Creator. The modern Siksika societies are Motokiks (Buffalo Women), Horns, Brave Dogs, Prairie Chickens, Bumble Bees, Thunder Pipe Carriers, and Beaver Men.

Warriors and hunters were celebrated and held an important place in community life.

"Blackfoot Prairie Chicken Society," date unknown, [NA-3735-1], by Unknown. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.





**TOP LEFT:** Sweat lodges in construction. *Credit: Sweat Lodges, Kenneth Kidd, 1935, Canadian Museum of History, 85-9630.*

**TOP RIGHT:** The Motokiiks gathered before a feast begins. *Glenbow Archives, courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing.*

**BOTTOM:** "Horn Society of Blackfoot (Siksika), Calgary, Alberta," ca. 1912, [PA-1889-110], by Unknown. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.



*The Horn Society of Alberta Indians.*



**POW-WOWS**

Pau-wau is a pan-Indigenous term that referred to a religious ceremony, usually one of curing dances. In the 1800s, Europeans observing Indigenous religious gatherings and dances mispronounced the word as "pow-wow." They used the term to describe nearly any gathering of Indigenous people. As Indigenous people learned English, "pow-wow" became a common word. Eventually, pow-wow became interchangeable with the dance celebrations our People held, known as apasskaan.

A modern pow-wow is where Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honour our culture. Pow-wow dance activities are divided into two types, intertribal (social dances) and competition dancing. Pow-wows vary in length from one-day sessions of five to six hours to three days. Major pow-wows or pow-wows called for a special occasion can be up to one-week long. The Siksika Nation holds an annual pow-wow every August, known as the Siksika Nation Fair.

Pau-wau is a pan-Indigenous term that referred to a religious ceremony, usually one of curing dances.

*Grass dancers during the Grand Entry.*







**TOP LEFT:** A young Blackfoot woman wears bells for the contemporary Jingle Dress Dance. (Photographer: Reg Faulkner, Fine Art Photography).

**TOP RIGHT:** Children begin learning to dance at early ages. (Photographer: Reg Faulkner, Fine Art Photography).

Pow-wows are lively celebrations of dance and community.



Respected Elder in Women's Traditional dance regalia. (Photographer: Reg Faulkner, Fine Art Photography).





**SMUDGING**

Smudging is when smoke from sacred plants, such as sage and sweetgrass, are fanned over people, objects or areas, and mixed with prayers. The purpose behind smudging is to cover yourself and others with the smoke, blessing others and carrying prayers to Apisistotoki, also known as Ihtsi-pai-tapi-yopa, which carries the additional meaning of *Source of All Life*. Smudging cleanses us of negativity such as anger or ill will and purifies us, attracting positive energy and goodness.

Individuals smudge themselves with the smoke, washing the eyes,

ears, heart, and body. For example, sweetgrass is used in pipe-smoking mixtures along with red willow and bearberry. Ceremonialists kept sweetgrass in a bag with other medicinal roots and herbs.

Another use was by men who were going to be closest to the buffalo before a hunt. They would carry bundles of sage or rub the plant and its smoke on themselves to hide their human scent so that they could approach the buffalo in secret.

Pipe bowl and apron, moccasins on top.

People wear moccasins and certain ceremonial garments before a smudge begins; the items are removed when a smudge ends.

**PIPE CEREMONIES**

Smoking the pipe is sacred to many ceremonial occasions. Pipe smoking was once considered so essential that every family owned at least one pipe. A good pipe, made by a skilled craftsman or woman, was worth as much as a riding horse. Pipes were decorated with carvings or porcupine quills and were housed within bundles.

**TOP:** A traditional Blackfoot pipe bowl and stem, plus a stone altar containing smudge materials.

**BOTTOM:** Preparing for a medicine pipe ceremony. Shown are: Mrs. Weaselhead, Paul Weaselhead, Chief White Headed and Broad Scalplock.

"Blackfoot Indian medicine pipe ceremony," ca. 1910-1930, [NA-4399-2], by Unknown. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.





**DRUMS AND SONGS**

Drummers and singers make a proper celebration. Singing without drums is extremely rare and considered inappropriate. When called, drummers answer with the right song. Each drum group has a lead singer who starts the songs. Singers need great skill and stamina to maintain the pace and pitch of drumming and singing.

The drum accompaniment to songs is independent to the singing but also functions in perfect unison. Drummers must know a wide variety of songs for competitive and other kinds of dances. While many songs are traditional and have been passed down, there are contemporary and new songs as well. Even the drum beats have different styles according to the song chosen.

Songs are considered to be objects given to individual people in visions or dreams. The traditional view still greatly affects how we view songs and their origin. Some songs belong to everyone; some songs to just one person or society but may be sung by others with permission; and some songs are saved until times of great need or in yearly ceremonies.

Singing is very different from speech. Many songs contain no words, such as traditional wolf (makoyi) songs. Songs with lyrics usually have a ceremonial purpose. Singing was once universal, performed by men and women. Today, it is mostly the men who sing but more women are starting to sing once again.

.....  
 Drum groups and dancers  
 are often invited to perform  
 at public events  
 .....



**TOP:** Siksika youth demonstrating their skills during a pow-wow drum group competition.

**BOTTOM:** Drum designs vary by group, such as the four buffalo painted in traditionally used colours pictured here.

**DANCES AND REGALIA**

**Kitokipaaskaan:  
 The Prairie Chicken Dance**

The Prairie Chicken Dance, or kitokipaaskaan, honours the prairie chicken's springtime mating dance. It takes place early in the morning as the sun is rising. Dressed in a head roach, breech-cloth, round bells and small feather bustle, the dancer mimics the male prairie chicken's distinctive movements. This dance honours a traditional tale.

There was once a young Blackfoot man who went out hunting and soon encountered these prairie birds dancing in the tall grass. Hungry as he was, he shot and killed one of those birds with his bow and arrow, and took the bird home to feed his family.

Later that night, this man had a dream in which the bird's spirit came

to him and asked, "Why did you kill me?" The man replied, "I needed to feed my family." The prairie chicken then told the man that it was going to teach him a dance that must then be taught to all the people in honour and remembrance of a life sacrificed. If the man did not do as instructed, then the bird promised he would return and take the man's life in exchange for the one it had lost.

As a result, the Prairie Chicken Dance is considered sacred for it teaches that all life is important.

The ceremony begins with a prayer known as the Pipe Ceremony. After the ceremony, the dancer sings to the accompaniment of a rattle while others follow. The sponsor of the ceremony

may have had a dream or he may have vowed to hold the dance in exchange for the long life of a sick child

Men who have never taken part before are required to give gifts to Elders who, in turn, give prayers for the dancers. An offering to the spirits is also given and is tied to the poles of the lodge.

The Prairie Chicken Dance is a unique Blackfoot dance that is not found in any other First Nations culture.

.....  
 Dancers line up to compete in the World Prairie Chicken Dance Championships at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.







The Prairie Chicken Dance is considered sacred for it teaches that all life is important.

**Ookaan: Sun Dance**

The ookaan means ‘medicine lodge,’ and involves aako’ka’tssin, which means ‘circle encampment.’ This is the traditional Blackfoot gathering that people today call the ‘Sun Dance,’ even though our particular celebration differs from what is commonly known as a Sun Dance for other nations.

It involves a vow being made for the well-being of a relative who may be gravely ill. A vow is an oral contract between an individual and the Spomi’tapiiks. The ookaan is sacred because of the vows being made to the Creator and can only be described in part to outsiders.

When the Saskatoon berries are ripe in the summer sun, the Siksika gather their tipis in a large circle to

observe the ookaan — one of the great celebrations of the buffalo. The buffalo is the symbol of the ookaan and the proximity of the herds once governed when and where the ceremony would take place. The buffalo tongue is offered to the sun and the skull is revered as the seat of the buffalo’s soul. These ookaan symbols seek reconciliation between Siksika and buffalo, honouring the kinship between man and animal.

Camp is moved for four days in a row. Then the medicine bundle of the ceremony, the ookaan lodge, is created on the fifth day by the Motokiks (Buffalo Women’s Society).

For three or four days, the sun dancers fast and abstain from drinking. Their

hardships enable them to gain access to supernatural assistance, enhancing their personal power here on earth.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, the ookaan lodge and its symbols are abandoned so that it will return to the earth with time.

An outsider’s view of the Sundance Lodge. The sacred ceremonies held within are not for public viewing. (Glenbow Archives courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing).





**Grass Dance**

The Grass Dance probably came to our People from the Assiniboine in the 1890s. Since then, the dance has been a common sight in modern Blackfoot pow-wows. Many stories tell of its origins. In one story, scouts seeking a site flatten tall grass to make a new camp or meeting place. The grass dance is also said to reflect balance in life; each movement on one side is repeated by the other side.

The regalia for the Grass Dance are long strands of yarn, ribbon, or fabric representing grass or the scalps of enemies. A headdress called a roach has two feathers attached so that they rock or twirl as the dancer moves. As in all dances, the dancer must keep pace with the drum, ending with both feet on the ground on the final beat.

**LEFT:** Grass Dancer in action.

**RIGHT:** Even toddlers start learning traditional dances. (Photo courtesy of Trevor Smith).



**Owl Dance**

The Owl Dance was a social occasion. Our People relaxed, sang, and told stories. At the Owl Dance, boys or young men could ask girls to dance or vice versa, under the watchful eye of family, for it was one of the few times in which men and women could dance together and initiate courtship in some cases. Partners stand side by side in a large circle, keeping time to the drum with shuffling steps.

*Owl Dance in progress. (Photo courtesy of Stephen Yellow Old Woman).*





Men's Traditional Dance is one of our oldest.



**Men's Traditional**

Men's Traditional Dance is one of our oldest. When warriors returned to camp, they danced out their stories of battles or stalking the enemy or hunting. Dancers wore highly personalized single bustles made of eagle feathers, feathered roach headdress, beaded moccasins, and war symbols such as breastplate, neck choker, ankle bells or dew claws. Sometimes they carried shields, weapons, dance sticks, staffs or other items that symbolized their warrior status.



**Men's Buckskin**

The Men's Buckskin Dance was one of the original Siksika dances. Only Chiefs, Leaders or respected older men who have received the Headdress through ritual transfer could dance. The drumming is a slow war song in keeping with the stately steps of the older men.

