SUMMARY OF ELDERS' INTERVIEWS

TREATY 7

by Lynne Hickey

The following material summarizes what the elders of the Treaty 7 area have said in interviews about what transpired during the negotiation of Treaty 7 and what promises were made to the Indians at that time. The subjects dealt with include mineral and other resource rights, hunting, fishing, and trapping rights, land and land surrenders, education and medicare and economic development. At the end, a "typical" interview is attached which exemplifies the format and content of most of the Treaty 7 interviews.

As is pointed out in some of the summaries, what the Treaty 7 elders say is often very different from what the elders say in the other treaty areas. Promises which were made to the Indians are more vague and are not stated in as much detail. The interviews are more concerned with reciting the sequences of events and dialogue between characters at the actual treaty negotiations than they are with enumerating any promises made.

Perhaps such differences result from the fact that the
Treaty 7 elders view the treaty as a "peace" treaty and not as a "land surrender" treaty. It is logical that if the treaty was not really about "giving up" something, then the interviews would be less concerned with what was obtained as compensation, the treaty promises.

Mineral and Other Resource Rights  
by Richard Daniel

The eleven interviews in the Treaty 7 area which refer to minerals contain a wealth of detailed discussions on traditional use of minerals, however only five of these elders were questioned about treaty mineral rights. All five of these elders indicated or implied that the Indian people have been cheated out of their mineral resources.

Example: Charlie Coming Singing, 65, of the Peigan Band says: "Today the effects of having been deprived of our land and cheated of our natural God-given land. David Laird assured us that the white man can only use the topsoil, 'except on reserves' now they have taken any valuable resources under the ground. We Indian people have been left right out of the mineral wealth, just another incident of cheating us of the natural wealth of our land."

Example: Useless Good Runner of the Peigan Band says: "During the treaty negotiations, mineral resources of all grades were never mentioned as oil, coal and others, and therefore no negotiations were every made and no Indian has ever benefitted from the wealth of these... Our ancestors own these resources, the game, the land, all the natural aspects of the country that the Blackfoot nation inhabited."

The Treaty 7 interviews are much less explicit about mineral rights than the Treaty 6 interviews, however there seems to be agreement that Indians are entitled to greater benefit from the mineral wealth from the land they have traditionally occupied. George First Rider of the Peigan Band says: that the people were told that they would always benefit from the resources of their land if they would make peace.

There are several detailed descriptions of the use of paint obtained from rocks and the ceremonies that were used to obtain the paint. Several uses of rocks are mentioned, including pipes, steam houses, religious artifacts, charms, toys, tools, war clubs and tomahawks. Perhaps the greatest value of the Treaty 7 interviews completed so far is the detailed discussions of the traditional use and significance of all natural resources, however most of these discussions are too lengthy to include in this report.

There is also considerable discussion of the use of trees
and other vegetation for fuel, tipi poles, pegs, back rests, tripods, pipestems, food, medicine, tobacco and sacred ceremonies. There is not explicit reference to the place of timber rights in the treaty negotiations, however Mrs. Cecile Many Guns, 87, mentions that after the treaties, Sitting on Eagle Tail Feathers wanted the Porcupine Hills area because of the timber in the foothills.

There is only one reference to mountains: First Rider (Bill Heavy Runner, 60), of the Blood Band says: "We also claim the mountain because of the forest for fuel..."

Hunting, Fishing and Trapping by Lynn Hickey

Twelve of the fifteen elders' interviews examined for the Treaty No. 7 area contained references to hunting, fishing and trapping. As compared to the other two treaty areas, the interviews from the Treaty 7 area appear to be less concerned with hunting, fishing and trapping rights. For example, only seven interviews specifically mention that Indians have such rights. It may be that not many specific questions about hunting, fishing and trapping were asked. Often in the Treaty 7 interviews, it is not clear what question was asked or if one was asked.

The topic most frequently mentioned with regard to hunting, fishing and trapping (8 times) was supplies promised in the treaty. Ammunition or the money to buy ammunition was most frequently discussed, with most persons interviewed complaining that the ammunition or money was either never received or was cut off soon after the first distribution. Charlie Coming Singing (Peigan) said that the year after the treaty was made "we were to receive money for ammunition. We never got it up to this day. Our hands or lying open waiting for the money for ammunition."

