



Long Ago in Montana

Transcript
(Running Time: 30 minutes)

INTRODUCTION (2:47 minutes)

Sally Thompson

Sometimes it's hard to really imagine how people used to live back before your grandparent's time. When you see pictures from long ago, are you able to imagine how things smelled or how hot the day was? Looking at a picture it's hard to get a sense of a living, breathing person. Today let's try to peel back some layers and take ourselves to those earlier times, bringing our imaginations along as a way to learn more about the land under our feet. With the help of our tribal educators, we're going to compare the way things are now to the way things were long ago in Montana. We'll cover the topics of water, food, shelter, staying warm, transportation, money, and communication. Then we'll listen to a story and practice using our imaginations.

But first let's introduce you to our tribal elders and educators who will help us understand this story. We have three from the Blackfeet tribe: Curly Bear Wagner, Calvin Weatherwax, and Narcisse Blood. Two from the Coeur d'Alene tribe: Cliff SiJohn and Felix Aripa. And from the Kalispel tribe we have Alice Ignace and Francis Cullooyah. Two from Nez Perce: Otis Halfmoon and Horace Axtell. From the Kootenai tribe, Vernon Finley. From the Salish, we have Louis Adams. From Crow, Joe Medicine Crow. And from Chippewa-Cree, Patrick Chief Stick. We also have Caroline Russell and Clover Smith Anaquad, two young women who help us understand how these traditions continue.

CHAPTER 1 - WATER (1:11 minutes)

Sally Thompson

How did people used to get water? Have you ever drawn water from a well? How would you get water if you didn't have a well? Could you drink just anywhere from a creek? Would it be the same to drink out of the Missouri River? Have you ever had fresh spring water from the source, not a plastic bottle?

Curly Bear Wagner, Blackfeet - Pikuni

The water, what we call the Sayitapi spirit, the water is extremely powerful. Everything is living. Everything is alive. You look up at the sun, you look at the sky, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the mountains, the trees, the rocks, the hills, the grass, the water,

everything is living, and they are all related, and we are part of that relationship. Without those things we can't survive as a people, our people fully understood that.

CHAPTER 2 – FOOD (4:18 minutes)

Sally Thompson

Where does our food come from? Do you know what the native foods of this place are? What would you have to think about to make sure you could feed your family in the days before grocery stores, and domesticated animals and garden plots?

Felix Aripa, Coeur d'Alene

<Coeur d'Alene> Said a long time ago we didn't know what a store was. We didn't know what money was. But we had all of this, what the almighty gave us. That's what we had. I guess they consider that their supermarket.

Vernon Finley, Kootenai

The major staples being buffalo, the deer and the elk, a lot of elk, and the fish, the fish, the trout, the whitefish.

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

When I was growing up, when I was about ten, we used to spend half the year round Priest Lake. Several families go and camp there because they can hunt and nobody bothers them. They get their deer. The ladies dry meat, tan hides. They also trap whitefish in the creeks and they dry them, put them in bags and save them, they bring it home. When the first snow, then they move back.

Joe Medicine Crow, Crow

When it's getting cold up here we go down to the big rivers, Yellowstone and Missouri, and there the grass is always high and animals are all down there. So it's good. And our women go up these creeks and ravines and pick berries, chokecherries, June berries. And of course, they dig wild carrots, wild turnips, and then of course there was always game there, buffalo and deer, and even birds. There are a lot of game birds here, we call prairie chickens, and they're out on the prairie. And on the foothills we have what we call the sage hens, they are larger birds, and up in the mountains we have what we call blue grouse. They had white meat, so they have all kinds of birds to eat and of course there's fish, trout, all over all these mountain streams, big rivers, trout. But then Crows would rather eat buffalo than sit and fish, but occasionally they'll get some and eat it.

Clover Smith Anaquod, Assiniboine - Sioux

In June we would go out and get the berries, June berries, chokecherries. We would go and get the currents. My grandma had this way that her grandma taught her, instead of breaking down the limbs like some people do, they would break down the branches of the chokecherry trees and the berry trees. She would have a big stick, and she would lay a tarp underneath the bush and then she would hit the bush with a stick to have the berries fall off, so that way the trees would still be there for next year, so the berries could come

back. And she would laugh because it's called <Native language> when you hit. She would say <Native language>. She'd say, 'Let's go hit the berries off the trees.'