**LEFT:** Men's Traditional dancer. (Photographer: Reg Faulkner, Fine Art Photography).

**RIGHT:** Men's Buckskin regalia and dance.





**Jingle Dress Dance**

While not a traditional Blackfoot dance, the Jingle Dress Dance is popular among women today. Legend has it that the jingle dance came to a young woman in a vision — the chimes made by the movement of the dancer would heal the sick and relieve suffering. Young women wear satin dresses adorned with small bells while dancing with light footwork close to the ground. The dancer snakes around the drum but she must neither cross her feet, dance backward nor make a full circle.

**Siksika Hoop Dance**

Originally, the hoop dance helped warriors to train. Hoops symbolize bushes, grasses and forest obstacles. The dancer creates patterns with the hoops to mimic the buffalo, eagle and snake. Some dancers are able to dance with over 40 hoops at one time.

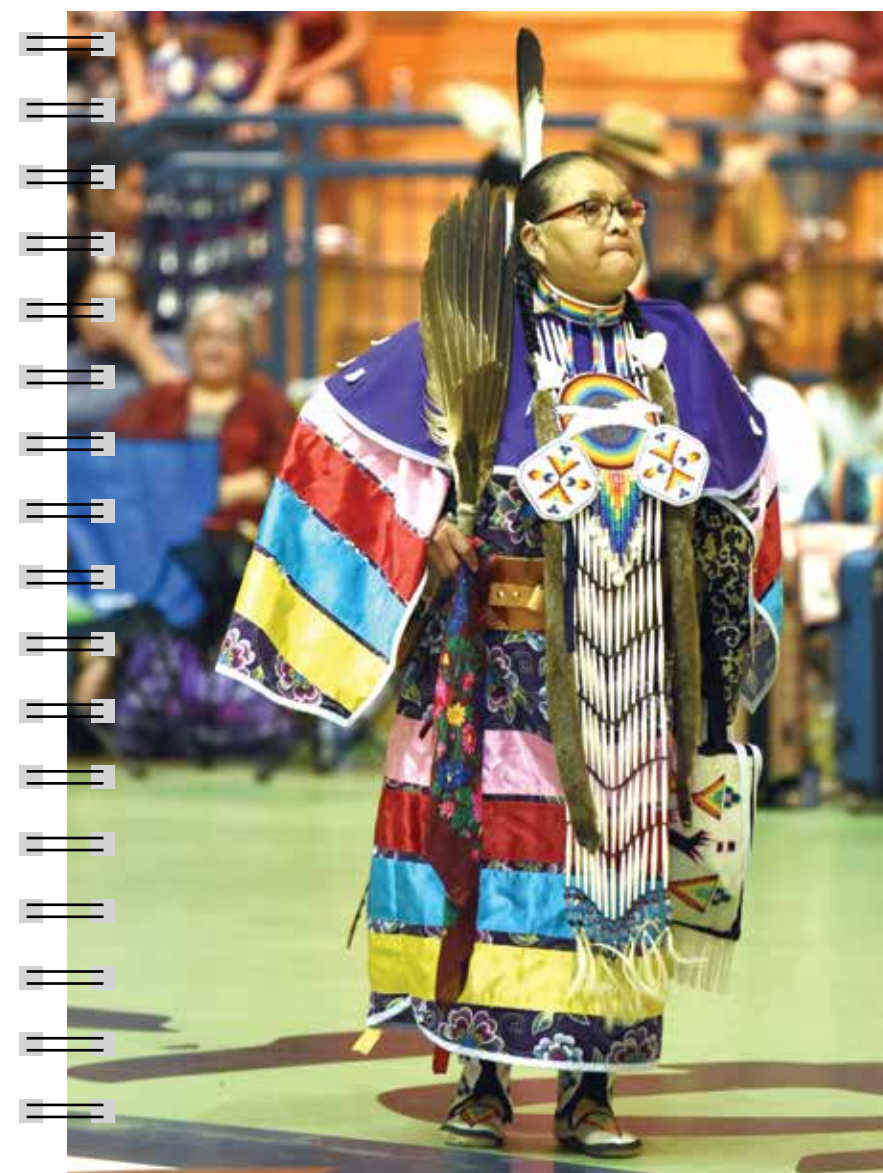
**Siksika Women's Traditional**

Women's Traditional dancers are typically restrained, graceful and elegant, moving gently to the drum beat. Their simple steps come from a time when women were kept outside the dance circle. Women's Traditional regalia include a buckskin or cloth dress, fringed shawl folded over one arm, a purse, an awl and knife case on the belt and an eagle feather fan raised to the drum in honour. Dress, moccasins and accessories are finely beaded.

**THIS PAGE:** Jingle Dress dancer.

**NEXT PAGE: (top)** Young hoop dancer mimics an eagle's wings in flight.

**(bottom)** Women's Traditional dancers in regalia. (Photographer bottom left: Reg Faulkner, Fine Art Photography).







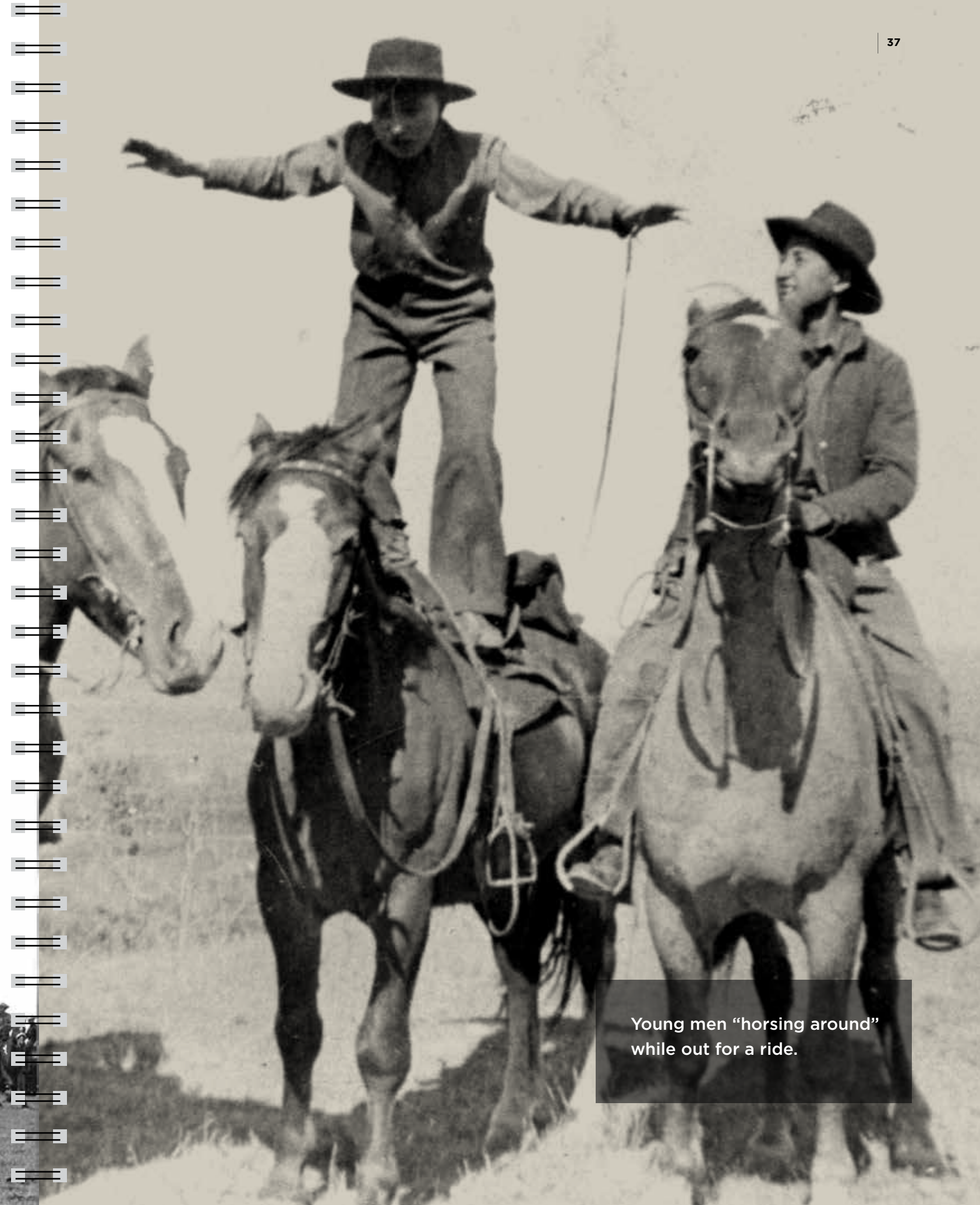
## RODEO: CELEBRATION OF HORSEMANSHIP

The coming of the horse had a profound impact on the culture of the Siksika. Today we celebrate our partnership with the horse in many ways.