Several people believed that since they were only receiving $5.00 as the annual treaty payment instead of the $12.00 they thought they should receive, the extra $7.00 was being put away in the bank for "ammunition money." Two interviews mentioned that certain tools related to hunting such as knives and axes were promised in the treaty. These were distributed at first and later terminated according to George First Rider (Peigan) who also mentions that traps and guns were promised, too.

As far as hunting, fishing and trapping rights are concerned, only seven interviews mentioned that their existence was guaranteed in the treaty. Six interviews stated that the treaty assured them of hunting rights, four mentioned trapping rights, and three fishing rights. The way in which this view is typically expressed is, Tall White Man said, "You can camp any place and hunt anywhere. Don't stop each other. It's all your land equal." (Willie Scraping White, Blood). In general, the emphasis on hunting rights is much stronger than on fishing or trapping rights.
The idea of Indian ownership of the game animals which was brought up so frequently in the Treaty 6 interviews as a rationale for hunting, fishing and trapping rights is not so prevalent in the Treaty 7 interviews. For example, there are no statements to the effect that the Indians did not "sell" the animals and fish to the white man. There are two interviews which state that the treaty says, "All game is yours, to hunt any place for food, for the buffalo will be all gone in time" (Charlie Coming Singer, Blood), but this is the extent of emphasis on the idea of Indian ownership of game.

Restrictions on hunting, fishing and trapping are only mentioned directly in two interviews. Tom Yellowhorn (Peigan) says that years ago, trapping on the reserve was forbidden and that, "We trapped beavers on a black market, somehow we always did find sale for our skins." Eventually, his father asked for and obtained trapping privileges on the reserve but only after pointing out to a certain white man the "densely populated beaver areas on the reserve first." However, with regard to hunting rather than trapping, George First Rider (Peigan) says, "Whatever we needed on the reserve in regard to game and birds was never out of season - there was no such thing as closed season." Conflicts with game wardens are not mentioned at all.

Only three persons interviewed make statements to the effect that the treaty promised Indians could hunt anywhere (fishing and trapping are not mentioned in this context). A fourth, George First Rider, claims the treaty said, "You will always benefit from the resources of your land," which does not clarify whether only reserve land or all land was meant. These are the only interviews which indicate that the treaty had anything at all to say on the subject of legal hunting, fishing and trapping territories.

The problem of whether hunting, fishing and trapping are allowed only for the purpose of obtaining food or also for commercial gain is not really discussed in the interviews. Two elders, Comoose Bottle and Charlie Coming Singer (Blood), both state that Tall White Man said the Indians would be able to hunt anywhere for food, and George First Rider (Peigan) says, "Traps were also issued so food could be obtained," but these are the only times hunting or trapping are mentioned with regard to their purpose.

Three interviews contain a statement that certain areas were rich in game. Charlie Coming Singing (Peigan) said of Red Crow's choice of the Belly Butte country for his reserve that, "The buffalo is still plentiful in that part of the country and they stay in good shape all year round." George First Rider mentions that his reserve had a piece of timberland in Waterton country where there was abundant game, and Tom Yellowhorn (Peigan) cites a legend of how his people obtained the right to utilize the fish and animal resources of the mountain area.
One final topic concerning hunting, trapping and fishing dealt with in the Treaty 7 interviews, as in those for the Treaty 6 area, is the sacred character of the connection between the Indian and his use of the land. Bill Heavy Runner (Blood) says, "The Creator give us this place to live. He gave us our food and other things for our survival... There is nothing we do not make use of." John Across the Mountain (Blackfoot) states, "As far back as our ancestors could recall during the dog days we had always lived with nature. All our needs were derived from the earth to make our livelihood... All forms of natural resources were used in the performance of religious ceremonies."

The information about hunting, trapping and fishing from the Treaty 7 interviews tends to be somewhat vague and not very great in quantity. Perhaps this is because questions on this subject were not asked and any information the interviewee provided came from his response to a question on a different subject. Only once does a question about hunting and trapping appear in an interview, and that time, the answer had good, factual information about trapping.

As was the case in the interviews from the other two treaty areas, it would be a good idea to ask questions about whether the treaty permits hunting, fishing, and trapping only to obtain food or also for commercial purposes. Also, what is the peoples' understanding about where they are allowed to hunt, fish and trap? Do they know of any cases where someone was forbidden to hunt or trap?