Sally Thompson

How would you store your food?

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

Do a lot of drying meat and fish and hang them up in the tree where the bucks wouldn't get into it.

CHAPTER 3 – SHELTER (2:27 minutes)

Sally Thompson

What about shelter? What did people used to do to stay dry and warm in winter and out of the sun in summer?

Cliff SiJohn, Coeur d'Alene

We made our tipis from the hide of the buffalo. We also had cedar lodges, cedar bark lodges in the winter. Long houses, like long tipis with cedar bark. These places were used as a communal building.

Vernon Finley, Kootenai

Some of the original lodgings that they made, that the Kootenais made were using tule mats and tule when it was woven and the mats were used, if it was on a rainy day the tule would kind of swell and it would close off and it would become waterproof so it would be nice and cool in the summertime when it was dry and hot but it could be warm and waterproof after the tule became wet.

Curly Bear Wagner, Blackfeet - Pikuni

During Blackfeet country they traveled during the day, and when they got into Crow country they traveled at night and they would build these war lodges. A war lodge would consist of trees, maybe dead trees piled up together, and it's camouflaged very unique. There is no rain that will come in on you, that's how tightly they were placed together, and this is their resting place. They would rest during the day and they may cook in there, build small fires and cook meat, and then go on at night.

Narcisse Blood, Blackfeet - Kainai

We moved throughout our area. You know I get a kick out of when they said that we were nomads, but we were in a very well defined area depending on the season, moving into higher ground as different roots and berries ripened, and followed the buffalo as they migrated, but in a very defined, traditional area. And you had the different clans moving where there was good camping grounds, where you get out of the wind and cold areas.

CHAPTER 4 – STAYING WARM (2:59 minutes)

Sally Thompson

What do you have to think about to take care of yourself outdoors? How did people stay warm? How did they plan for the weather? Did they know when storms were coming?

Calvin Weatherwax, Blackfeet - Pikuni

We used to have people that could read the weather. Now they read the weather, they'll turn on the weather station. But they had that gift by seeing the plants how they grew. The animals, how soon they got their winter fur.

Caroline Russell, Blackfeet - Kainai

My grandmother, she still has a lot of that traditional knowledge, of what animals were like back then, to be able to look at an animal and say, 'Okay, this is the type of season we are going to have.' And I remember she would talk about little things, such as ants, she'd be watching and she would show me if their houses were built upwards, it was going to be a wet summer, as opposed to a little bit lower, it was going to be dry, because they build their houses up because the water won't go into their homes. And in the winter time she would look at, we had a muskrat that lived in a lake near our house, if he had his house on the inside of the lake, it's going to be a hard winter, and if it's on the outside of the lake, near the edge of the shore, it would be not so harsh of a winter. And just stuff like, I think she would call it sundogs, if there was two of them on each side of the sun it's change of weather as well. And there would even be a ring around the sun or the moon at nighttime, and that would mean it would be colder weather. My grandmother would make comments with little kids running around in the house, 'Oh, it's going to be a change of weather, the winds going to blow,' or something. And she would make that comment because even with the horses running, it's a change of weather. So she would make that connection with children and animals. She was so in tune with what her mother had taught her, and so I would pay attention a lot of the times because it was so interesting to know what she knew.

Sally Thompson

What kinds of fuel did people use?

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

I helped my grandma gather wood. She put her ropes there and pile all the wood, then throw it on her back pack. Stack it, we'd have a big stack of wood, dry wood. Then when they're going to dry meat they have wood right there. They never let their fire go down.

Sally Thompson

Out on the prairie where wood was scarce, do you know what people used for fuel? I'll give you a hint. Some people call these 'chips', and others call them 'pies.' The buffalo left them all over the prairie.

CHAPTER 5 - TRANSPORTATION (2:14 minutes)

Sally Thompson

How would you get from one place to another? What did people do before cars?

Otis Halfmoon, Nez Perce

Horses was something that came up from Spain, from the Camino Real, it was from Mexico, worked its way up to all the tribes.