### SIKSIKA NATION RODEO

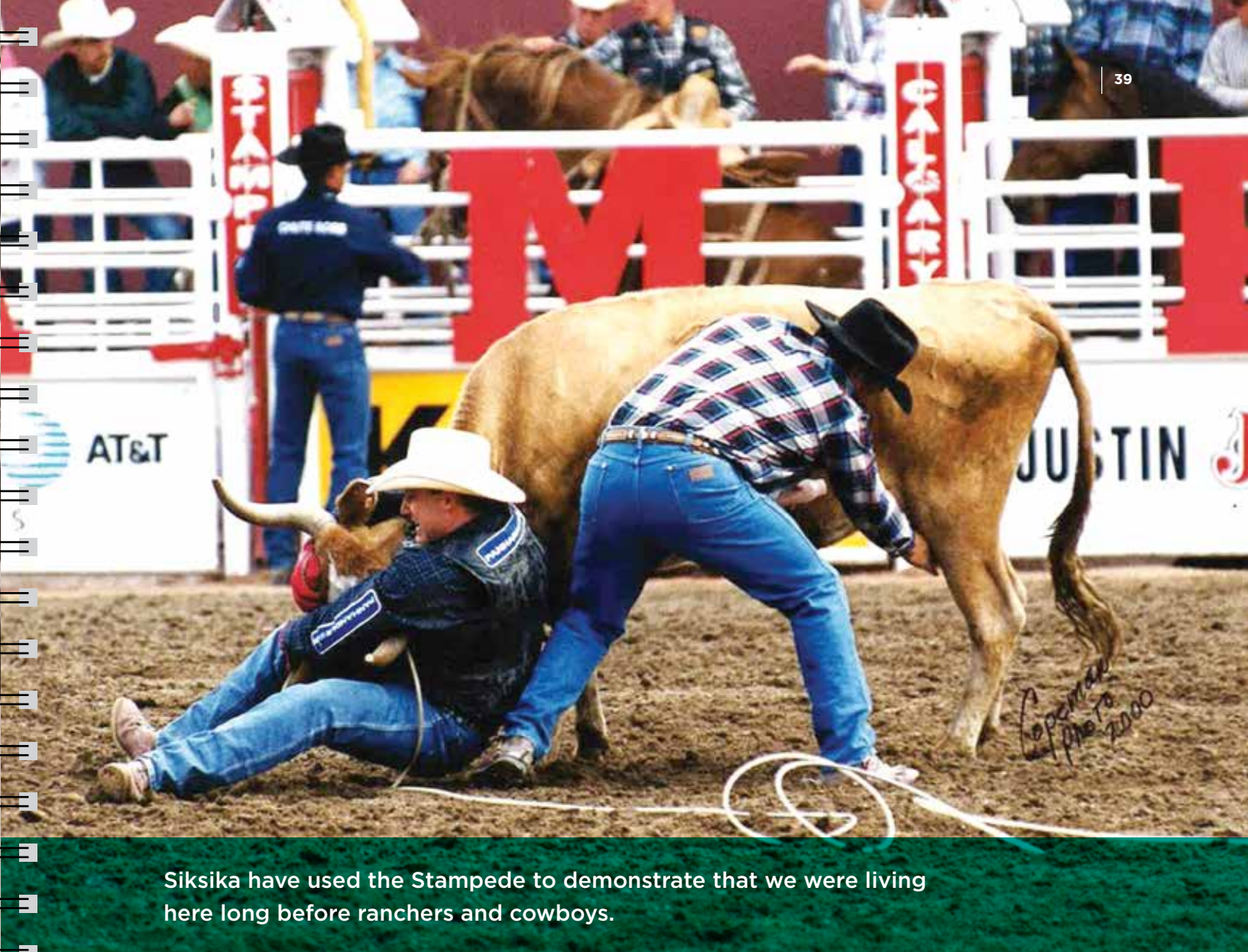
While it would be many years before the Siksika Nation Rodeo became a regular event, our People were handling horses and engaging in competitions with one another in the early 1900s. Today a rodeo is a part of the annual Siksika Nation Fair held every August.

Siksika cowboy, John Solway, participating in the Saddle Bronc-Riding event at the Blackfoot Stampede (later renamed to Siksika Rodeo) in the 1930s. (Photo courtesy of Munro Family).



Young men "horsing around" while out for a ride.





Siksika have used the Stampede to demonstrate that we were living here long before ranchers and cowboys.

**CALGARY STAMPEDE, STRATHMORE AND BANFF HERITAGE DAYS**

In 1912 over 1,800 First Nations people came to the first Calgary Stampede where they took part in a parade. Even though the organizers were not interested in promoting Indigenous culture, Siksika have used the Stampede to demonstrate that we were living here long before ranchers and cowboys. Siksika members also participated in the rodeo itself.

Strathmore Heritage Days is one of the largest rodeos in Canada with

\$175,000 in prize money on offer to cowboys and cowgirls. Siksika riders are among the 400 contestants who participate in events including saddle bronc, bareback, bull riding, calf roping, steer wrestling, ladies' barrel racing, wild cow milking, and wild horse racing.

In recent years, an event known as the Indian Relay Race, which originated among Plains Nations in the south, has been a growing sport with Siksika

riders participating in races held at the Calgary Stampede and the Strathmore Heritage Days.

The Siksika and other Treaty No. 7 First Nations believe that the mountains near Banff are sacred. For generations, we held ceremonies, collected medicinal herbs and met other First Nations people for sporting and cultural activities. In 1889 a rockslide blocked the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) near Banff. The CPR

manager asked First Nations people if they could provide some entertainment for his stranded guests. The events were so popular that they developed into a regular annual feature, and were known as Banff Indian Days. These continued until 1978.

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Siksika families participating in the Calgary Stampede parade is a grand tradition to this day.

"Blackfoot in Calgary Stampede parade, Calgary, Alberta," ca 1930, [PA-1036-124], by McDermid Photo Laboratories, Calgary, Alberta. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

**THIS PAGE:** Todd Munro, a Siksika Wild Cow Milking Champion of Alberta and Canada, competes at the Calgary Stampede. (Photographer: Mike Copeman Photography).



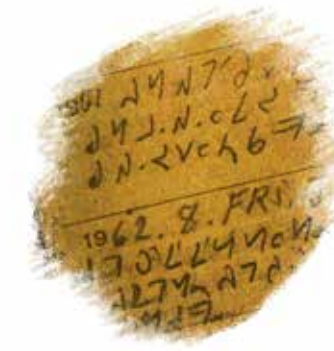


**TOP:** Eight cowboys from the Blackfoot, Stoney Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations traveled to Australia for the Royal Easter Show. Joe Crowfoot (6th from left) and Joe Bear Robe (7th from left) represented Siksika.

"Group of young First Nations people leaving for Australia," 1939, [NA-480-10], by Unknown. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

**MIDDLE:** Team Pretty Young Man, representing the Siksika Nation in the Indian Relay Races. (Photographer: Louise Doore).

**BOTTOM:** Siksika's only Indian Relay Race team, Pretty Young Man Team. (Photographer: Louise Doore).



## SPEAKING SIKSIKA

TALKING TO OUR ANCESTORS EVERY DAY

The Blackfoot language has four dialects, three of which are spoken in Alberta. We speak one of those dialects, called Siksika.

Key to an understanding of Siksika is that it has been in continuous use as an oral language for thousands of years. We are still speaking the language of our ancestors, even though some words have changed and new ones have been introduced. The language is constantly evolving to adapt to the new centuries. It was only in the last hundred years that Europeans wrote down our language in 'syllabics' and translated it into English.

Below is the "Siksika English Alphabet" with a glottal stop (*Blackfoot Grammar* by Donald G. Frantz). These are the consonants and vowels common in English spellings of Blackfoot.

A	H	I	K	M
N	O	P	S	T
W	Y	?		

It was only in the last hundred years that Europeans wrote down our language in 'syllabics' and translated it into English.



## GREETINGS

English	Blackfoot
Good Morning	<i>ah siks ka no to ni</i>
Happy Morning	<i>ii ta miks ka no to ni</i>
Nice day	<i>ii ta mi ksi tsi ko</i>
It's raining	<i>a so ta</i>
It's snowing	<i>oo poo ta</i>
It's windy	<i>aa so poo</i>

## ANIMALS

English	Blackfoot
Antelope	<i>a wa ka si</i>
Badger	<i>mi sins ki</i>
Bear	<i>ki ya yo</i>
Buffalo	<i>ii ni</i>
Bull	<i>a sa yoh ko mi</i>
Butterfly	<i>a pa ni</i>
Calf	<i>oo nis tah si</i>
Cow	<i>a poots kin a</i>
Gopher	<i>oo mah ko ka ta</i>
Horse	<i>po noo ko mi ta</i>
Lynx	<i>na ta yo</i>
Monkey	<i>ii ma pi tsi</i>
Owl	<i>sii pis to</i>
Prairie Chicken	<i>ki to ki</i>
Rabbit	<i>aa tsis ta</i>
Skunk	<i>a pi ka yi</i>
Squirrel	<i>mi kais si</i>
Wolf	<i>ma ko yi</i>

## PLANTS/ BERRIES/ FRUIT/ VEGETABLES

English	Blackfoot
Apple	<i>a pas ta mi nom</i>
Banana	<i>ii non</i>
Bitterroot	<i>ma miu ka ki kin</i>
Bearberry	<i>Kinnikinik</i>
Buffaloberry	<i>ap si</i>
Bull Berry	<i>mi ksi ni tsi</i>
Chokecherry	<i>pah ki pi</i>
Corn	<i>oh pi ki na tsi</i>
Mint	<i>ka ki tsi moo</i>
Orange	<i>otah koi naam</i>
Onion	<i>pi sa tsi ni kim</i>
Peach	<i>immo ya pas tam</i>
Pear	<i>omh ki no toh toon</i>
Pineapple	<i>is tsi maams ka po</i>
Potato	<i>ma ta ki</i>
Sage	<i>ka ksi mi</i>
Saskatoon Berry	<i>oko no ki</i>
Sweetgrass	<i>Sipaattsimaan</i>
Tomato	<i>kin ii</i>
Whiteberry	<i>apii ni kim</i>
Wild Turnip	<i>maas</i>

## COLOURS

English	Blackfoot
Red	<i>amoh ksi na tsi</i>
Orange	<i>otah koi na tsi</i>
Yellow	<i>ootah koi na tsi</i>
Green	<i>sas ksi mo koi na tsi</i>
Blue	<i>oots koi na tsi</i>
White	<i>ksi ksi na tsi</i>
Black	<i>si ksi na tsi</i>
Pink	<i>ii in a tsi</i>
Brown	<i>a po in a tsi</i>

## NUMBERS

English	Blackfoot
One	<i>ni tooks ka</i>
Two	<i>na too ka</i>
Three	<i>nio ooks ka</i>
Four	<i>ni soo woo</i>
Five	<i>ni si to</i>
Six	<i>noyi</i>
Seven	<i>iih ki tsi ka</i>
Eight	<i>na ni so</i>
Nine	<i>phik so</i>
Ten	<i>ki poo</i>
Eleven	<i>ni tsi op o to</i>
Twelve	<i>na tsi op o to</i>
Thirteen	<i>ni op o to</i>
Fourteen	<i>ni si op o to</i>
Fifteen	<i>ni si tsi op o to</i>
Sixteen	<i>nai op o to</i>
Seventeen	<i>ih ki tsi ki op o to</i>
Eighteen	<i>na ni si op o to</i>
Nineteen	<i>pihk si op o to</i>
Twenty	<i>na tsi op o to</i>
Thirty	<i>ni ii po</i>
Forty	<i>ni sip poe</i>
Fifty	<i>ni si tsi po</i>
Sixty	<i>na aa po</i>
Seventy	<i>ih ki tsi kip o</i>
Eighty	<i>na ni si po</i>
Ninety	<i>pihk si po</i>
Hundred	<i>ki pip po</i>

## DAYS OF THE WEEK

English	Blackfoot
Sunday	<i>na to yiks tsi ko</i>
Monday	<i>is si ka to yiks tsi ko</i>
Tuesday	<i>oomh tsis to ki si ka to yiks tsi ko</i>
Wednesday	<i>oomh tiusks ka si ka to yiks tsi ko</i>
Thursday	<i>ii ka tas tsi no pi</i>
Friday	<i>ta tsi kis tsi no pi</i>
Saturday	<i>ii na ka to yiks tsi ko</i>