Land and Land Surrenders

As was noted in the hunting, fishing and trapping summary for the Treaty 7 area, the format of the Treaty 7 interviews is very different from that of the other two treaty areas. Most interviews are presented as a continuous narrative by the interviewee and we cannot know if questions were asked by the interviewer during the recitation, or what these questions might have been. The whole tenor of the Treaty 7 interviews is different from that of the other two areas, and it would be useful to know whether this difference arises from differences in the treaty negotiations themselves, or the fact that the Treaty 7 interviews reflect a "Blackfoot interpretation" of the treaties as opposed to a "Cree interpretation" in the other treaty areas. Obtaining interviews from Stoney and Sarcee elders may help settle this question of the influence of cultural differences. It may be, too, that if the same questions were asked of the Treaty 7 elders, the content of their replies would be more similar to that of the northern elders.

In any case, it is very clear that the Blood and Peigan elders view the treaty itself and its relationship to the surrender of land in a very different way from the way these
matters are viewed in the Treaties 6 and 8 areas. The most striking aspect of this contrast in interpretation is the fact that not one of the 26 interviews mentions that the treaty had anything at all to do with the surrender or selling of land to the whites. In fact, the only time there is any mention that the treaty commissioners said anything to the Indians about wanting to even use their land is when Charlie Coming Singer (Blood, 65) states, "Red Crow said to Tall White Man, 'You have talked of farming land. I'm not giving away any of my land...'". Three elders (Ted Bull Shields, Joe Chief Body and Jim Shot Both Sides, Blood) make specific statements to the effect that they have no knowledge of any land surrender at the treaty. Jim Shot Both Sides, who is the Blood Head Chief, says, "I never heard my old man to say we surrendered the land at the negotiating of the Peace Treaty. This I never heard or was told."

This use of the term "peace treaty" is interesting in itself because it is the way so many of the Treaty 7 elders refer to the treaty. Although "peace treaty" appears mostly in the interviews done by one interviewer and may, therefore, represent a personal translation style, it does seem that most of the Treaty 7 elders are saying that the purpose of the treaty was to establish peace and not to surrender the land. Many elders say in their descriptions of the negotiations that Tall White Man told the Indians he had come to stop the Indians from killing each other, and to see that they put away their weapons, and to keep liquor from disrupting them any more.

What the elders do say about the treaty with regard to land, falls into several categories. The most frequently mentioned subject is the choosing of the reserve lands by the various head chiefs, with most elders reciting their names (except for the Stoney and Sarcee Chiefs) and the areas chosen by each. There are a few interviews which report that the chiefs were not really free to choose land where they wanted. For example, Joe Chief Body (Blood, 74) relates that Tall White Man wanted Crowfoot and Red Crow's people both to be on reserves at the place of the treaty and that after much argument, Tall White Man was convinced that Red Crow had the right to choose his own land.

Most interviews simply state that a particular chief chose a particular area, but some indicate the basis for choice. For instance, some say the Stoney and Sarcee chose land where they did because they were used to the mountains. Chris Bull Shields (Blood) says that Crowfoot chose land for his people where he did because, "I belong here, Ridge in the Water." Charlie Coming Singer (Blood, 65) states that Red Crow chose land where he was born (Belly Buttes), "my region, my land," while Jim Shot Both Sides (Blood, 62) says it was where his relatives were buried. Only three interviews mention reason for choosing land based on the resources contained therein. Two state that Red Crow wanted the Belly Buttes because buffalo were still plentiful or that they spent the winters there. One elder, George First Rider (Blood, 69) mentions that the Blood
own a piece of timber land "in Waterton country" (which
presumably was chosen for the reserve because it was a source
of wood). Finally, Cecile Many Guns (Peigan, 87) says that
Bear Child had recommended that Sitting on Eagle Tail Feathers
chose land along the foothills north to the Porcupine Hills
because of the area's wealth in game and that this advice should
have been followed since oil occurs there. She does not,
however, say how the Peigan Chief did make his choice.

Another frequently mentioned subject is the boundaries of
reserve lands. Every interview touching on this topic contains
statements to the effect that the reserve boundaries are not as
large as the people had believed. Some stated that the
Indians did not understand the white man's methods of surveying
and measuring land and that the "size of a mile" had no meaning
(Billy Heavy Runner, Blood). Others point out that their
understanding of what constituted boundaries of the area
requested differed from the way the whites defined that area.
For example, Jack Drow (Peigan, 72) says that when Sitting on
Eagle Tail Feathers requested the Porcupine Hills country, he
considered that the hills "stretch out far northwest of Nanton"
but that today the Peigans have only the "tip" of the Porcupine
Hills. The fact that Blood and Peigan elders so consistently
cite the same landmarks and boundaries for their land, supports
the idea of very precisely defined areas which the Indians
believed they were being guaranteed, and that the treaty
commissioners did not take into account these Indian
territorial conceptions when measuring out their land. Cecile
Many Guns says of the reserve, "Suddenly it was surveyed and
fenced and it was small and we were told to stay in this
corral." Howard Beebe (Blood, 59) expresses the view that the
people did not realize "that the land they wanted to keep would
just fence them in." The idea of reserves in themselves must
have been especially foreign and meaningless to the nomadic,
far ranging peoples of the Treaty 7 area.

