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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Describes the preparation and preservation of food.
- Describes the making of weapons.

Ka-tcakise-ikanipa-nik -- Maple Sugar.

Every spring we used to come up here to make maple sugar, even if we were far south on the prairie. It was the women's job but the men helped. A short slanting notch was cut in the trunk of the tree about a foot from the ground. It was done by placing a knife against the tree and striking the blade. Below this cut another one was made. It was shorter and horizontal. In this a stick was placed so that the sap ran down the slanting cut onto the stick. From there it dripped into vessels made out of whole buffalo horns or birch bark, which were set on the ground.

The sap was collected from the cups and spilled into a container made out of a rawhide propped up with sticks. A big fire was built and the sap boiled over it in a big kettle. When it was boiled down it is transferred to another kettle which is placed on warm ashes. A two-foot wooden paddle is used to stir this mixture. The stirring is kept up until the syrup is of the proper consistency. The test for this is putting some of it on snow -- if it stays on top it is ready. Then birch boxes are greased with frozen fat and the syrup put in these. These boxes are of the baking pan type. The kettle is then scraped and the scrapings form a kind of brown sugar called pisawihkahiguu. This is put in a buffalo or cow bladder and this in turn put in a rawhide bag. It is kept that way all summer. The syrup hardens and is given to the children. The scrapings are sprinkled over meat. This was the only condiment we had in the old days. We had no salt. Now I like salt and can't get along without it.

Askiwahgenuk -- Indian carrot. Grows in swampy places. In spring they have a sweet sap and that is the only time when they are good to eat. The women gather them, wash them in warm water and then boil them. They dissolve into a thick bouillon. Into this are put pieces of grease and buffalo willow berries. Sometimes little red berries that grow on the kinikimik plant are mixed in instead of the white berries.

There is another plant that looks just like the Indian carrot but it is poisonous. Its roots are bigger. Four of us, all cousins, dug them up once and ate them. We got stiff. They gave us warm water and we vomited. They caught the vomit, added some warm water and placed us[?] in the kettle. Then we were all right. If you eat these, they grow inside of you unless these measures are taken.

Fish:

Prepared by splitting them open and setting on stake alongside the fire. If the fish are fat the insides are not thrown away but are rendered to get the grease. Before opening, the fish may be scraped, but when they are not scraped they hold together better and do not fall to pieces when toasted. Fish are also boiled. They are also dried and kept all summer. The stacks are sliced, dried, cooked, pounded, prepared into pemmican.

Mits-kan -- Fish Trap. In old days it was called so but this is somehow an obscure word and it now is known as asko-nau. When the leaves reach a pretty good size in the spring the fish go down the river and that is when the traps are built. New ones would be made every year for the ice carries the old ones away.

Caches:

In the winter sometimes three or four deer are killed. If the carcasses cannot be taken in, they are skinned, the meat wrapped in the hides. Snow is piled over and a tripod it set

up on which a cloth (to scare the animals), ac-touwa-n, is hung.

Sometimes a platform is built on a tree and the meat piled on and covered over. A hat or some object is suspended over it to flap in the wind and scare the birds. This is called wawa-stahatcigan.

I asked Fine Day about hunting observances, such as the hanging up of a moose bell or deer antlers after a kill. But he denied any knowledge of these among the River people, saying that he had only heard of its being done up north. No bone discarding.

When a bear is located they speak to it and promise it a feast of berries if they kill it at which he will partake. If the bear is killed the feast is given. The berries are held up and the hunter says, "This is what I promised you." The Bear Dance was not given after the killing of a bear. I remember that I saw an old cipiwiyuw long ago kill a bear in his den. He spread the bear out with its head toward the sun (south). He smoked a pipe, talked, offered the pipe to the bear. But in my day this was not done.

There is no special way of hunting bears. But I have heard that they used to sing and make medicine before they went out to hunt. I myself got lots of bear with steel traps.

Muskwaciwawin -- Bear Dance.

A feast was made in the big tipi, wewahtahogan. (See original for diagram.) Then all that belong to the dance go out and sit in a semicircle. The old women have their hair done up into

horns, their eyes blackened around, and bear hides tied around their necks. The men are naked except for a breechclout. They have a gun and a buffalo powder horn slung over one shoulder.

They all sit in a kneeling, doubled-over posture. The headman stands up and talks to kicimanito. Then the drums beat and the dancers start. They unfold their arms, prop themselves up. They look from side to side clumsily, just like bears, bobbing in time to the music. Everybody laughs because it is funny to see them imitating bears. They start another song and the dancers stand up and dance. They do not laugh but still keep looking around and imitating bears. They do not dance in rows or in any order but are all mixed up. Then one of them loads his gun with powder and shoots just as if he were hunting a bear. All the dancers scatter and run away. Some of them climb up on trees or travois just as bears would do. Then another song is started, and they start to dance again.

Old Chicken's grandfather used to make this dance but when he died no one carried it on. He used to raise little bear cubs and when they were big let them go. This was on account of the dance but they were not really used in the dance. When a Bear Dance was given the cubs would be brought and the boys would tease them.