## MONTHS

English	Blackfoot
January	<i>maans to yi</i>
February	<i>pi ta ki soom</i>
March	<i>sa aa ki sooms</i>
April	<i>ma tsi yi ka pi si ki soom</i>
May	<i>ii tain si mo pi</i>
June	<i>ii ta wa ko ka tsu p</i>
July	<i>Soo-tai-kisom</i>
August	<i>ii ta poh kya kiu pi</i>
September	<i>mo ka to si</i>
October	<i>ii ta mi ksi tsi ko</i>
November	<i>iis ta to si</i>
December	<i>Nis-tai-kisom</i>



## SEASONS

English	Blackfoot
Fall	<i>oo ko wa</i>
Winter	<i>is to yi wa</i>
Spring	<i>mo to wa</i>
Summer	<i>nip o wa</i>

## SEASONS PAST

English	Blackfoot
Fall	<i>moo ko yi</i>
Winter	<i>a kaats to yi</i>
Spring	<i>moo to yi</i>
Summer	<i>akat tsi po yi</i>

## SEASONS FUTURE

English	Blackfoot
Fall	<i>moo ko si</i>
Winter	<i>is to yi si</i>
Spring	<i>moo to si</i>
Summer	<i>ni poo s</i>

## HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

English	Blackfoot
Bed	<i>aak si ni</i>
Blanket	<i>aa si kaane</i>
Broom	<i>a mah ki ma tsis</i>
Camera	<i>i ih ta sin a kiup</i>
Can Opener	<i>i ih ta ka yin a kiup</i>
Car	<i>aa kis to ma to mah ka</i>
Chair	<i>a soo pa tsis</i>
Clock	<i>ih ta ksis tsi ko miup</i>
Lamp	<i>aana ki ma tsis</i>

## BODY PARTS

English	Blackfoot
Back	<i>mo ka kini</i>
Ear	<i>moh to kis</i>
Elbow	<i>moh kins tsis</i>
Eye	<i>mo waaps pa</i>
Face	<i>moos to ksis</i>
Fingers & toes	<i>moo kit tsiks</i>
Foot	<i>moh kat</i>
Hand	<i>moo tsis</i>
Head	<i>moo to kaan</i>
Heart	<i>moos ki tsi pah pi</i>
Knee	<i>moot to ksis</i>
Liver	<i>kin na kin</i>
Mouth	<i>moo yi</i>
Navel	<i>moo to yiis</i>
Nose	<i>mooh ksi sis</i>
Throat	<i>mooh ksis toon</i>

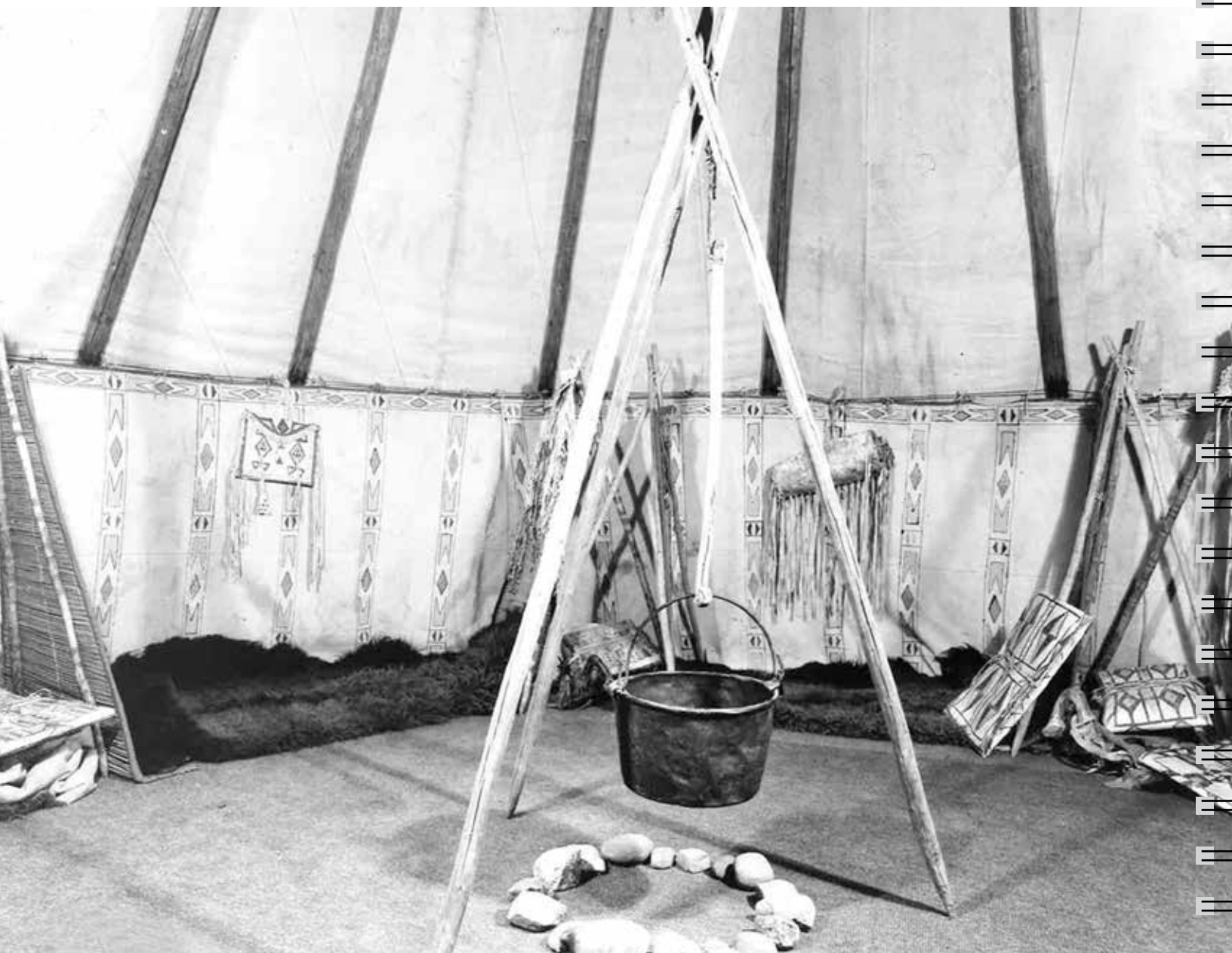
English	Blackfoot
Pillow	<i>a sooh kis ka tsis</i>
Radio	<i>ih to tsi mo pa</i>
Rug	<i>a soom maan</i>
Soap	<i>is sis kiu sat sis</i>
Sofa	<i>omah ksi soo pa tsis</i>
Stove	<i>poo sat sis</i>
Table	<i>ii ta soo yu pi</i>
Tea Pot	<i>ksi so yi</i>
Towel	<i>ih ta sis kiu soo pa</i>

## PHRASES

English	Blackfoot
Close the door	<i>Okiitnikitsimi</i>
Come here	<i>Pohsapota</i>
Come in	<i>Pi' taé</i>
Cutting meat	<i>Ayiitsitsimawa</i>
Do not be noisy	<i>Pinaatsistsikinita</i>
Do not fool around	<i>Pinaattaatsiskasita</i>
Do not speak	<i>Pinata tsipoyita</i>
Don't do that	<i>Pinata ta nistsita</i>
Drying	<i>Ahksimawa</i>
Get up	<i>Nipooata</i>
Give it to that person	<i>Kotsisiya ana</i>
Give that to me	<i>Kokit ani</i>
Go sit down	<i>Matopi'ta</i>
Here is my mother	<i>Aamok niksista</i>
Hurry up	<i>Nitakiita</i>
I'll see you again	<i>Kitakitamatsino</i>
Is that right?	<i>Haaniya</i>
Is this your house?	<i>Kokowa</i>
It is good	<i>Iksokapi</i>
It's hot	<i>Iksiksistoyiwa</i>
It's not cold anymore	<i>Matatsstoyiwa</i>
Listen carefully	<i>Sopoyaapistsiyiita</i>
Listen to me	<i>Istsiwakakkit</i>
Move	<i>Nowaaki</i>

English	Blackfoot
Open the door	<i>Kayinnit ani kitsim</i>
Say that again	<i>Matsistsaniit</i>
Sit down	<i>Apiita</i>
Sit right here	<i>Amo stopiita</i>
Tell me	<i>Anikiit</i>
That person is boiling meat	<i>Annihtawa</i>
The sun is hot	<i>Natosi ikkiiksistosim</i>
They are chokecherries	<i>Pakiipiya</i>
They are swimming	<i>Aotsimiya</i>
This is a book	<i>Aamoasinakiatsis</i>
This is a crayon	<i>Aamoihtaomianistsinakiopa</i>
This is a pencil	<i>Aamoihtaisinakiop</i>
This is my house	<i>Aamok nokowiyi</i>
This is my mother	<i>Aamokniksista</i>
What?	<i>Ha'</i>
What are these?	<i>Tsanistapiaamostsi</i>
What are they doing?	<i>Aikiwaikksa</i>
What did you say?	<i>Tsakitawanihpa</i>
What is that person saying?	<i>Tsaawaniwa</i>
What is this?	<i>Tsaannistapiamo</i>
What is that person doing?	<i>Aikiwatsiiks</i>
Who is this woman?	<i>Takaatsisaamoakkiwa</i>
Who is this?	<i>Taka amo</i>
Who's house is this?	<i>Aamonapioyisitakaaokowa</i>
Write something	<i>Sinakiita</i>





## SYMBOLS OF THE SIKSIKA

As well as an oral language, we have a highly developed symbology that is rooted in myth and legend. These symbols are most noticeable on painted tipis.

### NIITTOY-YISS: THE BLACKFOOT TIPI

Women made the tipis, caring for them and maintaining them. Men were busy with hunting but they would assist with tipi preparations as needed. Otherwise the tipi was solely the women's invention and responsibility. Blackfoot tipis consist of four poles and are among the most elegant and highly decorated among the First

Nations. The right to paint a design is a privilege and is transferred from one person to another in a formal, public ritual. There are also those who choose not to paint their tipi.

Tipis designs are meaningful because a tipi is a Sacred Bundle. Our People believed that Spomi'tapiiks gave these images to us in dreams so that harmony and long life would come to those inside. The symbols we must paint on each tipi are given to us by Papai-tapiiksi, the Dream Beings. The designs connect us with the Spomi'tapiiks in the world around us.