Felix Aripa, Coeur d'Alene

When we got horses, it opened up for us, that's when they can go buffalo hunting, they can go all different places, go visit their neighboring tribes. <Native Language> Said, 'Gee, that was accommodating.'

Curly Bear Wagner, Blackfeet - Pikuni

And before the come of the horse we used dogs as a means of transportation. The dogs that we used was a wolf like dog, and what we do is put a harness over there and the lodge polls in the back and we carried our belongings that way. An average family of four would have about 16 dogs to move their belongings. And a good days journey would be about five miles, and so that's how we traveled in those days.

Francis Cullooyah, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

The routes that the Pend d'Oreille, the Kalispel people took, were mainly the river system with canoes, because we really didn't have any horses and such at the time.

Vernon Finley, Kootenai

The waterways were the highways of the <Native Language>. And if you looked throughout the plateau area, the Kootenai territory, there are waterways, small and large waterways everywhere and the way the Kootenai canoe is designed, it can travel on smaller creeks to larger rivers. The other way, if you are going to go directly east into the mountains or across the mountains into the plains after the buffalo, prior to the horse, was walking. Another important part through the wintertime was the snowshoes that were made also out of a certain willow, a type of shoe that would stay on top of the snow as opposed to sinking in.

CHAPTER 6 – MONEY (2:19 minutes)**Sally Thompson**

How did people pay for what they needed?

Otis Halfmoon, Nez Perce

Trade. Sharing. That was how it was way back then. I mean this whole country that we called the Northern Plains, trade routes everywhere going to and fro, every which way.

Horace Axtell, Nez Perce

This old trail that goes through here, was where the people went over to the plains area to trade our kind of food with their kind of food, because all of the Indian foods aren't all the same. And they used this special trail they called <Nez Perce> "going to gather food."

Curly Bear Wagner, Blackfeet - Pikuni

The buffalo would be the same thing as money today, because we focused, our life went around the buffalo. We focused everything on the buffalo. That was our food, our shelter, our clothing, our toys, everything we needed came from the buffalo. So our whole system was focused around the buffalo, so the buffalo was considered very sacred to our people.

Patrick Chief Stick, Chippewa-Cree

The buffalo, they can use it for blankets. They can tan their buffalo hides, use it for moccasins. And even the bones. The shoulder blade, buffalo shoulder blade. They dry that, after it's really dry then they get a rock. They scrape the ends. They use that shoulder blade to skin other animals.

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

And the ones that are not able to go anywhere, they divide their food. Everyone gets something. They share their food with each other to help one another survive.

CHAPTER 7 - COMMUNICATION (4:01 minutes)

Sally Thompson

Have people always had telephones? If you couldn't call someone far away, how would you leave them a message? If your group got delayed on the way to the summer gathering, how would you communicate with the people waiting for you? Did the native people of this area have a written language? How did they pass on information from one generation to the next?

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

My uncle, he was a storyteller. Wherever they hear him, everybody comes in and sit around and tell stories.

Narcisse Blood, Blackfeet - Kainai

When you own something and it becomes yours, an experience. And the kind of storytelling that we heard was exactly that. They were such good storytellers that you experienced the story because of the language.

Caroline Russell, Blackfeet - Kainai

My grandmother, I learned to understand our language from her, and a lot of our protocols she taught me, and she shared a lot of stories with me. And a lot of the stories I take to heart with me. And even when she would tell a story, hearing it in Blackfoot, it's like your reliving the whole thing, like you were right there. She was such a gifted storyteller that you could actually see it happening, and the words that she would use in Blackfoot, they're so descriptive. I remember one time it was raining outside and thundering, and she was laying on her bed, so I laid down with her and I said, 'Tell me one of your stories.' And that was the best story that she told me. She told me one, and it took her three hours to tell me and by the end of the story I had goose bumps. I was so freaked out, but it was one of the stories about a character called <Blackfoot name>.

Alice Ignace, Kalispel (Lower Pend d'Oreille)

All kinds of stories. That's what I told my granddaughter, I wish they had invented tape recorder and video cameras then. Boy, we'd have some nice pictures.