Only those that belonged to the dance ate in the tipi. But anybody could join in the dancing. A person belonged to the dance after they had promised to give one or to give something away at the dance pending the recovery of a sick relative or the successful return from a war trip. After you once gave the dance you could eat in the tipi.

We used to hunt moose and elk and lynx in these hills. There was a lot of game here in the old days and we killed a lot for food and clothing. We would throw away much of the carcass except the muzzle (of moose), meat and hide. But we depended mostly on the buffalo. This was because anybody could kill buffalo but it took a good hunter to get moose or elk.

I never hunted caribou or saw one but I often saw and followed their tracks in the muskegs. When I was in the country of the Stonies who live near the Rocky Mountains, they taught me how to kill mountain sheep. You have to get above them. They never watch above, only below.

Martens always were very easy to get. Just set a trap with fish bait. Or, if you track it, you just follow the trail fast and sing loud. The marten gets scared, goes up a tree, and you have him.

When I hunted moose or elk or any big game up north I always had a gun. But I know that other men my age used to hunt moose and elk with bows and arrows. I did run down and kill many buffalo with the bow and arrow.

In my young days there might be only four muzzleloaders in a big camp of Cree. The Sotos always had more guns than the Cree. Among the Cree themselves the Prairie people had fewest guns and the House people most. The Blackfeet had more guns than the Cree which they got from the south and from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Before my time guns were very costly. There were only two Hudson's Bay stores, one at Winnipeg and one at Rocky Mountain House. A man would have to travel far and have many furs to get a gun. When an Indian did get one he wouldn't give it away or sell it. They didn't know how to fix the guns if they broke and after a few years the guns would be made into scrapers or fleshers for hides. When I was a young man guns were more plentiful but a young fellow would have none and would have to borrow one. On raids those who had guns took them along but I have seen men go armed only with bows and arrows. I myself did this on my first trip. When buffalo were hunted on foot, arrows were used.

Before a man goes out on a raid sometimes he may promise a gun to the Great Spirit. He makes a sweetgrass smudge, holds up a pipe, promises gun on return and specifies where it will be left. Only this man may use a gun so promised. Upon return the gun may be used until the time specified. This is not done for success in hunting.

At the time specified, the man goes to a tree and stands toward the sun at noon. He holds the gun up and says, "You heard me when I asked you to have good luck on my trip. Anyone can take this gun and borrow it but he must leave something for its use. He will then have good luck. When he returns he must hang it up again. I ask you to help us."

Then he cocks the hammer, passes a saganapi under it and lowers the hammer. Thus fastened, the gun is hung up.

This gun may be borrowed for fighting purposes only by the original giver or by someone else. When the gun is taken something else is hung up as payment. When the gun is returned, as it must be, the payment is not taken back but left.

Abandonment of aged:

I never have seen old people left behind but I heard that they did it a long time ago. My mother's father used to tell me about finding two old people dead in a tipi, having been left behind with a little water and provisions. He used to name the old people thus found. I heard the Cipiwiyniwuk talk about this too. Horses were very scarce in those days and they couldn't carry everybody.

I heard that an infant would be tied to a horse and the horse let loose so that its powa-guu would be strong. This was done mostly among the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre. I didn't see it done. Poor people used to do it.

Paskitcigana-tca-hpi -- Arrow Gun.

This is a crossbow. A stock is whittled out and a hole made near the end. Into this the bow is inserted. A groove for the arrows and a notch for the drawn bowstring is cut into the stock. Short-feathered arrows were used. I heard that this bow was used long, long ago for all kinds of hunting and for war. In my day it was just a toy for the boys to play with. They would kill birds with it. It was abandoned because they found a better way of making arrows. I wonder how they came to use the word paskitcigana, gun, for this when they never saw a gun in the old days.

Cimagama-htca-pi - Knife Bow.

This is a bow with a spearhead affixed to one end. It is larger than a regular bow and is used when they closed in on the enemy as well as for arrow shooting. My father-in-law had one that he kept wrapped up. The bayonet part was made of a Hudson's Bay knife.

Tahgatcigun -- Lance.

These were used for fighting only. The head was made of iron about two feet long. They bought the heads from the Hudson's

Bay Company. The stick was about four feet long and had arrows at the end. Chicken's father had one that had eagle feathers on the end. He kept it wrapped in otter skin.

Pahpaha-gwun -- Shield.

I never saw how they made these but I saw many around. It was made of the neck hide of a buffalo, heat-treated so that it shrivelled and took on a concave shape. Holes are punched around the hide before it is heated, and when it is shrunk feathers are inserted. In the middle the owner would paint a picture of his pawagwi. There was a saganapi attached to the top and by means of it the shield was kept slung on the shoulder when not in use. In battle it was held at the top and

braced by the forearm. I have heard that a round shot could not penetrate it. Sometimes an Indian would make one and the bullet or arrow would go right through it. This was because his pawagun did not tell him to make it. I saw many of these shields but there were only a few Cree who had them. I have never seen or heard of any kind of armor used. One Cree took a doublet of mail from a Blackfoot. Arrows could not pierce it. Where did he get it from?

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