**PREVIOUS PAGE: (top)** A tipi camp in the old days. *(Glenbow Archives, courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing).*

**(bottom)** General layout inside a tipi. *(Glenbow Archives, courtesy of Blackfoot Crossing).*



Modern tipis pitched in the valley below Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.



The tipi is painted in sections. The bottom of the tipi cover is referred to as the bottom skirt. Bottom skirt designs symbolize the earth's surface and Ksahkomitapi as the source of all life. The Blackfoot tipi has a broad, dark band of colour painted around the base. On this band is painted a series of circles or stars. The painted tops of tipis represented the upper limits of the physical world, symbolizing Spomi'tapiiks.

All human events were contained between these two boundaries; Ksahkomitapi below and Spomi'tapiiks above. Humans, animals and birds were depicted around the sides or middle of the tipi between these upper and lower boundaries.

The entrance to the tipi faced east with the place of honour in the rear. Ceremonial objects were also kept in the rear along with the bedding, backrests, rawhide containers and utensils such as wooden dishes, horn spoons, weapons, and implements.

When the tribe moved camp, the tipi was dismantled and carried on a horse using a travois sled. Before the introduction of the horse, the tipi was smaller with lighter poles so that it could be pulled by a dog. Tipis were always pitched with the door facing east to allow morning prayers to travel toward the rising sun.

**BOTTOM:** Siksika tipi, featuring a deer and snake design with the foothills and stars represented at the bottom. (Photographer: Wade Healy).



**TOP: (left)** Raising a tipi is a group effort.

**(right)** A modern day tipi with the Siksika Nation logo painted on it.

**BOTTOM:** "Sun Dance Camp, Blackfoot reserve, Alberta," 1920s, [NA-336-7] by Unknown. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.







## FLAVOURS OF THE PLAINS

For centuries the Siksika hunted the buffalo without endangering the ecosystem. The buffalo supplied the community with almost all of our needs, supplemented by deer and elk. Siksika people depended on the ‘four-legs’ for food. We ignored fish and snakes, for example, which don’t feature in our traditional cuisine. Unlike other First Nations, we regarded many other animals as sacred and would not eat them.

### BUFFALO MEAT PREPARATION

A male buffalo provides about 700 kilograms of meat. No part of the buffalo goes to waste. Fresh meat is either roasted on a stick over a fire or boiled in a pit. By stuffing meat and herbs into the buffalo gut we make sausage. Meat that can't be eaten right away is hung over an open fire or on a rack out in the sun to dry out, creating buffalo jerky or kyii.

### BOILING PIT

First, we gather over a hundred fist-sized stones and place them within a fire pit. A fire is then built over those stones. Meanwhile, a hole is scooped out of the earth and lined with rawhide, and then filled with water. When the stones are red hot they are either dropped or held in the water, raising the temperature to boiling point to cook the meat. Once the water boils, meat is added with dried vegetables in a skin bag to make a rich soup.

For the Siksika the buffalo is the staff of life. Even today we celebrate the bounty of the plains in our traditional foods.

**NEXT PAGE:** (top) Drying meat over a fire in the Chief Crowfoot Tipi Village at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park. (bottom) A modern boiling pit.





**MOOKAAKIN: PEMMICAN**

In the past, pemmican was prepared from the lean meat of large game such as buffalo, elk or deer. Meat was cut into thin slices to be dried over a slow fire or in hot sun until brittle. Then it was pounded with stones into granules until it became a powder. The pounded meat was mixed with melted fat at a ratio of approximately 50/50. In some cases, dried fruits such as Saskatoon berries, cranberries, blueberries or chokecherries were pounded into powder and then added to the pemmican mixture. The paste was then packed into “green” rawhide pouches, known as parfleche, for storage.



sage



saskatoon berry

**BANNOCK**

Bannock was adopted in our cuisine in the 18th and 19th centuries, most likely from fur traders. It was easy to make on the trail and complemented high protein trail foods like pemmican. As a result, it is a staple dish for many First Nations. Our bannock is generally prepared with white or whole wheat flour, baking powder and water which are combined and kneaded (possibly with spices, dried fruits or other flavouring agents added) then fried in fat, vegetable oil or shortening.



wild turnip



sweetgrass

**KA'KSIMI: SAGE**

Used for ceremonial cleansing. Sage is used in medicinal brews. Some brews can only be made and given by those who have sacred authority.



bearberry

**PA'KIP: CHOKECHERRY**

Crushed, dried and made into little cakes or mixed with dried meat and fat to make pemmican. Also used for medicine. Branches are used for tools and backrests.

**OOKONOOKI: SASKATOON BERRY**

Berry soup is served at ceremonies and for special occasions. Saskatoons are enjoyed fresh or dried and were mixed with meat and fat to make pemmican.

**MA'AS: WILD TURNIP**

Eaten raw but traditionally cooked in boiling pits lined with grass and rocks. It is very important in oral traditions and for the Societies and their ceremonies.

**SIPAATTSIMAAN: SWEETGRASS**

Used for cleansing and for ceremonies, with prayers and offerings. It can also be used for medicine. Sweetgrass is often used in our crafts.

**KINNIKINIK: BEARBERRY**

The leaves are dried, mixed with twist tobacco and smoked in pipes at sacred ceremonies. The berries and leaves may also have been used for medicinal purposes.



A woman prepares  
a meal for her family.

*(Glenbow Archives, courtesy  
of Blackfoot Crossing).*





Winter Counts commemorate important events in Blackfoot history, such as this bear attack, which was significant enough for depiction.



## THE JOURNEY OF THE SIKSIKA

In our tradition, Siksika history is recorded on Winter Counts. These are hide tapestries painted with significant events such as battles and treaties from previous years. The Siksika have a history that stretches beyond what can be painted on any number of Winter Counts.

### 3,500 years BCE

There is archaeological evidence of human habitation on the Great Plains for thousands of years. At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, bone fragments suggest that hunters have been active here since 3,500 BCE. It is not yet known when the ancestors of the Siksika first came to these lands but it probably coincides with the evolution of migrating buffalo. The Siksika believe that our People have always been here and that our ancestors were always Blackfoot, not a separate group of people.

### 500-600 BCE

The Blackfoot begin to use the bow and arrow for hunting alongside buffalo jumps and pounds, which will continue to be in use for many centuries.

### Pre-1700

#### Iitotasimahpi Imitaiks - Dog Days

Before the arrival of the horse, Siksika use dogs to haul travois. Tipis are smaller and lighter.

Tribal government is well established, with a non-hierarchical, consensual leadership group deriving its authority from sacred practice and clan ties. There are as many as 36 Siksika clans living in unison.

### 1755

Great Britain creates the Department of Indian Affairs.

### 1763

Royal Proclamation recognizes Aboriginal land rights.

At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, bone fragments suggest that hunters have been active here since 3,500 BCE.



**Late 1700s — early 1800s**

**Ao'ta'sao'si Ponokomita - Horse Days**  
The arrival of the horse in North America brings many changes. Travois become larger and carry heavier canvas tips. With horses come conflict between tribes. Soon settlers appear, followed by waves of European illnesses such as smallpox.

**1830**

The first Anglican and Catholic missionaries arrive uninvited. They begin to forcibly convert Siksika with help from the authorities and white settlers. Traditional beliefs are vilified. Sacred artefacts are vandalized or destroyed. Sacred practices are banned.

Indian Affairs become a responsibility of the government in Ottawa.

**1874**

Whiskey posts are built on Siksika land by Americans, one of them being Lafayette French Whiskey Post, which was established on the south side of the Blackfoot Crossing.

**1876**

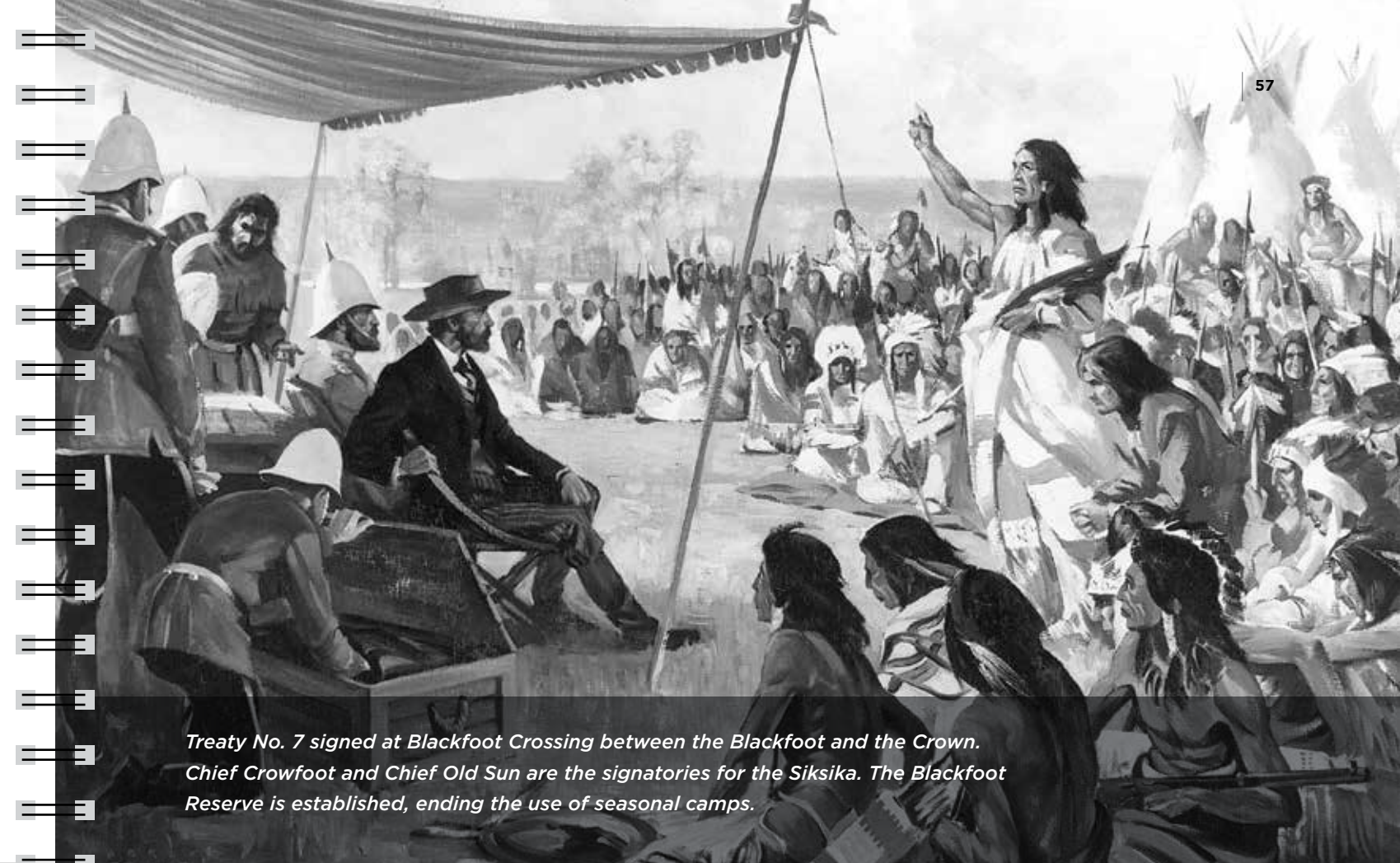
The Indian Act comes into force in Canada. The terms of the Act are modified over time, becoming increasingly vindictive and coercive.