Louis Adams, Salish

And we don't tell coyote stories until the tress pop from the cold, that was sometime in January. My grandmother had a house down here, my Dad's mother, a log house. It was in December I went down there, I told her <Salish> you know I told her, tell me a coyote story. She said <Salish>. She said, 'No, all the animals that hibernate haven't gone in yet.' You've got to wait until everything goes into hibernation before, and you wait for the trees that are water soaked to pop <Salish> and then the coyote stories come out. That's because at that time until spring the people wanted to protect the animals that were big, that were going to have little ones, the elk, the deer and stuff, so you left everything alone. And you made sure you had enough wood and stuff to settle in for the winter. That's when the stories come out.

CHAPTER 8 - STORY (5:51 minutes)

Sally Thompson

Is it different to just listen to a story told to you by your parent or grandparent than to watch a story like 'The Lion King' in a movie? Let your imagination take you to that question. How is it different to just be listening? You'll get a chance to listen to a story, an old, old story told to you by Narcisse Blood. Imagine that you're sitting in a lodge surrounded by your friends and family. The fire is growing dim as the story begins. As you listen, watch the pictures that form in your mind.

Narcisse Blood, Blackfeet - Kainai

<Blackfoot> A long time ago, this young man had a fledgling family and he wanted to make ends meet to support his family. And at that time the buffalo runner was a horse that was trained to be a horse that you used to chase the buffalo and they were very, very valued. And he didn't have one of those, and he used to have to go and borrow a buffalo runner for hunts so he could feed his family. And it's okay the first few times to go and borrow from your neighbor, from your father in law or whoever he had to go and borrow this kind of horse so he could go hunting to feed his family. But this young man had pride and he wanted to support his own family without always having to borrow. So he looked at his horses and he knew that not just any horse could become a buffalo runner, he had to look for the horse that had the right temperament, that had enough speed, because the buffalo can outrun a horse anytime. They still had to get very close for that short chase during the hunt. And they had to get a horse that was surefooted, for there are a lot of holes. The ground wasn't as flat as people like to think out in the Plains and the horse had to be able to avoid those holes and maintain the chase. And the horse had to be quick enough to avoid the goring or the buffalo when they got close. Because he knew, this young man knew that when people went to count coup at enemy camps that any horse that was tethered into the lodge was a buffalo runner for they were really valued with other tribes. And anybody that could come home with a buffalo runner gained great status. So anyway this young man started working with one of the horses he felt he could

train to become a buffalo runner. He worked with this horse almost in secrecy. And when the big day came for his chase, for his first hunt with this new horse, he had to go and hunt it on his own for he wanted to save face in case he didn't train the horse well. He wanted to avoid embarrassment. So he went hunting on his own, which is not the typical way of hunting. At any rate his first hunt was successful so he was very happy. And with group hunts, family hunts, what happens is the family would bring in another horse. With that other horse you would pack the meat, the hunt. That other horse would carry the meat out. You would never use the buffalo runner to carry the meat out. So anyways he had to break that protocol and he put all his fresh meat on his new buffalo runner, but he was really happy as he was walking home leading the horse. As he was walking, these wolves came running. A family of wolves, they ran past him. They knew there was a fresh kill. And way in the back, barely keeping up was this old wolf. And this young man felt sorry for this wolf. He thought by the time he gets to his kill there will be nothing left for him, for this old man, for this old wolf. So he stopped and went to his meat and got out the best meat and cut it up. And by then, by the time he put the meat down, the old wolf had reached him. And he told him, 'Old man, I pity you. I'm afraid by the time you get to that kill, there will be nothing left for you, so here is some food for you.' And the old man responded, 'Young man you are very kind. I am very, very grateful for this kind gesture. You see I'm in a big hurry. Those are my children and my grandchildren, and they are very hungry. And they don't start eating until I arrive there. So I'll have some of this food that you have given me, but I will reward you for what you have done.' And the old wolf ate quickly and continued. So this young man went home very happy with his successful hunt. That night in his dreams the spirit of the old wolf came to him and told him, 'Young man, for being so kind I'm going to gift you with my powers. You're going to become a great hunter. You're going to have several buffalo runners and you're going to use my spirit to heal people that come to you who get sick.' And that's the story of the buffalo runner.