Further support for the elders' view that land was not
surrendered or sold at the treaty can be derived from the
manner in which the elders speak of the land. Statements such
as, "This is our land. It is really ours because our Father
gave it to us" (Mr. and Mrs. Bill Heavy Runner, Blood), "This
land was given to us by God, it was meant for us"( Bill Heavy
Runner), and "All our needs were derived from the earth to make
our living with" (John Across the Mountain, Gleichen) would
indicate that the Indians conceived of the land in a different
way from the whites. If this is so, it is not likely that they
would agree to sell something which was so highly regarded and
held in such awe.

The remaining discussions of land in the elders'
interviews are concerned with specific grievances about the
takeover of reserve land by or the selling of reserve land to
whites. Most frequently cited among the Blood elders is the
coming of the Mormons and the story of how they took over land
unfairly. Whether the fault lies in the leasing of the people's
land by an individual (Red Crow) or in the idea that the
Mormons got Red Crow drunk and confused when they made the land
deal, the elders feel that the Mormons misled the Indians and
did not make their intentions clear when they first came to the
Blood reserve. Other grievances mentioned are the building by
whites of sawmills, farms, and other industries on reserve land
(Comoose Bottle, Blood, 71), outsiders ranging cattle on
reserve land (Jack Crow, Peigan 72) at one time needing a
permit in order to leave the reserve (Cecile Many Guns, Tom
Yellowhorn, Peigan), the fact that the railroad right of way
was not renegotiated every 25 years, people were bullied into
selling land for a dam (Tom Yellowhorn), and the fact that
there is a strip of land along the B.C. - Alberta border which
was never surrendered to the whites (Ted Bull Shields, Blood,
74). In most of these cases it is felt by the elders that
treaty promises were broken. The very fact that such
occurrences could take place indicates that "the Queen and her
men did not take care of what's happening to the Indian and the
treaty" as was promised (Pat Weasel Head, Blood, 74).

Education and Medicare

Of the twenty-six elders interviewed in the Treaty 7 area,
twenty mention treaty promises concerning education and
medicare. This represents a greater percentage of interviews
dealing with the subject than was found in the Treaty 6
interviews.

Aside from the usual statements to the effect that
"education" was one of the treaty promises, there are more
complaints and negative undercurrents running through the
discussions on the subject of education than was the case for
Treaty 6 elders. A few elders speak of education as if it were
something that was pushed on the Indians. For example, Jim
Bottle (Blood, 70) says, "After these laws and treaty were
made, the white people or government wanted education started on
the Indian people." Several mention, too, that parents did not
want to have to send their children away to school. This is in
contrast to most of the Treaty 6 elders who felt they were
promised local schools and who did not make complaints about
having to send their children away. A few elders mention that
education was promised "as soon as you settle on your land,"
(e.g. John Across the Mountain, Blood) making the promise seem
almost a bribe to get the people to settle on a reserve.

As in the Treaty 6 interviews, it is not really clear as
to exactly what sort of education the elders feel the treaty
titled people to. Several mention that education for
"children" was promised, so perhaps they felt only a grade
school education was promised. One elder, Willie Eagle Plume
(Blood), is a bit more specific when he claims that Tall White
Man told the Indians, "We will build schools and you will be
taught education so you will speak English," so it is likely
that the promised education is viewed as something to help the
Indian cope with white society.
Some elders express directly or indirectly what they feel should be included in "education" or what its goals should be. For example, Jim Bottle (Blood) feels that education will enable the Indians to start finding out how they were cheated of land. Others speak of the value of the old Indian education, religious teachings and history and express a desire that these not be lost, so they may be indirectly saying that these things should be part of education today.

