

Historic Sites HIGHLIGHTS



#4

The Plains Indians' Commissary

With the acquisition of the horse, the nomadic peoples of the Plains developed a two-fold culture based on the horse and the buffalo. The buffalo provided most of the peoples' needs for food, clothing, shelter, and implements. The animal held a sacred place in their lives and the conducted ceremonies to insure a successful hunt.

Hide: The hide was used to make the Indian's home, the tipi. Hide leather became moccasins, shields, caps, leggings, lariats, sleeping robes, and even thread. Winter coats were made of hides with the hair still attached and worn on the inside.

Meat: Following the hunters were the women who did the butchering. In the village, the meat was jerked into strips and dried or pounded into a flaky mush. The mush was often mixed with nuts and berries and scooped into a hide bag between layers of buffalo fat. Called pemmican, it could last for years.

Chips: Buffalo dung was the main source of fuel for a camp fire on the treeless prairie. The chips stayed dry inside even in wet weather and they always burned hot and clean.

Horns, Bones, and Sinew: Cups, bowls, and spoons were made from the horn. Various bones became tools, such as shoulder blades for hoes and smaller bones for scrapers. Strong elastic tendons called sinew made bow strings and cord.

Internal Organs: The successful Indian hunter cut out the liver first and ate it raw, often flavored with gallbladder bile. The gall was also used to make yellow paint and bladders were made into canteens.

An early observer of Indian life, Francis Parkman stated, "The buffalo supplies (the Indians) with the necessities of life; with habitations, food, clothing, beds, and fuel; strings for their bows, glue, thread, cordage, trail-ropes for their horses, coverings for their saddles, vessels to hold water, boats to cross streams, and the means of purchasing all that they want from the traders. When the buffalo are extinct, they too must dwindle away."



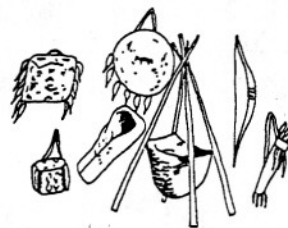
Tongue: The choicest cut, tongues were cured in salt, smoked over chips, and broiled.

The buffalo provided for many of the same needs for early non-Indians in the region. The inevitable westward expansion marked the end of a way of life primarily through the extermination of the buffalo. Whether killed for the products that were in demand such as hides and tongues or simply for sport, the buffalo were hunted to near extinction in just a few years.

Even with their passing, the buffalo still served as a provider. Millions of bones lay upon the prairies to be picked up by homesteaders and sold as phosphate for fertilizer, carbon for sugar refining, or as clay for bone china. Horns could be sold as raw materials for knife handles, combs, and buttons. So great was the demand for bones in the 1870s that they became "legal tender" in Dodge City.

For Plains Indians, like the Blackfoot, Sioux and Nez Perce, the bison was a walking storehouse. The people relied on the bison for their very survival. This fact was used by those who wanted to destroy the American Indian and was a major impetus in the mass destruction of the bison.

Bison Store



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| BEARD Ornamentations | BRAIN Hide Preparation Food | Quivers Sweatlodge Covers Tapestries Tipi Covers Tipi Liners Winter Robes Bedding Shirts | HAIR Bracelets Doll Stuffing Hair Pieces Halters Headdresses Medicine Balls Moccasin Lining Ornaments Pad Fillers Pillows Ropes | HORNS Arrow Points Cups Fire Carrier Headdresses Ladles Medication Powderhorn Signals Spoons Toys | MUSCLES Arrow-Ties Bows Cinches Glue Preparation Thread | Saddles Saddle Blankets Sheaths Shields Splints Stirrups Straps Lariats Masks Ornaments Quirts Shrouds Snowshoes | STOMACH CONTENTS Medicines Paints |
| BONES Awls Bows Fleshing Tools Game Dice Jewelry Paintbrushes Pipes Knives Arrowheads Quirts Saddle Trees Scrapers Shovels Sled Runners Splints Tableware Toys War Clubs | BLADDER Medicine Bags Pouches | CHIPS Diaper Powder Fuel | HIND LEG SKIN Preshaped Moccasin | LIVER Tanning Agents | PAUNCH LINER Basins Buckets Canteens Collapsible Cups Wrappings (meat) | STOMACH LINER Cooking Vessels Water Containers | TAIL Decorations Fly Brush Medicine Switch Whips |
| | BLOOD Paints Pudding Soups | FAT Cooking Cosmetic Aids Hair Grease Medicine Soaps Tallow | HOOF, FEET & DEWCLAWS Glue Rattles Spoons | MEAT Cached Meat Immediate Use Jerky (dehydrated) Pemican (processed) Sausages | RAWHIDE Buckets Bull Boats Caps Clinches Containers Drums Moccasin Soles Mortars Ropes | SCROTUM Containers Rattles | TEETH Ornamentation |
| | BUCKSKIN Backrests Bags Belts Bridles Cradles Dolls Dresses Leggings Mittens Moccasin Tops | GALL Yellow Paints | | | | SKULL Medicine Prayers Other Rituals Sun Dance | TENDONS Bowstrings Sinews-Sewing |
| | | | | | | TONGUE Choice Meat Comb (rough side) | |