Indian Education for All

Your Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Pow Wows

Thanks to:
Murton McCluskey, Ed.D.

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Introduction

The following pages include a collection of information which is intended to help the reader better understand and enjoy the events and activities which occur at many of the plains area pow wows and celebrations. Because the customs, rules and regulations may vary from one celebration to another, the booklet should serve only as a basic guide and not as an authoritative directory. It is merely designed as a resource to help the reader to be more knowledgeable and better able to understand and enjoy the history, events, activities and planning of a pow wow. Comments and suggestions are welcomed for improving future revisions.

The author would like to thank those individuals who have provided the materials, information and expertise for this booklet. This project could not have been completed without their help.

Developed by:
Murton McCluskey, Ed.D.
4804 7th Ave. South
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 727-1101
(May 1995)

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History of the Pow Wow

A *Pow Wow* is a gathering where Native American dancing, singing and celebration take place. There are several different pow wows that take place throughout the country; however, this booklet will talk about pow wows in general and, more specifically, about pow wows along the northern tier of the United States.

Some reports say that the word pow wow has its origin from the Pawnee word pa-wa, meaning "to eat." Other sources say the word is of Algonquin origin and was originally pronounced pauau, which indicates a gathering of people for purpose of celebration or important event. In any case, it is a special time for people to gather and celebrate, meet old friends and create new friendships.

In early times, hunters would invite their friends and relatives to share their good fortune.

As time went on, while the meal was being prepared, relatives would dance to honor their host. Eventually, the dancing became the main focus of the event. Participants began to use this time to display their weaving, quill work and other finery. Pow wows also had religious significance. They were an opportunity for families to hold naming and honoring ceremonies.

Pow wows have changed over the years. However, they are still gatherings where Indian people can share part of their tribal traditions and culture. But they should not be confused with other tribal customs and ceremonies that are not performed or shared in public gatherings.

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Today, pow wows, or celebrations, are still very much part of the lives of many Native Americans. In the Northern Area, the pow wow season can begin as early as March; from June through September several pow wows, also called celebrations, take place—somewhere—every weekend. Many families pack up and go on the circuit, camping out and enjoying the celebration activities, singing, dancing and seeing friends they may not have seen since the previous season.

A pow wow may have dancing and singing contests, "give aways," encampments, feasting and other cultural activities. In present times, activities such as handgames (stick games), horse races, softball tournaments, parades, pow wow princess contests and other events have been added.

Most religious ceremonies are no longer part of the pow wows. For instance, naming ceremonies are now more often conducted in the privacy of a family; however, some small pow wows do include naming ceremonies. Honoring ceremonies and ceremonies for a dropped eagle feather remain today.

Competitive singing and dancing for prize money is a recent change in the traditional pow wow. Prize money is awarded to top point-getters at the culmination of the event for both dancing and singing/drumming competitions.

The circle is an important symbol to Native Americans. You will see that at many large pow wows that the dancers are in the center of a circle, the drums and the audience form a circle around them, and the concessions and encampment form another circle around the gathering. This is symbolic of the life cycle. The pow wow brings the circle of people closer to their family, friends and Native American culture.

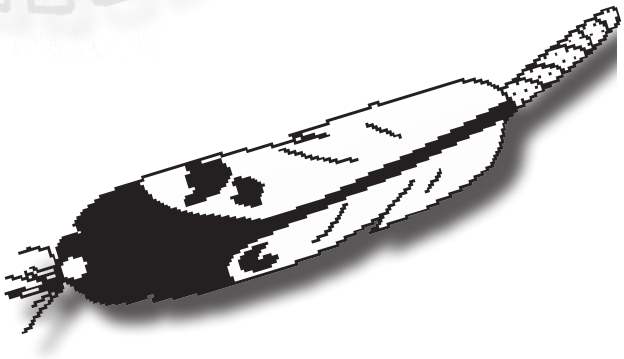
When you attend a pow wow, you will see children (tiny tots) as young as two or three years old in dancing outfits. You will also see elders partaking in the dancing. Although many pow wows have competition dancing for money, trophies or other prizes, not everyone dances for prizes. For many it is a time of celebration and to participate in one's culture.

Dancing was one of the first aspects of Native American culture to come under criticism by missionaries and the federal government. In the 1880s, the federal government forbade most forms of dancing fearing that all dancing was a form of war dancing. The ghost dance was especially feared. It was not until the 1920s that the Native peoples were again allowed to dance and practice parts of their religion.

Many Native Americans have moved to the urban areas and, as part of their desire to maintain their cultural identities, have continued to hold intertribal celebrations. This gives them a chance to interact with Native Americans from other tribes, as well as expose their children to the culture. Many large urban centers hold traditional pow wows.

> *The pow wow brings the circle of people closer to their family, friends and Native American culture.*

Many Indian ceremonial events, like the Sun Dance (Plains) or Hopi Rain Dance (southwest), are not open to the public, but most pow wows are. Everyone is welcome. Some, but not all, pow wows charge admission.



The Pow Wow Committee

Pow wows are not spontaneous happenings nor do they automatically occur on a certain date. Usually, they are the result of a lot of hard work done by many dedicated people who work for an entire year to make sure that the pow wow is successful.

The Pow Wow Committee for most pow wows is made up of volunteers, who may or may not be sanctioned by the tribal government or organization, but who are responsible for making sure all arrangements for the pow wow are made. They do the planning, fund-raising, publicity, set dates, make rules, set policy, etc. Members of the committee are respected members of the community and are usually able to get the support of the community in helping with the various jobs or activities that need to be carried out. To show their appreciation for the honor of serving on the committee and for the community's cooperation, the pow wow committee members, or at least subcommittee heads, will usually have a give-away during the pow wow.

Pow wows are the result of a lot of hard work done by many dedicated people who work for an entire year to make sure that it is successful.

Head Staff

The Head Staff are usually the heads of different aspects of the visible operations of the pow wow. Often the Pow Wow Committee chair is designated as Head Staff. Other persons designated as Head Staff are usually the announcer(s), head or host drum, head man dancer, head lady dancer, head boy dancer, head girl dancer, arena director, head judge, (sometimes drum keeper, water carrier, etc.). Each member of the head staff has responsibilities which they are called upon during the pow wow to carry out.