**THIS PAGE:** "Blackfoot Peoples hunting buffalo Sweetgrass Hills area, Montana," 1853, [NA-1274-14], by Stanley, John Mix. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

**NEXT PAGE (top):** "The Blackfoot Treaty (Treaty 7), 1877, Crowfoot speaking," 1877, [NA-40-1] by Stapleton, A. Bruce. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.*

**(bottom):** Leaders of the Blackfoot included Crowfoot, Sitting on an Eagle Tail Feathers, Red Crow, and Three Bulls.

"Group of chiefs of the Blackfoot Confederacy," 1885, [NA-4452-2], by Hall and Lowe, Winnipeg, Manitoba. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.



*Treaty No. 7 signed at Blackfoot Crossing between the Blackfoot and the Crown. Chief Crowfoot and Chief Old Sun are the signatories for the Siksika. The Blackfoot Reserve is established, ending the use of seasonal camps.*

The Blackfoot followed and hunted the buffalo all around their vast territory.







**1883**  
*Canadian Pacific Railway line built across Siksika land.*

“Canadian Pacific Railway train going through Gleichen, Alberta,” 1907, [NA-686-1] by Unknown. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.

**1883**  
The Starvation Winter devastates the Blackfoot Confederacy with almost no buffalo left and no supplies from the government.

**Late 1880s**  
It is estimated that less than 100 wild buffalo survive on the great plains from a highpoint of around 30 million.

**1890**  
Chief Crowfoot dies.

**1894**  
Siksika try to make ends meet by gardening and rearing cattle.

**BELOW:** Siksika has a rich agricultural history.



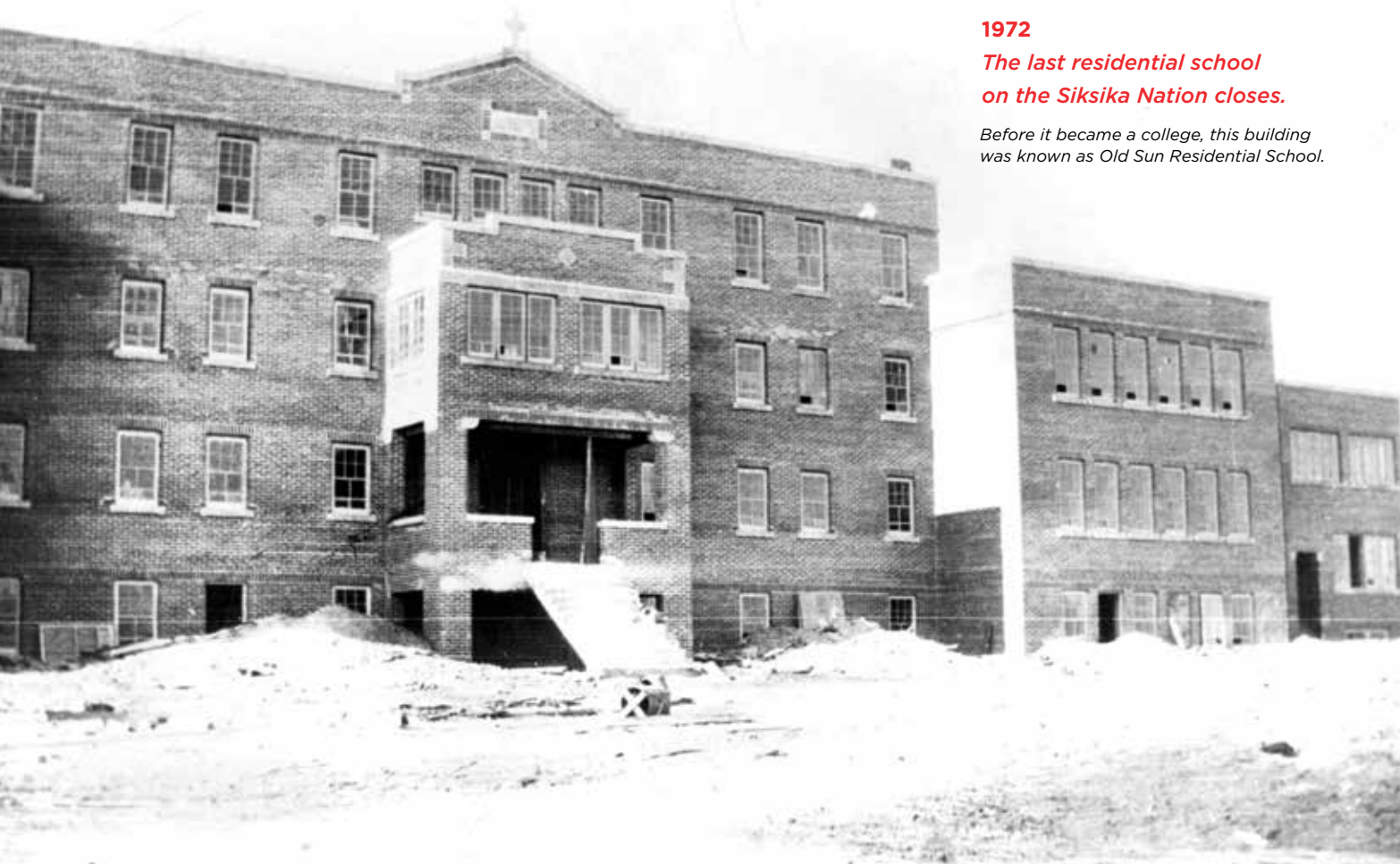
**The buffalo massacres of the late 1800s dealt a great blow to a centuries-old way of life.**  
*“Bone yard, Michigan Carbon Works, Detroit, Michigan,” 1892, [NA-2242-2] by Klima, J., Detroit, Michigan. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.*



"Gandier family with children at Old Sun Residential School, Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, Gleichen area, Alberta," 1914, [PA-3819-1], by Unknown. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.



Siksika children were taken from their families at an early age into residential schools, where assimilation was meant to remove children from cultural roots.



**1972**  
*The last residential school on the Siksika Nation closes.*

*Before it became a college, this building was known as Old Sun Residential School.*

←..... **1897-1900s**

Residential schools built by Anglican and Roman Catholic priests persist for the majority of the twentieth century throughout Canada. The Siksika reserve is divided between the two churches. Children are forced into the religion of their school. There is no choice but to comply. Traditional beliefs are vilified. Sacred artefacts are vandalized or destroyed. Sacred practices are banned.

The Indian Agent controls the reserve applying the strict laws of the 1877 Treaty and the Indian Act.

**1951**

Imposition of Indian Act Chief by Indian Superintendent.

**1960**

Castle Mountain Land Claim brought to Ottawa.

**1971**

The vacant Old Sun Residential School becomes the new Old Sun Community College, providing higher education for Siksika residents.

←..... **1972**

**1977** .....→

**1980-87**

Siksika begin process of self-government, land claims and revitalization.

**1994**

Treaty-based self-government.

**2000-01**

Blackfoot Confederacy reunites.

**2002**

Siksika commemorates the 125th anniversary of the signing of Treaty 7.



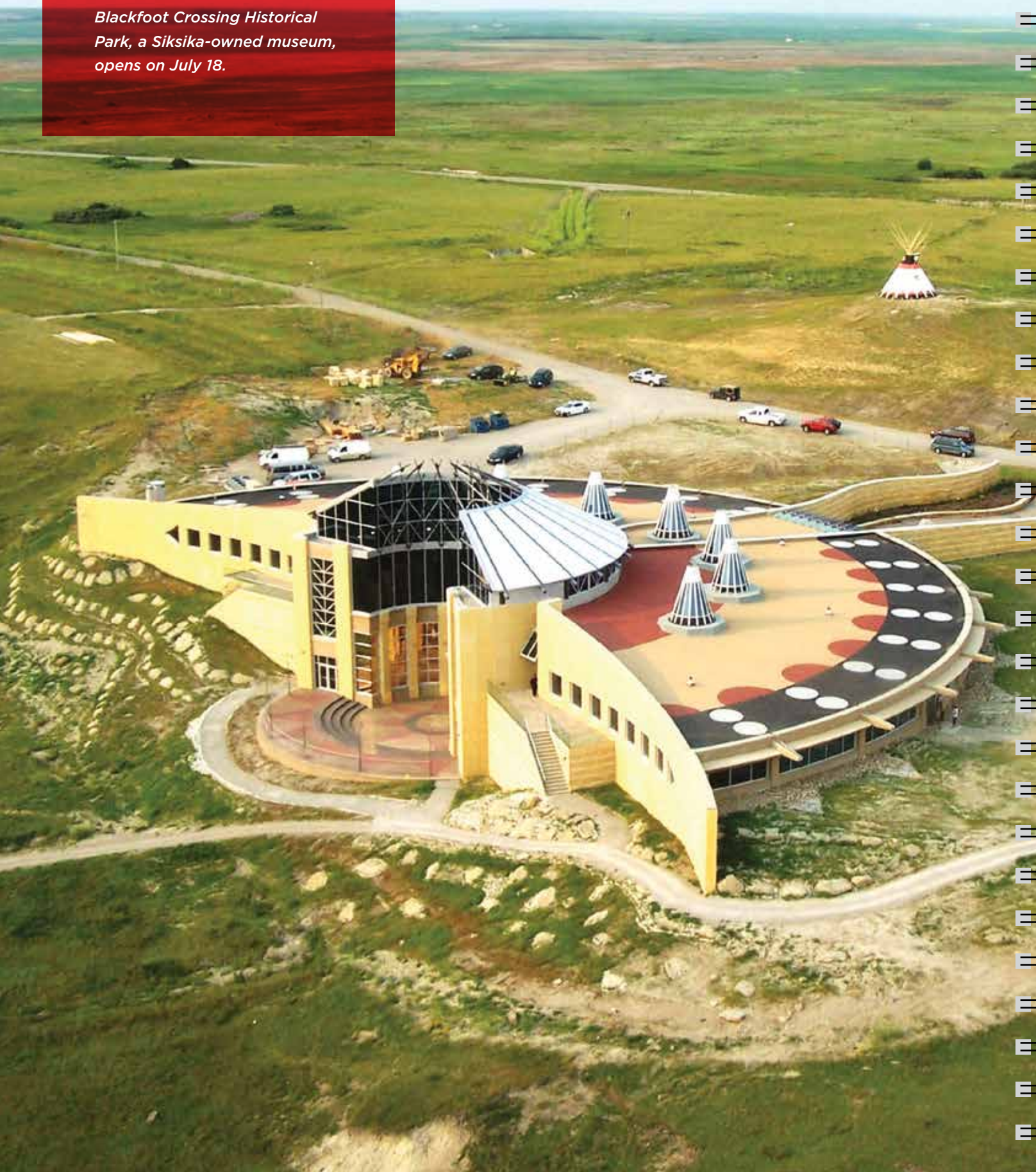
1977

**1977**  
*Siksika commemorates the 100th Anniversary of the signing of Treaty 7 with a visit from Charles, Prince of Wales. This commemorative event inspired Siksika Elders toward a vision of the future Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.*

..... **ABOVE:** Monument on the site where the Treaty 7 Signing took place.



