

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: GEORGE FIRST RIDER
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: THE SIGNIFICANCE AND FUNCTION
OF THE COYOTE IN BLACKFOOT
INTERVIEW LOCATION: CARDSTON
TRIBE/NATION: ALBERTA
LANGUAGE: CARDSTON
DATE OF INTERVIEW: ALBERTA
INTERVIEWER: BLOOD
INTERPRETER: BLACKFOOT
TRANSCRIBER: JULY 30, 1969
SOURCE: JOHN C. HELLSON
PROVINCIAL MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES
OF ALBERTA
TAPE NUMBER: DAVE MELTING TALLOW
DISK: JOANNE GREENWOOD
PAGES: TRANSCRIPT DISC 48
RESTRICTIONS: 7
NONE

GEORGE FIRST RIDER

George First Rider of the Blood Reserve was born in 1904. He had no formal schooling but became an accomplished horseman and worked for a time on the rodeo circuit. After working as a farmer he ended up in jail as a result of alcoholism and theft. He attributes his reform to his conversion to Christianity.

He prides himself on his ability as a storyteller and on his knowledge of Blood culture, particularly the holy societies, many of which he joined as a young man.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Story of the coyote who taught the hunter how to get game, and the success which followed for the hunter and his companions.
George First Rider: I am going to tell one short story. I will tell a story about the coyote. The coyote has a white yellowish colored fur and it has a bushy tail with a black tip and it has light yellow eyebrows. This animal is a wise animal and it is very timid. They live on mice and birds that they can grab; they also live on baby chicks.

Here is how the people of the past kill the coyote. They will brace up a log. The brace is very slippery; the log will slip with the least little movement. The stake is sharpened and it is driven into the ground and greased with fat and the log rests on the stake and a bait is set under the log. And when the coyote bites the meat the log will fall on its neck and it

will knock out the coyote as the log is a real heavy log. So that is how a coyote is killed.

The contraption is a trap; the coyote was trapped. There were no steel traps in those times so that is how they trap the coyote. Hunting is different. The coyote was trapped and it was skinned. The skin did not have to be stretched then to be tanned; it was tanned with white sod while it was green. I (First Rider) saw one being tanned like that; the woman was rubbing it with the sod and when it dried the skin was ready for use.

The coyote was skinned from the mouth and after it was skinned the fur was inside. When the skin was dry it was turned inside out and the fur was on the outside again. Then a stick is bent and it is stuck in the mouth of the coyote so that the mouth will be open and the skin is hung outside in the wind so that the fur will dry up. When the fur is dry then it is a charm. The opening on the legs will be stitched together. A man will put his arrows in the coyote skin. The skin is made into a quiver; it is called wolf quiver.

A man went out hunting. He had no gun; he just had a bow and arrows. He went hunting to get some food for his children. It got too [late] in the evening so he laid down and went to sleep. The people of the past don't care where they are going to sleep; they will even curl up in a hollow place. They won't care to have some blankets; they don't care to take their moccasins off. Even in wintertime they shovel the snow with their feet until they come to the ground and they will lay down to sleep. And if it's a blizzard, he will be covered with snow, he will take one of his arrows and he will make a hole in the snow as a ventilator. They say it's warm if you are covered with snow.

While the man was laying there he heard a coyote howl. When the man heard the coyote howl he just laid there and listened. When the coyote howled again it came close to him. The coyote told him, "You people are not so kind to us coyotes, but myself I pity you for sleeping out in the wilderness. I know why you slept here. You wanted to get some food for your children. Us coyotes, when we are out hunting for food we will lay down and sleep. When night comes and when we get cold we will get up and howl. The howling warms us up. If we are alone we will just howl. If we hear that someone will come, even if we are only two, here's what we do." The man looked at the coyote, this was his vision, he looked at the coyote. It stood on its hind legs and it jumped up and down with its nose straight up and it howled. When the coyote howled, its howling sounded like as if there a lot of coyotes howling.

A second coyote came and it stood by the first coyote and they both howled and their howling sounded like as if there were a whole flock of coyotes howling. When the coyotes got through howling, the coyote told him, "You will skin one of the coyotes that you trap and cut it open in front and you'll have your

head in the head of the skin and you will tie the front feet to your wrists and the hind legs to your thighs with the tail hanging down. When you sight the animal that you are going to shoot, whatever it will be - it might be an antelope - you will start crawling with your bow and arrows. There is one song that you will sing and then you will start crawling to your prey with great care and when you get close enough and then shoot it. If you come to a herd of antelopes you will go right in the midst of them and you will pick your choice but you are not to kill more than four. You can kill one, two, or three, but not more than four." The man went home in the morning; he didn't go far. He saw a coyote jump up from the snow bank. He shot it and he killed it with one shot. So he skinned it just the way he was told to do and when he came home his wives tanned it with white sod and after the skin was tanned the man invited the men. He told the men, "I am going out to hunt for food. This coyote hide was given to me and I'll use it in my hunt and if it works I'll transfer it to you and we will get food that way." The men all considered it holy.

The man had the coyote skin on and he went. He came up to some antelopes, he sang and then he fixed the coyote skin onto himself and then he sang again. Then he started for the animals and when the antelopes noticed him he went down on all fours and he started to crawl and the antelopes were just looking at him.

The man's companion was just watching him. When he got closer the antelopes jumped up and started to walk up to him. When he got real close enough he took his mitts out and he took a shot at one of them. The arrow found its mark, the antelope went down and the others were just watching. And he shot the other one in the arm pit and it went down too. He shot the third one and it went down. One got up and stretched itself. As the antelope was stretching he shot it and it also went. After he killed four antelopes he got up and his companion cried and said, "We are hungry. Why did you let the others go?" He told his companion, "You will be eaten, I was told not to kill more than four. We will kill some more tomorrow."

