

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: GEORGE FIRST RIDER
CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES OF
WHISTLES, DOG TRAVOIS, BOW
AND ARROWS
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CARDSTON, ALBERTA
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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:

- Discusses the making and function of whistles.
- Briefly describes the making of a dog travois.
- Mentions the making of bows and arrows.

George First Rider: I am going to illustrate the origin of whistles. The people that first lived didn't know about iron: iron was introduced to us just lately. All the things that we imitate today are from the earlier times and the artifacts from the earlier times are almost extinct now and now we are illustrating them so that we will remember them. The whistle is not ours; shouting is ours. The people didn't know about whistling; the white people taught us how to whistle. Shouting is ours and yodelling sound belongs to the women. Women cannot shout; if a woman shouts she will get a beating from her husband. The whistle originated from the elk that was looking for his wife. This elk was the first one to blow a whistle. The

other is not the only one that blew his whistle; the beavers blew their whistles to reinforce their powers. The reason why a whistle is in the Medicine Pipe Bundle is when a Medicine Pipe owner is going to dance he will dance with the whistle. He will blow his whistle four times, to the east, south, west and to the north. We will see somebody walking at a distance and we will shout at him and he will stop. He will think, "That man is shouting at me. He wants me to go to him." Blowing a whistle is the same. We will hear someone blowing a whistle. I will illustrate it this way. We will hear a coyote howling and when a dog barks that is what the whistles are. Blowing a whistle is not ours; it's an imitation. The elk blew its whistle, the beavers blew their whistles, Medicine Pipe owner blew his whistle. That is why Medicine Pipe owners beat the drums. Noisiness belongs to the Medicine Pipe owners. Blowing whistles belongs to the Water Bundle Society and they own the rattles.

When a person was given the whistle, the story was told to me (First Rider) about the wood; that the first whistle was made out of was a red osier dogwood. Red osier dogwoods have the biggest heartwood. A small stick is used to push out the heartwood of the red osier dogwood so the first whistle was made out of a red osier dogwood. There are still some whistles in some of the Medicine Pipe Bundles. When the white men came then there were whistles that were made out of rifle barrels; the first whistles were put in the Medicine Pipe Bundles. A man kneads out some small twigs. The twigs are heated. They dry fast. Then he thins them out and they are used to punch the wood. Before the men pushed out the heartwood from the red osier dogwood he told the people that were in his tipi, "To drill this wood good, I started out on a horse raid from a certain place and I went straight to the place where I was going to get a horse for myself." The man counted four coups then he stuck the twig into the heartwood of the red osier dogwood and pushed out the heartwood of the red osier dogwood. The first whistle that was made was not long. The Medicine Pipe whistle was the only whistle that is long. The man made a hole on the red osier dogwood then he put in a small amount of

pitch and, as he blew on it, it gave a sound. The people of the past made pipestems out of red osier dogwood and when iron and metal were available they used oak to make their pipestems. Then the Indians used heated irons to bore holes through their pipestems. Before an Indian bores a hole through his pipestem he will invite the chief warriors and they will count war coups so that they may bore a straight hole. When a hole is going to be bored through a Medicine Pipe stem, as the stem is long and the iron for boring is short, a hole will be made from end of the stem as far as the iron can go and then a hole will be bored from the other end and the two ends will meet. The men will count coups before they bore a hole in the stem. The Water Bundle Society make their whistles out of a wood that was gnawed off by a beaver. I (First Rider) saw one of the whistles. I saw an old man. He lived over one hundred years; his name is Big Swan Old Man. He made a whistle out of a wood that was gnawed off by a beaver and wears it around his neck. There was no hole made in it but, when he blows on it, it give

a whistling sound. So that is how Water Bundle Society whistles are made.

The people of the earlier times have wooden whistles. Time passed on and then a whistle was made out of a gun barrel and pitch is used in the hole of the whistle. When a pitch is dry it hardens up like a rock; it will never get soaked even if it gets wet again. The pitch is always used in a whistle; that gives the sound when a whistle is blown. Later on the Indian discovered to make a whistle out of the wing bone of an eagle. The wing bone was cut to the same length of a wood that was gnawed off by a beaver. The wood that the Water Bundle Society use for a whistle.

The Motoki have whistles too. And the buffalo grunts. The old bull buffaloes grunt while walking. When the cattle were brought west the grunt of the buffalo was not called grunting any more, it's called crazy bellowing. The Motoki couldn't be grunting while dancing so the ones that wear bird headdresses were given whistles. So the whistling of the Motoki is the whistling of the birds. The Scabby Bulls couldn't be grunting while they are dancing, that does not sound good. So they also took the whistles. Those were the wooden whistle, then after, the wing bones of eagles. We can make a whistle out of the green bark of a tree. A length of the bark will be peeled off and it will be cut to a certain length in two parts and then a green leaf will be put between the two sections of bark and held together. And when you blow on it, it will give a sound like a horn. It is also called a whistle; this bark whistle was used by boys.