Judges and Scoring

The selection of judges is very important to ensure a successful pow wow. At some pow wows the head judges are selected by the Pow Wow Committee; they may also recommend singing and dancing judges. The head judges must have knowledge of the contest dances and the songs that will be sung. The head judges choose other judges (usually five) from the spectators, dancers or singers participating in the pow wow. Each dancer, at some time in his/her life, must have been a singer or dancer and be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations of the contest. The head dancing judge, or Arena Director, organizes the Grand Entry, chooses different judges for each contest session and makes the final decision on disputes that may arise over judging or scoring.

The head singing judge is responsible for selecting different judges for each contest session and settling disputes over scoring.

As each dancer takes his/her turn in the arena, the judges may look for the following criteria when scoring contestants:

- Participation in the Grand Entry, for which they are given additional points.
- Intricacy of the dancer's footwork and style.
- The dancer's ability to keep time with the drum. (If the dancer fails to stop on the last drum beat, he/she will be disqualified.)
- The quality of the dancer's outfit (note that the word costume is not used) and how the dancer presents him/herself.
- The judge will look to see if a dancer drops or loses part of his/her outfit, for which he/she will be disqualified. The dancer will also lose points if he/she is unprepared and not fully dressed for the contest.

The selection of judges and the score keeping methods may vary from pow wow to pow wow. The following are but two methods which have been used in the judging process:

Chief White Eagle and his wife, Pawnee, in their booklet titled, My Pow Wow Manual (date unknown), use the following criteria when judging and scoring—

The judges are very important because they are the ones who select the winners in the different contests. If possible, they should be selected ahead of time, so they can be told what is expected of them. Here are some suggestions for picking judges:

1. Judges should be Indians who know the different dances and who can understand the rules for judging.
2. Judges should not be related by family or marriage to any of the contestants. The judge should disqualify him/herself so the dancer can have a chance to compete.
3. My suggestion for judging for speed and accuracy is simple. Have each judge mark his/her card first, second and third. Give three (3) points for first, two (2) points for second, and one (1) point for third. Each judge should sign or initial the card. Do this as soon as possible and give the card to the Head Judge. An odd number of judges is best to lessen the chance of ties.
4. These points should be judged for sure, as well as other points that may be awarded by the organization sponsoring the pow wow.

    a. The (outfit) must be authentic and complete—headdress, apron, moccasins, and bells or rattles. In some cases bells will not be worn, according to the custom of the dancer's tribe.

    b. Any dancer losing part of his/her (outfit) will be automatically disqualified.

    c. Any missed step (in) starting, dancing and stopping. In some places when the drum stops the dancer must have both feet on the ground; however, the local club will set the rules for the judges.

5. Judges do not talk to or ask questions from another judge, and do not talk to or with any dancer.

The United Tribes Education and Technical Center Pow Wow in Bismarck, North Dakota (WOW, September 1980), uses a different method for scoring and judging. Their system is as follows:

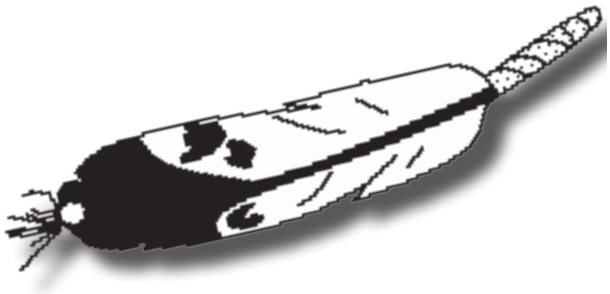
The Pow Wow committee uses a six-point spread system that makes a tie score more difficult. If the categories being judged have four winners (Men's Fancy, Men's Traditional, Women's Fancy and Women's Traditional) five judges are used per session. The points used are: 21, 15, 9, and 3. The other categories have five place winners and thus have six judges. Points used are 27, 21, 9 and 3.

The dancers receive points according to: (1) timing with the drum, (2) outfit, (3) sportsmanship, and (4) both feet must be on the ground upon completion of the song and the last beat of the drum.

After judges pick the winners of that session, they record their numbers on their score sheets according to their places. The head dancing judge will collect the score sheets and will hand them to the scorekeeper. The scorekeeper transfers the scores into the official scorekeeping book.

Any dancer, singing group or spectator is permitted to see the score book after the completion of the dancing and singing contests (Sunday night). During the dancing and singing contest competitions no one is allowed to see the score book (no judges or officials). If a dancer or singing group questions the final scores they received, they may ask to see a copy of the judges' original score sheets.

The spectators may want to familiarize themselves with the scoring and judging system being used at the pow wow which they are viewing. This may make the events more enjoyable and exciting to watch.



Contest Rules and Regulations

As previously stated, different pow wows have different rules and regulations which they follow to govern their celebration. Some are old and have been in place for hundreds of years, while others may be fairly new and are in a constant state of modification. The rules and regulations have been included in this booklet to make the spectators more aware of the planning, order and intricacies that are involved in putting on a successful pow wow.

> *Some rules are old and have been in place for hundreds of years, while others may be fairly new and are in a constant state of modification.*

The United Tribes Pow Wow in North Dakota (WOW, September, 1980) have used the following regulations, as they apply to dancers and singers.

Singers

1. All singing groups must be eligible for prize money.
2. All singing groups must be seated 10 minutes before the Grand Entry.
3. All singers will sing with their assigned groups only. No Drum Hopping. No Exceptions.
4. There will be no fewer than three (3) singers per drum, and no more than 10 per drum.
5. The decision of the Dancing and Singing Contest Judges shall be final in all events.
6. Important: Singers under the influence of alcohol or drugs will result in disqualification of that singing group for that session.
7. Intertribal Singing: All singing groups shall be required to limit their songs; 4-2 or straight 6. Should a participant use a whistle for a particular singing group, they will be permitted to continue singing.
8. Whistles: Participants shall be limited to three whistles per singing group or drum. Note: It is a tradition that individuals who use the whistles are required to donate to the singing group that is singing.
9. During contest songs, singing groups shall be required to limit their songs to 4-2 or straight 6, except for trick songs, which can be used except during the final dancing competition.
10. Should singing groups not comply with all rules and regulations, they will lose 20 points.