The Treaty 7 elders do not particularly stress that they were promised free education. Only two elders make statements to this effect (Howard Beebe, Blood; Jim Bottle). Two others feel that when their treaty payment was reduced from $12.00 to $5.00, the extra $7.00 was put away by the government to be used for the Indians' education and medical services (Joe Chief Body, Blood, 74; James Takes a Gun Strong, Blood, 77). This is the only instance of relating broken treaty promises with regard to education except for Mr. and Mrs. Bill Heavy Runner's (Blood) statement that promises were broken because, "Nowadays, there are very few of us with good education," implying that the government has fallen down in the provision of services.

Again as in the Treaty 6 interviews, medicare is most often mentioned in conjunction with education and in similar fashion. None of the elders disagree that something in the way of medical services, or "a hospital," or "a doctor" was promised in the treaty. One elder, Billy Heavy Runner, (Blood) states that Laird told the Indians that as they settled "on the reserve a hospital would be built there for our conveniences," which may indicate that perhaps some elders feel that medical services were offered as a bribe, like education, to get the Indians settled.

Several elders specify that the medical services were to be placed where the people were. Rosie Davis (Blood, 96) says, "They would also place a doctor among us to look after us." Most elders, however, do not specify the location of the promised medical services. Many Blood elders express their displeasure over the possible removal of the hospital on their reserve, their feelings being summed up by Billy Heavy Runner who says, "Some of us do not wish to go to outside hospitals. We are trying to keep our own hospital on the reserve today."

Another frequently mentioned promise is that medical services were to be provided free.

Other possible instances of broken treaty promises regarding medical care are not really specified. Annie Buffalo (Peigan, 84) mentions that in the early days of providing medicine to the Indians, a "castor oil doctor" travelled through the reserve. The fact that a doctor was provided who was not considered particularly competent by the Indians was not mentioned as a broken treaty promise, however. As has already been stated, two elders imply that the promise of free medical care was violated when the treaty payment was reduced.
Economic Development

Only thirteen elders from the Treaty 7 area discuss subjects which can somehow be related to ideas on economic development. As was the case with most other topics discussed, the Treaty 7 elders tend to differ quite a bit in what they say from Treaty 6 and 8 elders.

Most elders, when discussing treaty promises with regard to economic development, speak in terms of having been promised to be taken care of. Although such a promise would seem to imply the opposite of anything to do with economic development, it does say something about earning or obtaining a livelihood which is where our concern should lie. The attitude is expressed typically by Bob Black Plume (Blood, 73) who says the Indians were promised, "You will be wards of the great mother Queen's government and furthermore, she will feed you by getting rations and whatever you will be in need of assistance she will give to you as long as the sun shines and rivers flow and the mountains stand..."

Two elders, Comoose Bottle and Joe Chief Body (Blood) say that after the treaty payment was reduced from $12.00 to $5.00 per person, the extra $7.00 was put into the bank to provide whatever the people needed in the way of assistance. So, it may be that some elders feel that the promise of eternal care has been broken in this manner.

As in the Treaty 6 interviews, some elders do speak of agricultural implements and animals that were promised to the Indians. People merely mention that such things as plows, hay forks, hoes, hay cutters, horses and cattle were promised, and that once these were distributed, were terminated. The implication is that when these things were no longer given out, the treaty promises were broken. The only restriction placed upon receiving these items which is cited is that they would be given out "Upon settlement on your reserves." (Billy Heavy Runner, Blood).

What is very different in the Treaty 7 interviews is that the tools and animals are not spoken of as things which would provide the Indians with new means to earn a living. The purpose in providing tools and animals is not discussed and only Mr. and Mrs. Bill Heavy Runner (Blood) mention that the Indians "would be taught the use of them." It may be that this way of stating things reflects a feeling that the people really do not have much control over their own economic development anyway. Two Peigan elders, Jack Drow (72) and Tom Yellowhorn (70) cite numerous cases in which either the Indian agent or the Department of Indian Affairs is faulted for trying to control something which the Indians had been handling perfectly well. For example, Tom Yellowhorn says, "It has always been that whatever possessions an Indian had or money earned, was always controlled by the Indian agent," and people could not even sell their own horses without interference by the agent.
It is clear that even though personnel such as Indian agents and agricultural experts are not mentioned as something that was promised to the people, they were provided. The Treaty 6 elders did not seem delighted with these government personnel in terms of their performance, but the elders did regard them as being potentially useful for the Indians.

Treaty 7 elders either do not mention these personnel (and certainly not as something "promised" to them) or else speak of them in a very negative fashion. It may be that they have had particularly unpleasant experiences with the personnel or perhaps that the treaty commissioners did not "sell" the idea as well as they did for the Treaty 6 area.

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