2007  
Blackfoot Crossing Historical  
Park, a Siksika-owned museum,  
opens on July 18.



**TOP (left):** Opening day ribbon cutting ceremony. (L - R) Alma Pretty Young Man, Adrian Stimson, Miss Siksika Royalty, and Vincent Yellow Old Woman.  
**(right):** Dwayne Red Old Man in regalia, teaching a group of students.  
**BOTTOM:** Lower gallery of the museum.

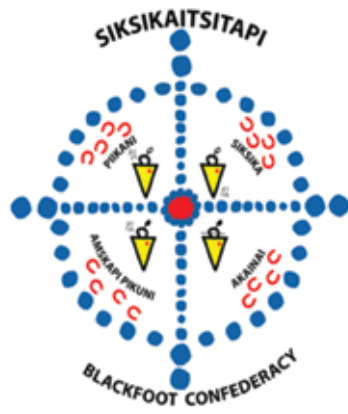


**2010**

Siksika settles century-long land dispute over construction of the Bassano Dam, and receives new water rights.

**2016**

Blackfoot Confederacy is officially incorporated as an entity separate from Treaty 7.



**2017**

Blackfoot Confederacy signs Protocol Agreement for Discussion on Matters of Mutual Concern with the Government of Alberta. This agreement allows the Blackfoot Confederacy to have an equal partnership with the Government of Alberta on education, environment and land claims, health, economic development and employment, and other political and legal matters.

**TOP:** Blackfoot Confederacy logo.

**BOTTOM:** Rich in lodgepole pine trees, the Siksika routinely visit Castle Mountain to gather and construct tipi poles. (Photo courtesy of Robert Crow Chief).



**TOP:** Siksika Elections 2019. Ouray Crowfoot, current Chief of Siksika Nation, addresses the community.

**BOTTOM:** 2019 Protocol Agreement, renewal at BChP.

Pictured (L-R): Jason Kenney (18th Premier of Alberta), Joseph Weasel Child (former Chief of Siksika Nation), Roy Fox (Chief of Kainai Nation), Stanley Grief (Chief of Piikani Nation), and Rick Wilson (Minister of Indigenous Relations).



**2016**

Castle Mountain Claim settled with Siksika passing on rights to the Crown, but the area is still designated for Siksika use, such as constructing tipi poles and conducting other cultural excursions.

**2019**

Blackfoot Confederacy renews Protocol Agreement with the Government of Alberta in September at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park.







## LEADERS OF THE SIKSIKA

**NAATO'SAAPI:  
CHIEF OLD SUN**  
1819-1897

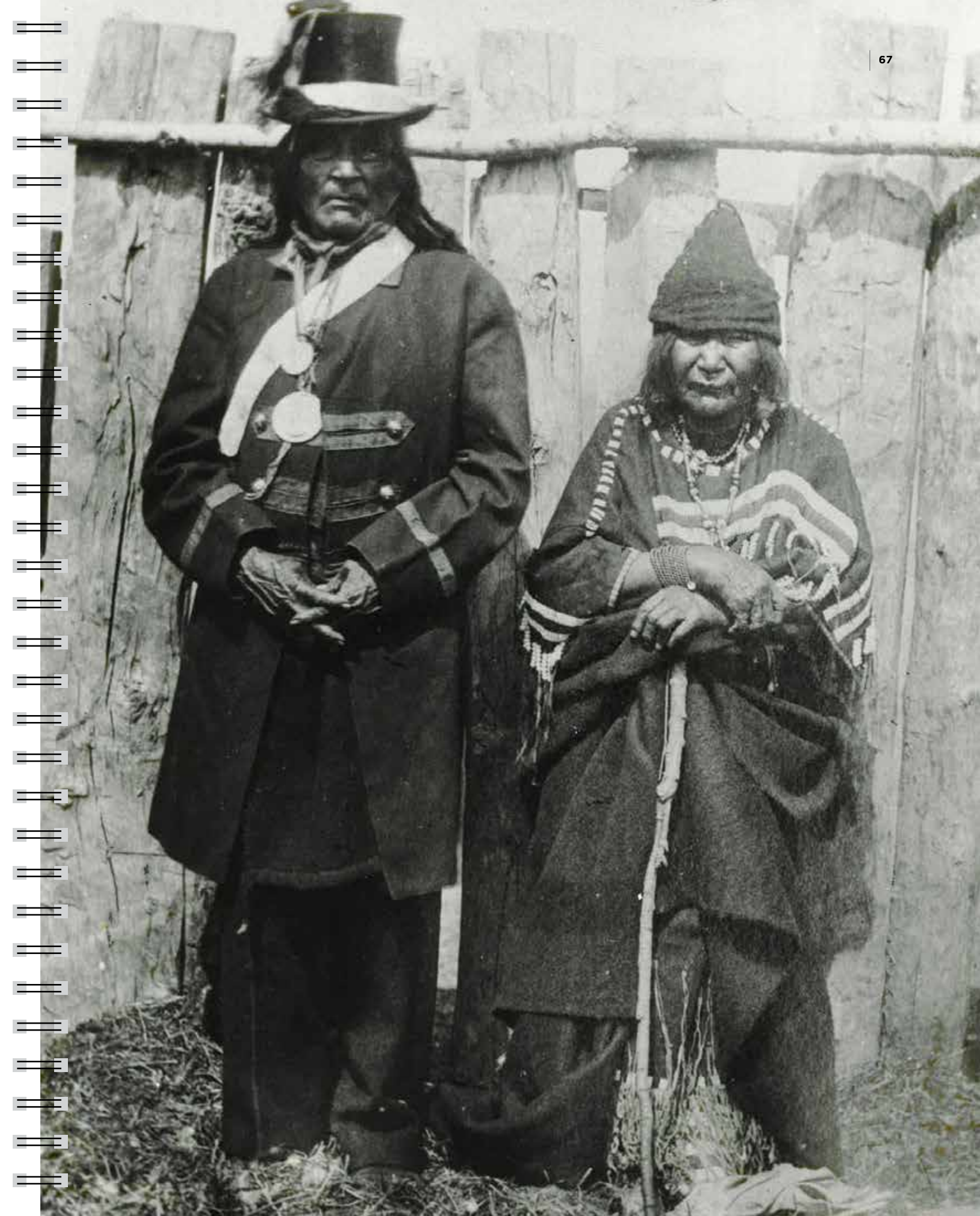
Old Sun was born in Alberta in 1819. His Siksika name was Naato'saapi — the Sun Elder or Sun Old Man. He was said to have been granted great spiritual power from a deer he met on a vision quest.

With his wife, Calf Old Woman, by his side, Old Sun became a formidable warrior. Throughout his long life, he was more often a fighter than a peacemaker, continuing to lead horse-

raiding parties late in life. Though he tolerated priests, he never gave up his Siksika faith.

Old Sun took Crowfoot's advice in signing Treaty 7, settling down to the north of Crowfoot's band at North Camp Flats. But it is said that Old Sun was always suspicious of government motives.

.....  
Chief Old Sun and his wife.







**ISSAPOMMAHKSIKA:  
CHIEF CROWFOOT**

1830-1890

.....  
 “What is life? It is  
 the flash of a firefly  
 in the night. It is the  
 breath of a buffalo in  
 the wintertime.  
 It is the little shadow  
 which runs across the  
 grass and loses itself in  
 the sunset.”

.....  
 “Crowfoot, during tour  
 of eastern Canada,”  
 1886, [NA-182-2],  
 by Livernois, J. E.,  
 Quebec City, Quebec.  
 Courtesy of Glenbow  
 Archives, Archives and  
 Special Collections,  
 University of Calgary.  
 Modifications to this  
 image include cropping.  
 .....

Crowfoot's parents, Istowun-eh'pata (Packs a Knife) and Axxahp-say-pi (Attacked Towards Home), were Kainai. After his father was killed in a raid, his mother remarried Akay-nehka-simi (Many Names) of the Siksika. His bravery during battle led to him being adopted by the tribe and earning him the name Issapommahksika, which means “Crow Indian's Big Foot.” The name originally belonged to another famous chief in his family.

Crowfoot tried to avoid violence, working with settlers, army and police to reach peaceful settlements. He negotiated with the CPR and other authorities, hoping that he could gain economic benefits for the Siksika.

The smallpox epidemic of 1869-70 left Crowfoot as one of the three head

chiefs. In 1877 Crowfoot brought various tribes together at Blackfoot Crossing to negotiate with the Canadian government.

After the signing, conditions for the Siksika soon deteriorated. Crowfoot even led his people to Montana for a short time to avoid starvation. The Department of Indian Affairs took control of the reserve and, working with the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, inflicted decades of mistreatment on Siksika people. Even so, Crowfoot did not join the North West Rebellion.

He died in 1890. His grave is marked near Blackfoot Crossing.





The prairies are abundant in natural buffalo pounds where the animals could be trapped within the coulees.



**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Buffalo and other animals were attracted to the river, whose flats made for an ideal hunting and camping site.