Dancers

1. All Dancing Contest participants entering the Dancing Contest are required to register for prize money.
2. Dancing Contest participants are required to participate in all Grand Entries.
3. Dancers must be in full dress and ready to go 10 minutes before Grand Entry time. Points will be deducted for failure to participate in the Grand Entry; 20 points will be added for participating.
4. Dancers competing in various dance contests are eligible to sing with a singing group provided they are registered with that group.
5. Dancers must, at all times, keep in time with the drum beat. Bells must be worn.
6. Should a contestant lose any part of his/her outfit during the contest, he/she will be disqualified for that session.
7. Upon completion of the song and last beat of the drum, both feet must be on the ground. The body can be in any position.
8. Trick songs can be used, except in the finals.
9. No dancer shall dance under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This will be considered an automatic disqualification for that session.

The Grand Entry

Although pow wows may differ, depending on the location or type, the following is a system used by many pow wows throughout the plains area. Many pow wows use the following format:

First the eagle staff is carried into the circle, followed by the American, Canadian, state and tribal flags, followed by the title holders from tribal pageants. Other invited dignitaries are next, followed by the men: traditional dancers first, then grass dancers and fancy dancers. Women come next, followed by traditional dancers, fancy shawl dancers and jingle dress dancers. Next are the junior boys, then girls, in the same order as the adults. The last to enter are the little boys, traditional and fancy dancers, and the little girls, traditional and fancy dancers.

The dancers dance sunwise—clockwise—around the arbor, showing the audience that they are ready to begin, showing their outfits (the term costume is seen by some as derogatory) and their dance steps letting those who watch know who they are and what they can do. (Note: This may vary from tribe to tribe or Pow Wow to Pow Wow.)

When the Grand Entry song ends, there is a flag song, an equivalent of the national anthem. Then there is an invocation blessing the gathering. After that, the eagle staff (always positioned above the American Flag to signify the first nation) is tied to the pole in the center of the arbor or brought to the announcer's stand. A welcome is extended and then there may be a few words by various dignitaries. When this portion of the ceremony is completed, the dancing can begin.

Pow Wow Participants

Dancers from tribes throughout the United States and Canada participate in hundreds of pow wows and celebrations each year. They come from every state in the Union and every province of Canada. At times, even participants from the Native tribes of South America participate. Some smaller pow wows serve as opportunities to gather during the winter months and may be more of a local event.

Dancers from tribes throughout the United States and Canada participate in hundreds of pow wows and celebrations each year.

Only registered contestants can participate in the dance contests, but when the announcer calls for an Intertribal dance, everyone can take part—tourists included. You don't need a feather, beads or bells; you can dance in your street clothes. There are no spectators at a pow wow. Everyone is considered a participant, even if you don't do anything but lend your presence. Everyone has a place in the circle of people.

The Announcer(s)

No pow wow is complete without Announcers. They are the orchestrators and motivators. They keep the Dancing and Singing Contests moving and keep the public informed about what is taking place. The more the announcer knows about the dances and songs, the better he/she will be able to keep the events moving and be able to call more specialty numbers. He/she may also entertain by telling jokes, making comments and giving directions. He/she also can set the atmosphere for the crowd and contestants.

Arena Director

This is the individual whose responsibility it is to keep track of the dance contests, singers and special events. The announcers keep the pow wow going in an orderly fashion and are very valuable in assuring a successful celebration.

Head Dancers

The Native American tribes have always strived to present exemplary role models for members of the tribe to follow. The Head Male Dancer and Head Female Dancer are such role models. Individuals who exhibit outstanding traditional qualities are asked to serve in this capacity. The responsibilities of this position include being present throughout the pow wow activities and leading the dancers by being the first to begin each dance.

There are no spectators at a pow wow. Everyone is considered a participant, even if you don't do anything but lend your presence. Everyone has a place in the circle of people.

The Drum, Songs and Singers

The Drum

Drums can come from a variety of sources. Some are handed down in a family; others are donated to a drum group. Older drums are made of deer, elk or horse hides, but contemporary bass drums can be purchased or renovated, and even blessed, just as are the older drums.

The drum is more than just a musical instrument to those who own and play it; it has its own life. Some drum groups have gone through ceremonies and have had their drums blessed and named. The drum has its own powerful spirit. Gifts are made to the drum and some drums have their own sacred medicine pipes. In some traditions, the drum symbolizes the heartbeat; in others, the powerful medicine of thunder.

Regardless of the tradition, the drum must always be treated with respect as a sacred object or entity. Nothing is ever placed on the drum, nor does anyone ever reach across it. Many drums even have their own songs, which are frequently sung as a warm-up at the beginning of the pow wow/celebration.

The beat of the drum is like a heartbeat, starting slowly and then beating more quickly as the singers get further into the song. The drum sticks connect the singers to the power of the drum as they sing.

> *The drum is more than just a musical instrument to those who own and play it; it has its own life.*

The drumming is judged in contests by the rhythm of the song. Usually the drum group is only judged on the songs they sing for the dance contests and on intertribal songs. There are many different rhythms and drum beats played, and each type of contest song requires a different one. The drum beats must be in perfect time, and each player must be in perfect unison.

The basic drum beats include the roll, a very fast drum beat, a slow steady processional beat; the Omaha beat, (the most frequently used round dance beat 1**2**1**2**1**2**- the boldface numbers indicate the more forceful beat); and the social dance beat, which is strongly accented (121212) and ranges from medium to fast. (The drum beat that is heard in movies and old Westerns is NOT authentic.)

The Host Drum is picked by the Pow Wow Committee. They are the invited drum by choice of the Pow Wow Committee, and they are often called upon for special songs or ceremonies.