The man told his companion, "We will trap some more coyotes and we will have more coyote skin." So they started to butcher the animals and what can they do, they're on foot. They spread out one hide and they put the meat on the hide and they folded the hide with a thong for towing. The same with the second one and they did the same with the third one. They threw away what they didn't want, so they had the meats bundled in the hides and they dragged them home.

As the hides were fresh and green they froze right away because this was in the winter. They strung themselves to the bundles. They are the ones that bundles their meat in hides; they are called deceivers(?).

On the northeast side of the Belly Buttes there is a hill which is called Turnip Hill. A Cree Indian was deceived out there by

some Blood Indians. They were telling him to come to them so finally the Cree went and sat with them. The men were using sign language telling him, "Where did you come from?" The Cree was telling them, "I come from over there." One of the Blood Indians had his rifle ready and suddenly they all pointed to the back of him. As the Cree turned to look he didn't have a chance to dodge. One of the Bloods shot him and he was killed. The coyote was used as a disguise, so it's the one that deceived. They are the men that bundled their meat in hides and they pulled them home. There was hunger in the camps; the people saw them coming and when they came home all the women rushed to his tipi and they started to give out meat rations to the women and his wives had cooked a lot of the meat. Then he invited the men.

After they had feasted the guests dispersed. Some had coyote quivers and they started to cut out the coyote skin quivers. The disguises were not completed at this particular time. It took many nights and days before the disguises were completed, then he told them, "Now we are going on a hunt." The men selected the men that were powerful shots with arrows, so he gave the men the coyote skins.

As the people at that time had no clocks, it was explained this way. The men started in the morning when the birds started to chirp. Those are the men that are going to disguise themselves as coyotes. They took their bows and arrows and they all went northwards where the cold spells come from. After they had walked for a length of time, it was getting daylight. He told the men.... (This man wasn't called by his name he is just mentioned as a man. I [First Rider] would have known his name. The people in those times don't mention names. A man also had no name. Lately his name was mentioned; he is always called Napi (Old Man). After he (Old Man) became real crooked and a practical joker he was given the name KI-NA-KA-KA-AHTSIS, [Deceiver].) Now when it started to get daylight the leader of the party stopped and he told the men, "Now we are going to scatter and we are going to howl. You all know how the coyotes howl so that is how you will howl."

As all the aggressive young men were selected, we will say the men that have nice voices, then they all howled like coyotes. They stopped howling and then they howled again. They howled four times. After they got through howling the leader told them, "You and him will go together; you will go that way. And you and him will also go together; you'll go that way. And you, you will also go with him and you will go in that direction." It was not mentioned how many men they were, it was just mentioned that they were dispatched two at a time.

The leader told the men, "After we're gone for a while I will howl and when you hear me you will also howl so I will know where you men are. If someone does not howl, he is gone poor." The leader told the men, "Before you approach your game you will sing this song and your game will not flee from you." So they dispersed.

The leader kept going and he had a companion, too. The sun was not up yet but it was daylight. Then he howled. One of the men howled in answer to the call of the leader. He said, "Ah, yes, they are somewhere." And another also howled from another place. They were reporting back by sound. The leader said, "Ah, nobody is missing."

The men know each other. They were told, "Every one of you will howl in a different way so we will know that somebody is missing." It is dangerous out in the wilderness, that is why they were told to communicate by sound. They might meet a bear or any other wild animals. Everyone howled.

*'Gone poor' means that he or both of them are dead. At last they found some game and as their song is a mysterious song, I (First Rider) forgot to mention this, but I haven't gone far - I will illustrate it. When all the men that had coyote robes came into the tipi they all burned the incense. They scraped the ground where they sat and that is where they burned the incense. The chief of the ceremony got up and walked up to the man that sat close to the door and painted his nose red. And he went to the next man and the man also burned the incense and he also painted his nose red. He told him, "How will I paint your nose?" The participant said, "Paint my nose red just a little which means I will not go far and I'll have my kill." If someone says, "Paint my nose red a little up to the centre," this man will go a little further and he will have his kill; and if someone says, "Paint my nose red further up," he will go farther before he will find some game.

The significance of the painting of the nose red is, when a coyote is feasting on a carcass its nose will be stained with blood, so that is why the men's noses were painted red. When a coyote first starts to eat, its nose will have a small stain of blood, and after the coyote eats for a length of time, its face will be all stained with blood; so that is what it means. So the chief of the ceremony was just telling the men, "How do you want me to paint your nose red?" So the men were just telling him how to paint their noses. The man kept going on to every man. Finally he got to the other side until he came to the last man that sat by the door on the southside, then he went back to his seat. He already painted his face.

The ceremonialist painted his nose halfways, which means he will not go far from the coups and he will kill his game. He told the men, "Those men that have a little red paint on their noses will not go very far and they will have their kill. And those that have their noses red painted will go a little further and they will have their kill. And those that their noses are painted high will go very far before they will sight their game. So don't get impatient on the hunting trip."

When they dispersed, they got their game by the way they painted their noses. The first ones that killed their game howled. They heard each other by the echo and the leader knew that they got their game and the others also howled and they

also knew. They told each other how they will howl. Then the other two also howled. They knew too that the others have killed their game. They howled and howled and after they had howled, now we are going to assemble. So they howled again, so they started to go to where the first ones howled from and they

all got there. After they had all met, they went home. They had their meat bundled up in the hides. When the people in the camps looked, they said, "The hunters are coming." They all had their meat bundled in hides so they came home abundant with meat. Now I'll close my story and I'll tell another story. That is all.

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