The Motoki were a different groups. There are the Scabby Bulls, the bird headdress group, the snake headdress group and the owner of the centre pole. They're all in different groups and they all have different sounds; they're of all different kind of birds and animals. They're not all of the same kind. The Motoki communicate by the whistle; they hear each other by the whistle. It's the same as in all different tribes, a person will have to speak English in order to get acquainted with another person. I'll say even if a person is a Blackfoot Indian and the other Blackfoot Indians will be talking English, and this Blackfoot Indian doesn't speak English and he doesn't understand what the others are talking about, in this case he will be all alone, by himself. He will not be able to get acquainted with the other Blackfoot Indians. But if they talk Blackfoot then he will know what they're talking about.

In the other example -- a Cree Indian, a Gros Ventre Indian, a Crow Indian, a Sarcee Indian and a Blackfoot Indian -- all these different Indians cannot understand each other. The only time they will hear each other is when they sing. So that is how the whistle is. That is why the Motoki blow on their whistles; it's the whistling that gathers them together. Now the Water Bundle Society have all various kind of animals and birds in their bundle and every pelt has a song and they don't give the same sound. It's their whistles that gathers together. A

Medicine Pipe owner's outer wrapping for his pipe is a bear skin, and the loon, the owl and all the animals and bird skins that are in the bundle don't all have the same ways; they're all different from each other. They hear each other by the whistle.

The Cree Lodge dancers stand around the centre pole and they can't talk to the centre pole. We think that the centre pole of the lodge is holy. The dancers will see a painted face and they'll paint their faces in the same way as the facial painting that they saw on the holy centre pole. The lodge dancers can't talk to the vision on the lodge centre pole but they communicate with the vision with their whistles; that is what the whistles are for.

When the Water Bundle Society start blowing their whistles we'll know that the Water Bundle ceremonial singing is in full swing. When somebody blows a whistle in a Medicine Pipe dance we will know that the dance is on and that someone is going to dance with the whistle. When the Motoki start blowing their whistles we'll also know that they have started to dance. Whistles are used in most of the transferable sacred bundles. The drumming and rattling... I will explain it the other way. The All Brave Dog Society also drum and blow their whistles at the same. The whistles are not just made. A person that is going to make a whistle will make vow. He'll say, "I will donate this whistle to a certain society so that it will turn out good." Every society operates by whistles, drums and

rattles. Men cannot operate alone, the women will help them. When cutting the centre lodge pole and when it starts to fall whistles are blown and whistles are also blown when the centre lodge pole is raised. Whistles, drums and rattles are used at a lot of ceremonies. I (First Rider) think that whistles are mostly used. The Medicine Pipe that saw, the whistle to it was a wooden whistle. The wooden whistles don't make shrill sounds when they are blown; the gun barrel whistles have more shriller sound when they are blown.

I (First Rider) heard that when a woman is going to cut her pole she will take her whistle and she goes out alone and when she got to the woods she looked for the willow that she was going to cut. When she found the willow and before she cut it down she said, "O willow, may I cut you down nicely because I am going to load some tongues on you?" The woman started to cut the willow and when she was about to break it loose she blew her whistle. Then she broke it and then she cut it half ways to the top. She did not scrape the bark off right away. She scraped it after it dried and then she greased it. She didn't go home with the willow. It was said that she will stay with it for two days in the woods and then it will be ready. Yellow flowers were used to polish the willow; after it is polished it will have a yellow color. When the woman got home she put the willows behind her tipi; the willows had yellow color because they were polished with yellow flowers. The willows got real dry after four days and then they were taken

inside and a portion of a hide was cut and she used it for a saddle over her dog travois that she made. The poles of the travois did not protrude over the dog's head. They were short and the loading section of the dog travois didn't have a floor. Only two sticks were tied across but a rawhide was secured to the two crosspieces and the loading section is hollow; the bottom of the rawhide will drag. The dog travois had a saddle and a breast strap but it has no cinch so that the dog can sit down if it gets tired. The loading section of a horse travois has a floor.

And now a woman will die. People will not say, "She is dead," they'll say, "She is gone to make her travois." When a woman goes away to make a travois means prayer. It's just the same with people that go to pick ochre. They pray continually while they're getting the ochre. A boy will not eat when he goes out to look for his arrows. He fasts so that his arrows may not crack when they are dry and so that his bow may not dry crooked. They pray very hard and they'll cut the willows with which they'll make their arrows. I (First Rider) already told the story of arrows. Wooden pegs will be driven into the ground. The bow will be planed on one side leaving a space in

the middle. The bow will be soaked overnight and then it will be put between the pegs and it'll dry up between the pegs. It takes two days for a bow to dry up. The boy that went for arrows kept praying so that he may cut the willows good. Coups will be counted before carving out the arrowhead. Coups will also be counted before tying on the bow string. Coups are also counted before taking the feathers from the old arrow. The feathers are then attached to the new arrows. When a boy or a man dies the people will not say, "He is dead," they will say, "He is gone to get some arrows." And if a girl or a woman dies we will not say, "She is dead," we'll say, "She is gone to make a travois." Now these are stories.

Us, we will be going out to work. The reason why we are going to work is to make money. So these are the works of the old people. They will pray before the work and fast before they work on something. It's the same in constructing a lodge. We will not eat and we can't wash our faces with water. It might rain if we do. We'll wash our faces with oil and we will wipe our faces with a muskrat skin. When people are going to work on something they pray before they do the work and today it is still like that. Today if a person knows about the Horn Society and if he is told to give the history of the Horn Society, the person will say, "I can't because misfortune might come to me." So I conclude my story.

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