Singing

Different types of songs are sung for different events—Grand Entries, dance contests and honoring ceremonies. Songs are made for all reasons. Although they differ in tempo, words and emotion, pow wow songs all follow a similar structure. The lead singer selects the songs to be sung

for a contest. He/she may hit the drums once to let the dancers and other singers know the song is about to start. The lead singer, the first the people hear, will sing alone a phrase or a tune called lead or push-up. The rest of the group repeats the lead, this is called second. Then all the singers sing the melody (first part) and a repetition of the melody (second part) together. One rendition of the song can also be called push-up, so if the announcer asks a drum for four push-ups they will sing the grouping of the lead, second, fourth part and second part four times.

There are three kinds of songs:

- all words;
- all melody (these songs are sung with vocables, syllables without meaning used to carry the melody); and
- those with vocables for the lead, second and first part and words for the second part.

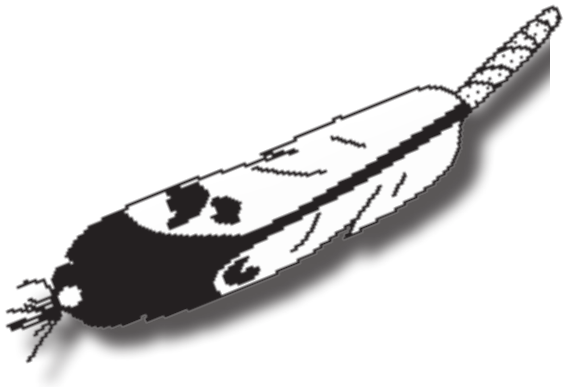
Many times, at the end of the second push-up, four or five honor beats or accent beats are heard from the drum. Some say they represent gun shots. Others say each of the four beats is for the four directions, and the fifth is for Mother Earth and the Great Spirit. The honor or accent beats are a signal to the dancers and singers that another push-up is about to begin or the song is about to end.

There are songs for all occasions: honor songs, veterans' songs, and war party songs, but many of the pre-reservation songs have been put aside in favor of the flood of new songs being composed. Some singing groups sing nothing but their own songs. Others borrow songs in addition to performing their own. The songs aren't written down, but tape recorded and learned from the recordings by singers and dancers, too.

Contest singers, unlike pop stars, aren't judged by the sweetness of their voice. In the Northern Plains, the higher parts of the song are sung in falsetto and the melody gains energy and rhythm as the voice descends. The sound is produced in the back part of an open mouth and throat with the volume and quality of the voice depending largely on well-developed abdominal muscles. Singers are judged on the range, volume, strength and expressive quality of their voices and the way they blend with the rest of the group.

Women singing an octave higher than the men may sometimes join in the latter part of each rendition. Women may also trill (a high-pitched sound made with the tongue) in special places in the song to indicate deep feelings such as joy, or appreciation of the song, or in honor of a specific person or event.

Drum groups have recently begun to win Grammy's for their recordings in the new Native American music category.



The Flag Song

Many Indian tribes around the turn of the century adopted a song with which to honor the flag of the United States. The Flag Song has since been utilized by the tribes at the beginning of virtually all events in almost precisely the same manner in which mainstream America has adopted the Star Spangled Banner.

The Honor Song

Note: Spectators should always stand and remove their caps or hats during an Honor Song. As the name suggests, Honor Songs are requested at the pow wow/celebration to honor someone. Perhaps a family would request an Honor Song for a son who returned from being away, or in the memory of a deceased relative. Honor Songs can be made for almost any occasion. In some traditions, people with an Indian name have their own songs and those songs are sung if the person is to be honored. In other instances, there are "generic" honor songs for people without their own song.

The Trick Song

These songs are usually sung only for the fancy dancers and shawl dancers. A Trick Song is really a contest between the dancers and singers. The drummers try to fool the dancers into missing beats or failing to stop on time. Singers will either pick a specially-composed song or transform another song by agreeing among themselves when they will stop.

Dances and Dancers

Men's Traditional Dance

The men's traditional dance is just that: a traditional dance held over from times when war parties would return to the village and dance out the story of the battle, or hunters would return and dance their story of tracking an enemy or prey.

The outfit of the traditional dance is more subdued in color than the other dancers. The outfits are frequently decorated with bead and quill work. Traditional dancers wear a circular bustle of eagle feathers, representing cycles and the unity of everything. The eagle feather spikes on the bustle point upward, representing a channel between the Great Spirit and all things on earth.

The traditional dancers are usually veterans and carry, as they dance, many traditional items that symbolize their status as warriors. Traditional dancers carry shields, weapons, honor staffs (used to challenge the enemy and decorated with eagle feathers representing achievements in battle) and medicine wheels (carried as a reminder of the wisdom of the four directions, unity, and for the cycle of all things in the universe).

The traditional step is done with the ball of the foot touching the ground on the 1 beat, the whole foot on the 2 beat. The traditional dancer's movements are patterned after animals and birds, like the grouse, and may be an imitation of the tracking of the animals themselves.

The men's traditional dance competition is generally divided into five age groups: 50 plus, men, teen, junior boys and little boys (nine and under). Dancers are judged on how well they keep time to the music, follow the beat of the drum and stop when the music does, with both feet on the ground.

Men's Fancy Dance

The *Fancy Dance* is a relatively new dance. The brilliantly colored feather bustles are said to have originated in Oklahoma in the early 1900s when promoters of large Native American ceremonials asked dancers to beautify their outfits for the spectators. Also at that time, the dance contest for cash prizes was introduced and contestants started making their outfits more colorful as a result.

The Fancy Dance—danced mostly by boys and young men—is based on the standard double step of the traditional grass dances, but it takes off from there with fancy footwork, increased speed, acrobatic steps and motions, and varied body movements. The Fancy Dance is also a freestyle kind of dance. Dancers do whatever they can to keep up with the music! They, too, must follow the changing beat of the drum, stop when the music does and have both feet on the ground. The Fancy Dance competition is divided into four categories: men, teen boys, junior boys, and little boys.

Men's Grass Dance

Much has been written about the *Grass Dance*. Borrowed from the Omaha tribe, perhaps in the 1860s, the dance is very popular. Dancer's outfits feature a good deal of colorful fringe, replacing the grasses dancers originally tucked into their belts. Many dancers wear the hair roach, the crow-belt, and the eagle-bone whistle—originally emblems for the Omaha society.