**THIS PAGE:** A bird's eye view of the Majorville Medicine Wheel.



## READING THE PLAINS: STONES AND MONUMENTS

The Siksika have left their mark on the Plains in many ways. Our traditional, seasonal way of life means that many of our monuments might be overlooked by those who are used to seeing more formal, built structures. But the traces of our culture are just as meaningful as architectural ruins around the world.

### OMAH'KAW'KIH' TAWKSSINISTS: MEDICINE WHEELS

A medicine wheel is typically a cairn with spokes radiating in all directions, resembling a wagon wheel. Many have been destroyed or altered but many can still be found in Blackfoot Territory – mainly in Alberta, Montana and Wyoming, with a few in Saskatchewan. At Majorville, a bone from the central cairn has been identified as 4,500 years old.

Many interpretations of the purpose of medicine wheels are possible. They could be Aw'kih'tawksini — memorials to celebrate warriors or other important people. They could be communicating with Spoo'mitaapiksi or Above People. The Siksika believe that the medicine wheel is a shrine or offering to the Above People that must be honoured and respected by everyone.





**STONE FIGURES**



At one time, there were many stone figures on the prairies. But agriculture destroyed most of them. The few that remain undisturbed are in remote locations.

**TOP:** Blackfoot people often commemorated important events with stone patterns on the prairie. This marker points to Blackfoot Crossing.

**BOTTOM:** Majorville Medicine Wheel cairn.

Typically, stones are set out in the shapes of animals or humans and some are part of larger formations. There are several located on Siksika land including at least two Napi or “Old Man” figures.

The so-called Ward Effigy near Cluny has been designated as a Provincial Historic site. The feet point in the direction of Blackfoot Crossing. Around 1872 a battle took place between several Siksika and Kainaiwa on the flats by the Bow River near Blackfoot Crossing. After the battle, the Siksika involved in the skirmish commemorated the battle with stones. Cairns at each end showed where the opponents jumped off their horses and ran towards each other. Their paths were marked by a trail of stones. Along the trail is the figure of a Kainaiwa where he died.

The Ward Effigy Archaeological Site (Borden No. EfPf-16) is located immediately north of the Siksika Nation reserve about 100 km east of Calgary, Alberta.

**UMOH'TSIS'KI'MAH'PIA:  
TIPI RINGS**

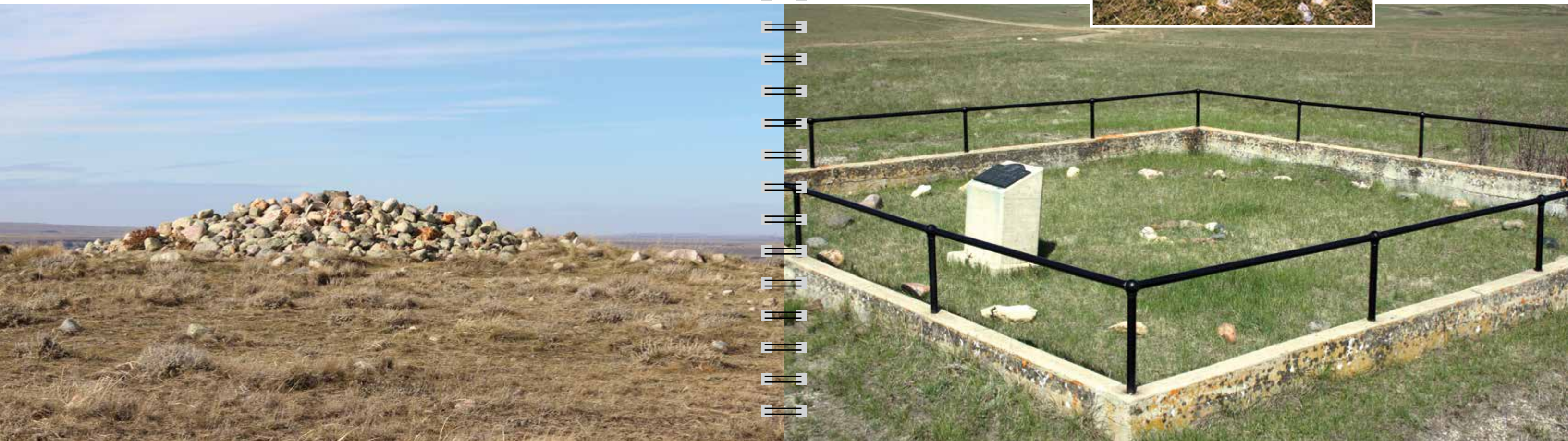
Circles of small stones were used to hold down the edges of old-style tipis, which were made of buffalo skins. Hides were heavy and didn't need too much to weigh them down in contrast to canvas which would blow over without pegs.

Thousands of tipi rings are dotted over the prairie. Each ring has its own story. The size of the ring indicates if the tipi was used during the Dog Days when tipis were smaller or in the Horse Days where the tipis are larger and pegs made of birch were used to hold the tipi in place. If there are two rings and a circle of stones in the centre, it was probably a Dog Days tipi. The inner ring was the liner; the stones were the fireplace. The number of tipi rings in an area shows how many people were gathered in camp.



**TOP:** Tipi ring.

**BOTTOM:** The site of the last camping place of Chief Crowfoot, April 1890.





### ISAPO-MUXIKA: CHIEF CROWFOOT'S GRAVE SITE

The grave is located near Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, approximately 1 km north.

The life of Crowfoot and the Siksika people are forever linked. Chief Crowfoot is remembered as the father of his people for his role in negotiating with the Crown.

Crowfoot was born along the Belly River in approximately 1830. Even though Crowfoot was born into the Blood Tribe, he later became chief of the Siksika. He earned his name after being wounded while fighting the Crow.

Following the smallpox epidemic of 1869-70, Crowfoot became one of the two surviving Siksika chiefs. He welcomed the North-West Mounted Police when they arrived in 1874 because he feared the effects of the whisky trade on his people. Crowfoot played a pivotal role in the Treaty 7 negotiations.

At their conclusion, he hoped that the government would be charitable and that the police would protect the Blackfoot. He soon became disillusioned with the negligence of the Department of Indian Affairs and the prejudices of Indian agents on the reserve. He died in 1890.



**ABOVE:** "Crowfoot, Head chief of the Blackfoot," 1887, [NA-29-1], by Ross, Alexander J., Calgary, Alberta. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

**RIGHT:** Chief Crowfoot's gravestone.

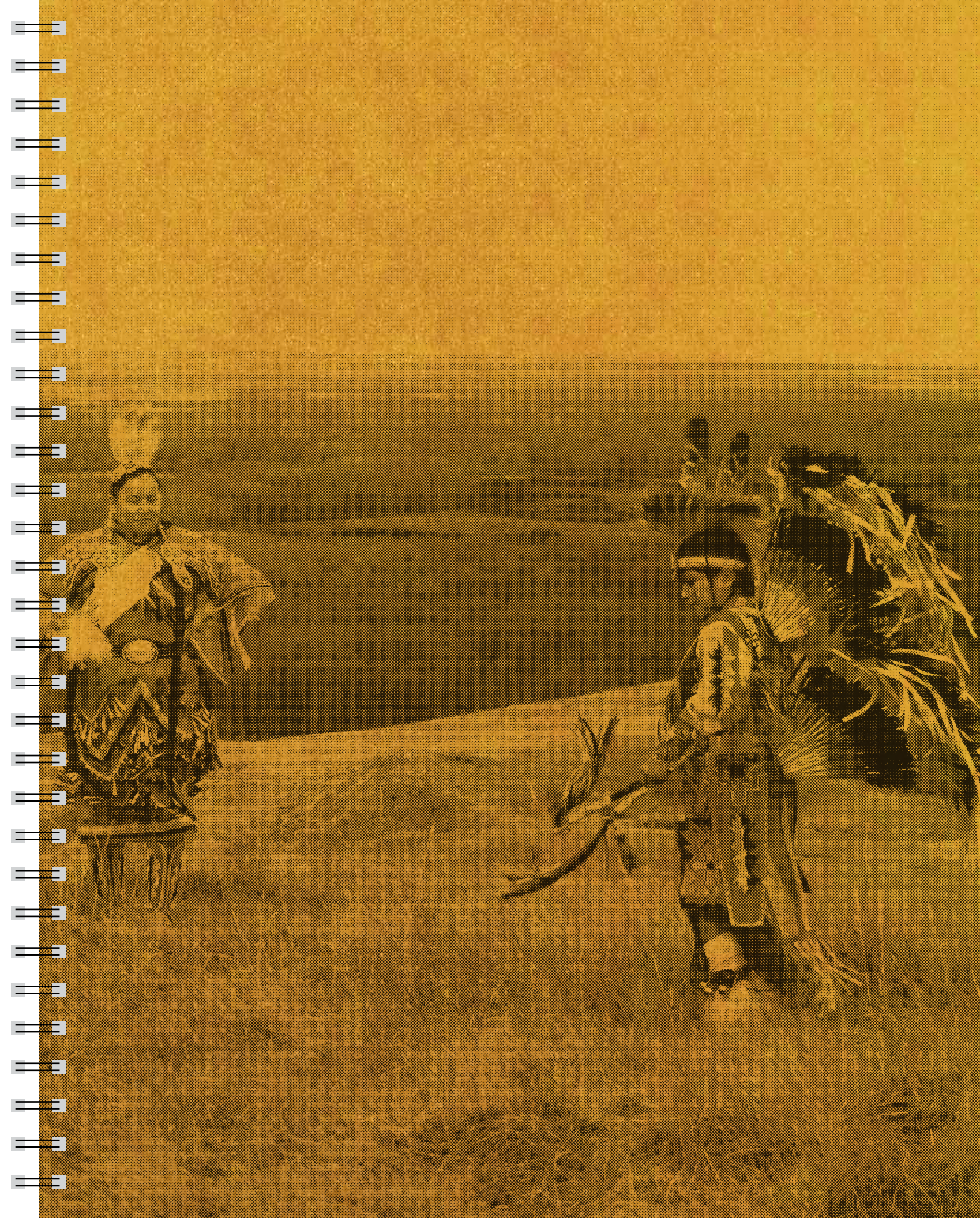






Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is a world-renowned cultural, educational and entertainment Centre built for the promotion and preservation of the Siksika Nation People's Language, Culture and Traditions.

[www.blackfootcrossing.ca](http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca)





# STORIES OF THE SIKSIKA

*The stories of the Siksika are many. They have been passed down through the centuries from one generation to the next. Our long history is also an oral tradition that is interwoven with the land, plants, birds, and animals, especially iinii – the buffalo. To understand our history, you must first understand our stories.*