The basic step of the Grass Dance involves the ball of one foot being tapped on one beat and placed down flatly with the next, repeating the action on the opposite foot without missing a beat. Each time the foot is placed flatly on the ground, the weight is shifted to that foot. Dancers should keep their heads moving either up or down with the beat of the drum, nodding quickly, several times to each beat, or moving from side to side. The purpose of this action is to keep the roach crest feathers spinning. To keep the feathers moving constantly is the sign of a good dancer.

Although the Grass Dance is a freestyle type of dancing, dancers must follow the changing beat of the drum and stop when the music does, with both feet on the ground. The competition is divided into four categories: men, teen, junior, and little boys.

Sneak-Up Dance

The *Sneak-Up Dance* follows a definite pattern of drum rolls in the first half of the four renditions and a standard Omaha beat in the second half of each of the four renditions. On the

drum roll, the dancers shake their bells and make gestures of either following or seeking out the enemy. On the Omaha beats, they sneak up, advancing toward the center and stopping on the last beat of the song, then walking back to the perimeter. The fourth rendition doesn't end as the first three do, but continues with three or four straight Omaha renditions, so the song is actually sung six or seven times in all. The Sneak-Up Song doesn't have a traditional song ending, but ends on the word manipe instead.

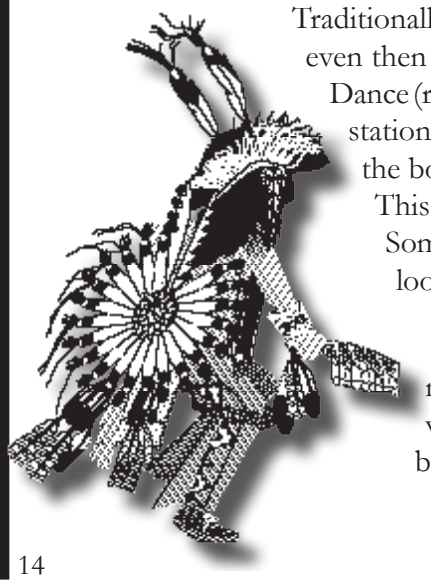
The War Dance

The *War Dance* cannot function as it once did, but it is one of the principal features of a pow wow. Traditionally, the War Dance was a major event in itself that was performed after a battle.

As it was first performed, the men returning from war remained outside the village to clean themselves and prepare for entry into the village. The warriors then entered the village in a procession, each acting out his exploits in battle through dance. Through his movements of stalking and subduing the enemy, each told his personal story. Today, the War Dance is a demonstration of dancing ability and is a major contest dance category. The generous monetary prizes given for the contest encourages War Dance skill. The War Dance for the contemporary American Indian does not exclude women and is a main part of all pow wows for many tribes.

Traditional Women's Dance

In the mid-1800s, when beads were acquired through trade, the style for women's traditional dance outfit was to bead the entire top of the dress. The design of each dress had a symbolic meaning to the individual owner. The dresses are decorated with ribbon work, elk's teeth and shells, among other things, and the dancers usually wear decorated moccasins, knee-high leggings, beaded or concho belts and various pieces of jewelry like hair ties, earrings, chokers and necklaces. Most traditional dancers wear or carry a shawl and some carry a hawk or eagle feather fan, or a single feather. This may depend on whether the dance is social or a competition.



Traditionally, women only danced to certain songs or on certain occasions and even then they were in the background. This is why the Women's Traditional Dance (relatively new as a competition category) basically consists of remaining stationary and bending the knees with a slight up and down movement of the body. At the same time, the feet shift subtly and women turn slightly. This is one form. It is also acceptable to dance slowly around the circle. Some traditions hold that this symbolizes the way women turned and looked for their warriors to come home.

At certain points in the song, women may hear words that have meaning to them. They may signal their pride and acknowledge the words by raising their fans. Others raise their fans during the honor beats of the song.

Women's traditional dancers must follow the beat of the drum and stop with the music. The dance competition is generally divided into four categories: 40 and over, women, junior girls, and little girls (10 and under).

Women's Fancy Shawl Dance

The *Women's Fancy Shawl Dance* is a relatively new addition to the dance competition. Until recently, women performed their fancy dancing in traditional garb. Some accounts say in the early 1900s, shawls replaced the blankets and buffalo robes young girls traditionally wore in public. In the 30s and 40s, young women would show off the shawls they made by doing some fancy footwork during the dances. Some say that was how the Women's Fancy Shawl dance was born.

The Fancy Shawl Dance outfit consists of a decorative knee-length cloth dress, beaded moccasins with matching leggings, a fancy shawl, and various pieces of jewelry. The dance itself is similar to the Men's Fancy Dance, and the style is moving toward more movement, especially spinning. Footwork is the chief element of the dance. Fancy Shawl dancers must follow the changing beat of the drum and stop when the music does with both feet on the ground. The competition is generally divided into three categories: women, junior girls, and little girls (10 and under).

Jingle Dress Dance

According to one account, the *Jingle Dress Dance* evolved from Mille Lacs, Minnesota. In a holy man's dream, four women wearing jingle dresses appeared before him. They showed him how to make the dresses, what types of songs went with them and how the dance was performed. The dresses made a pretty sound to him. Upon awakening, he and his wife made four of the dresses. The four women who appeared in his dream were then dressed in the dresses. He brought them forth at a dance and told the people about the dream and told them that was the way the women were to dress and dance.

From there the jingle dress spread throughout the Ojibway territories. In the late 1920s, the White Earth people gave the jingle dress to the Lakota and it spread westward into the Dakotas and Montana. But until recently, the jingle dress dance had all but died out. Now interest in the jingle dress is rekindled and women from many tribes are beginning to wear them. The jingle dress is not likely to be mistaken for anything else. The dress is made from cloth with hundreds of metal cones or jingles covering it. Often women use 365 cones to symbolize each day of the year. Jingle dress dancers must keep time with the music and stop when the music does with both feet on the ground. The competition is divided into two categories: women and junior girls.

Team Dancers

Team Dancing is another relatively new addition to the pow wow/celebration. Generally, three or four members who make up a team all dance in the same style. They must synchronize their steps. Team Dancers are judged on their synchronization, their outfits, how well they look together and how well their steps are put together. Team Dancers, as usual, must keep time with the music, follow the drum, and stop when the music does with both feet on the ground.

Owl Dance

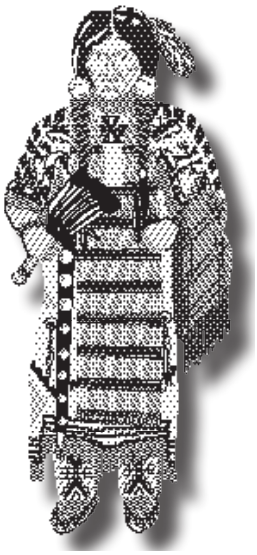
The *Owl Dance* is performed by couples to the beat of a hand drum. It is performed at social events and all ages participate.

Round Dance (Friendship Dance)

The *Round Dance* was in earlier times known as *The Dance of the Slain*. Women were the main performers of this dance, which allowed them to show their pride and mourning at the same time. Today, the Round Dance has evolved into a dance of friendship and is performed by all ages and is easily taught to tourists. Everyone is encouraged to dance by forming a circle and dancing in a clockwise circle. Dance outfits are not necessary.

The Crow Hop

A unique form of dancing which has developed within the Indian culture is the Crow Hop. It has also been called the *Skip Dance* and the *Jump Dance*. This dance is part of the repertoire in every competitive dance function, especially in the Men's Traditional and Fancy Dance. (This dance is different from the Salish Jump Dance, which is a religious ceremony.)



This dance was developed in the 1900s and done with a specific rhythm of the drum beat.When the Crow Hop is performed, the singers find the music and drum beat easier to follow than the typical intertribal music beat. When dancers execute the Crow Hop, they have a feeling of exhilaration. The Crow Hop is a change of pace for dancers and is dramatic to watch.

Intertribal Dance

Everyone is welcome to dance in the *Intertribal Dance*—even tourists! It is not so much a particular type of dance, as it is a dance in which everyone can participate. (Note: this is not true among some tribes.) Intertribal Dancers move around the arbor sunwise—clockwise—and

everyone is welcome to take part. You don't even need to be in regalia. You can dance in your street clothes. The basic step is the same one used by traditional dancers; the ball of one foot is tapped on one beat and placed down flatly with the next, repeating the action on the opposite foot without missing a beat.

Everyone is welcome to dance in the Intertribal Dance—even tourists!

The Blanket Dance

The *Blanket Dance* is a means of gaining contributions from the audience for certain causes, (e.g., paying the drummers, a family in need, special programs, etc.). Sometimes a blanket dance will be held to give the spectators a chance to donate gifts or money to help defray pow wow expenses for a particular reason or person. The lead dancers hold the blanket, by each corner, and walk around the arena. The other dancers may join behind the procession. As the blanket is carried by, the spectators are given a chance to contribute by tossing money into the blanket. Please feel free to participate.

Exhibition Dances

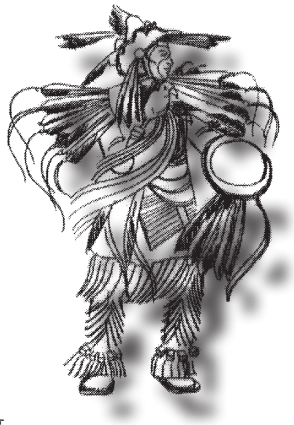
This event gives dancers an opportunity to exhibit their specific style of dancing. It is a chance for participants to dance for the audience without being judged. Usually, each category will have an exhibition dance. For instance, the announcer will call for all the men traditional dancers to perform.

Dropped Eagle Feather Dance

During the Eagle Feather Ceremony, regardless of the tradition in which it is being performed, spectators should stand and remove their hats. Picture taking, with still or video cameras, is not permitted.

To most Native Americans the eagle feather is sacred. So, when a feather falls from a dancer's outfit, the pow wow must stop and a special ceremony must be performed.

In some traditions, a fallen eagle feather is treated like an enemy because it is believed the sacredness of the feather can turn against the person who dropped it. The ceremony is necessary to capture the feather, ask its forgiveness and say a prayer over it to make the feather's medicine good again.



The ceremony is performed by four male traditional dancers, generally veterans (i.e., warriors who have earned the privilege) who dance around the feather. At a certain point in the song, they approach the dropped feather from four directions and attack the feather, usually four times. In some instances, the warrior who actually picks up the feather relates a battle or war story. For most tribes, four is a sacred number, symbolizing, among other things, the four directions. When the feather is retrieved, a prayer is

said. If the person who dropped it wishes it returned, it's customary to gift the four dancers, the drum who performed the song and sometimes the Pow Wow Committee. Sometimes the feathers aren't claimed; in that case, the person who picked it up might give it to someone he thinks deserves the feather.

Different tribes have different customs. In some traditions, the eagle feather is looked upon as a protector and accidental dropping is similar to the American flag touching the ground. Some traditions simply have a veteran pick up the feather and return it after the prayer and gift.

Honoring Veterans

In a dominant Anglo society that often doesn't seem to pay much attention to veterans, the honor accorded to *veterans* at the pow wow/celebration can take one by surprise. Veterans are asked to be flag bearers, called upon to retrieve dropped eagle feathers and honored in a multitude of veterans' songs.

The respect shown to veterans is an integral part of the Native American culture, a tradition from times when the welfare of a village depended on the quantity and quality of fighting men. To be a warrior was a man's purpose in life, and the best death a man could have was to fall defending the tribe. To the Native Americans, the good of all outweighed the good of the individual, and veterans were honored because they were willing to give their lives so people could live.

The veterans of today are accorded the same honor and respect as the warriors of times past, and, in some tribes, bravery is still honored as one of the four virtues: bravery, generosity, wisdom, and fortitude.

The veterans of today are accorded the same honor and respect as the warriors of times past.

Miscellaneous

What to Watch For

- The pow wow will open with a Grand Entry, in which all dancers will enter single-file behind the Indian flag (a long staff with eagle feathers) and the United States flag.
- The Grand Entry is followed by a flag song. You should stand for this song as you would for the national anthem. This is followed by all dancers joining for several rounds of intertribal dancing. The contest dancing will follow beginning with the smallest dancers, progressing to the men's fancy dance. Dancers in the four main categories (Men's Fancy, Men's Traditional, Women's Fancy and Women's Traditional) may compete in a series of dances to decide the finalists.
- Rounds of intertribal dancing usually take place between the contest dances. Winners of the contest dances are usually announced after the judges have cast their ballots and they have been tabulated. If there is a tie, there is a dance-off to decide the winner. Some dancers can earn a considerable sum by winning throughout the pow wow season.

Pow Wow Do's and Don'ts

Do's

It is permissible to take pictures during much of the pow wow. If you are not sure always ask, since taking pictures of some activities is not allowed. For example, during the dropped Eagle Feather Dance the announcer will request that no pictures be taken, as during ceremonial dances, certain Honor Dances or during prayers. There may also be some individuals who do not want their picture taken. You should also be careful not to use bright or blinding lights which may create a problem for the dancer. There is no objection to photographing parades, intertribal dances and contest dances.

Be careful about getting out on the floor unless invited to do so. Although there are special times when the audience is invited to participate, there are certain activities in which only registered contestants are allowed to participate. It would be courteous for you to ask a pow wow official before moving around in the dance arena.

Check out the concession stands, food booths, arts and crafts displays, and raffle ticket booths. Pow wows use rental moneys from these activities to help defray the cost of the pow wow. Your participation is always appreciated and you will enjoy the Indian tacos and frybread.

You need to be patient when the events do not start exactly at the time that is indicated in the program. It is sometimes difficult to get all the pow wow people and activities synchronized to all begin at the same time. Be patient and enjoy the atmosphere.

Don'ts

- Don't boo a judge's decision.
- Don't get in the dancers' way.
- Don't sit in the chairs or benches reserved for the participants.
- Don't film or tape without being sure it is okay to do so.
- Don't set up your camp without asking first.

The Give Away Ceremony

The *Give Away Ceremony*, or similar ceremony, is said to be universal among Native American people. Unlike other societies where one is likely to say, "Look what I did" and expect to receive gifts, in the Native American society the person being honored has a Give Away Ceremony and gives gifts. It has been said that the chief of a tribe was always the poorest in the village for he looked out for the good of all his people. Charged with their welfare, and honored by them, the chief gave away blankets, horses, food and whatever else his people needed.

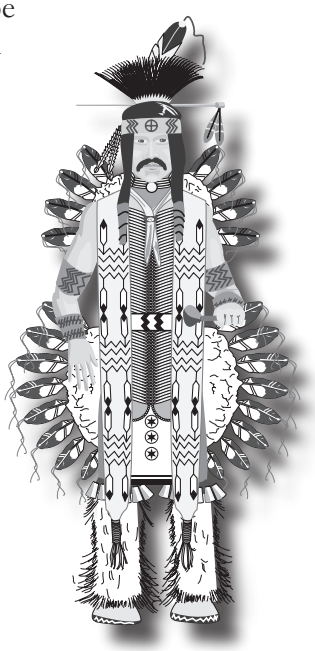
. . . in the Native American society the person being honored has a Give Away Ceremony and gives gifts.

This event is often used as time when a family or individual can distribute goods or gifts to friends and relatives to honor an individual, someone's memory, an event or activity. Gifts may cover a wide range of items—from money to blankets to horses. The person may first be honored by an honor song. Some families may save up for a long period of time to be able to host a big give away.

Today, Give Away Ceremonies, either by people being honored or in honor of someone else, are common at pow wows.

Money Placed in Front of Dancers

When money is placed in front of a dancer, it is an honoring of that person by the person placing the money. The dancer is supposed to dance over the money to acknowledge the gift. After the money is danced over, anyone from the crowd can go pick up the money—or the Arena Director can pick up the money and give it to someone in the audience (usually an elder person will be given the money). Many times, children will be the first to run out and collect the money, so the Arena Director will shoo them away.



Giving a Gift at a Pow Wow

If you have a good time at a pow wow, you may want to enter into the gift-giving spirit yourself. You can write a note explaining why you want to make a donation to the pow wow and give it and your gift to someone at the announcer's stand. No minimum or maximum is required or expected. (*It's the thought that counts*.) Gifts are always welcome and can be used for the benefit of next year's pow wow.

If you have a good time at a pow wow, you may want to enter into the gift-giving spirit yourself.

The Pow Wow Committee may wish to make an announcement, and shake your hand in thanking you for your gift. You can ask to remain anonymous if you prefer. And, if you are watching a dance competitor who is dancing well and having fun, you might offer a gift to that dancer, or to a drum whose music you might particularly enjoy. Again, if you go to the announcer's stand, someone will be glad to pass on your gift.

Closing Ceremonies

At the end of the pow wow, the Eagle Staff is taken down by veterans and a closing prayer is given by an elder. All the dancers then follow the veterans who are carrying the Eagle Staff out. The process can be compared to a Grand Entry, only it is a Grand Exit.

Handgames (Stick Games)

Many Indian tribes throughout the United States and Canada practice some form of the hand game, also called stick game or bone game. It is simply a gambling game of hide and guess. Sides are chosen and one person will hide the two different colored bones. Another person, from the opposing team, is designated as the chooser. The person doing the hiding will try to confuse the chooser into making the wrong choice. The rules may vary from tribe to tribe, but basically, the team who wins the other team's (11) counter sticks is the winner.

The 49er

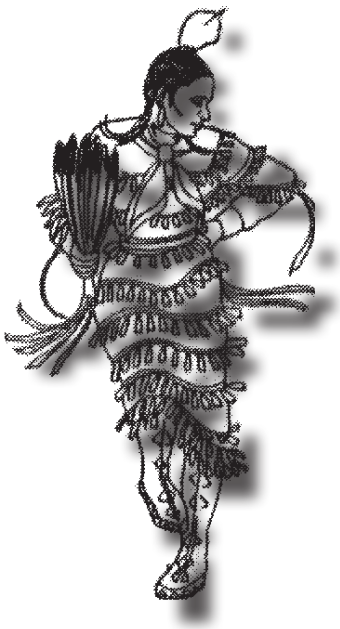
This impromptu activity usually takes place after the formal pow wow is over. The singers and dancers will gather at a site just to sing songs and share stories and good times.

Pow Wow Princess Contests

A relatively new addition to the pow wow scene is the *Princess Contest*. Since Indian tribes do not have royalty, the *Princess* designation is in name only. The Princess Contest allows young ladies to represent their tribes, communities or cultural groups. The young ladies are judged on their knowledge of culture and customs, communication skills, poise and some sort of cultural talent. Winners are usually given an honored place at the pow wow, as well as considerable respect in their schools and communities. In some locales, the outgoing princess is obligated to provide for a give-away for designated honorees.

Parades and Rodeos

Other attractions at many pow wows are parades and rodeos. This is a chance for the community and participants to show off their outfits, regalia, animals, honored persons and programs. Many parades have horseback riders, floats, bands and dignitaries. Rodeos may attract top-notch cowboys from all over the Native American and cowboy world. These two events have become a very popular part of the pow wow scene.



Use of Drugs or Alcohol

All pow wow committees will not tolerate a dancer who uses drugs or alcohol when dancing. A dancer is considered disrespectful and disgraceful to do this. Most dancers also frown on someone who is dancing and drinking or taking drugs. If a participant is found to be drinking or

using drugs, he/she may be asked to leave the grounds and will be automatically disqualified from the dance contest. Drinking on the pow wow grounds by members of the audience is also prohibited.

Resources

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- Great Falls Tribune, May, 1992
- The Native American Almanac; A Portrait of Native America Today, Arlene Hirschfelder and Martha Kreipe de Montano, Prentice Hall General Reference, 1993
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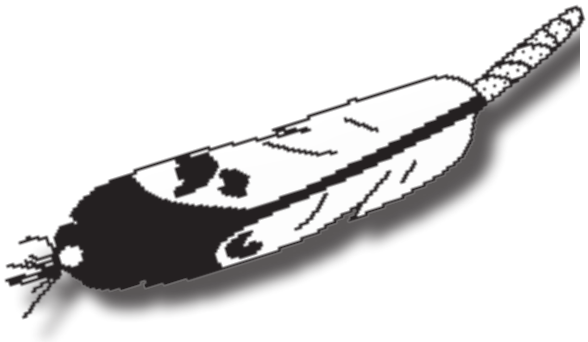


Pow Wow Calendar

The following is a listing of some Montana Pow Wows, celebrations and cultural events that occur throughout the year. The dates are approximate since the days may vary from year-to-year, and in some cases, the celebration or pow wow may no longer be an active event. For further information regarding exact dates and schedules you might call tribal councils, cultural committees, school districts or the Indian education specialists at the state departments of public instruction. Some of the events listed below may not take place on a yearly basis, so please consult the tribes and organizations for further information. More information can also be found at: www.travel.state.mt.us/tripplanner/events

Montana Pow Wows:

Blackfeet—

North American Indian Days (Browning)	2nd weekend in July	(338-7276)
Heart Butte Celebration	early August	(338-7521)

Crow—

Crow Fair Celebration (Crow Agency)	3rd week August	(638-2601)
Big Horn Reenactment, Custer Battlefield	4th week June	
Valley of the Chiefs Pow Wow & Rodeo	early July	(638-2601)
Chief Plenty coups Day of Honor (Pryor)		(252-1289)

Flathead—

Arlee Pow Wow	1st week July	(745-2700)
Chief Victor Days (Victor)	2nd week July	(642-3614)
Standing Arrow Pow Wow (Elmo)	mid-July	(849-5798)
Bitterroot Valley All Nations Pow Wow	late July	(363-5383)

Fort Belknap—

Milk River Indian Days	4th week July	(353-2901)
Hays Fair, Pow Wow and Rodeo	mid-July	(253-2205)
Veteran's Pow Wow	(Hays)November	(673-3221)

Fort Peck—

Wadopana Celebration (Wolf Point)	1st week August	(653-2915)
Red Bottom	mid-June	(768-5155)
Bad Lands Indian Celebration (Brockton)4th	week June	(768-5126)
Poplar Indian Dayslate	August	(768-3826)
Wahcinca Dakota Oyale Celebration	mid-July	(768-5186)

Northern Cheyenne—

New Year's Pow Wow	Early January	
Fourth of July Pow Wow	July 4th	(477-6284)
Northern Cheyenne Labor Day Pow Wow	Labor Day	(477-6284)

Rocky Boy—

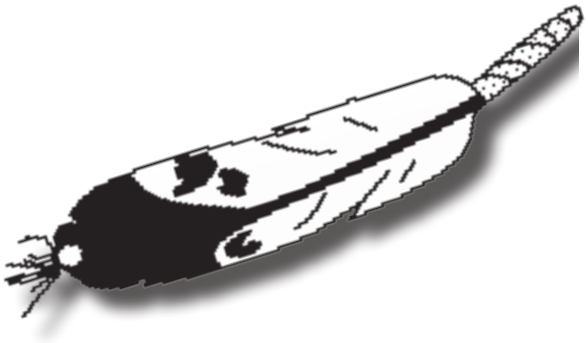
Rocky Boy Annual Pow Wow	1st week August	(395-4690)

Colleges—

Montana State University Indian Club Celebration (Bozeman)	early April	(994-3751)
University of Montana Kyiyo Indian Days (Missoula) www.umt.edu/asum/kyiyo/	late April	(243-5302)
MSU—Northern (Havre)	mid-April	(265-2325)
Carroll College (Helena)	April	
College Great Falls Indian Club Pow Wow	late April	
MSU—Billings	April	(657-2182)

Urban—

Last Chance Community Pow Wow (Helena)	late September	(439-5631)
American Indian Alliance Pow Wow (Butte)	mid September	(782-0461)
United People's Pow Wow	early August	(728-2180)



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