

The Buffalo Experience



*Fancy StripedSquirrel showing off the skull she skinned*

BHA's ongoing relationship with the Blackfoot Tribe's Buffalo Program bore incredible fruit once again this year with another traditional buffalo harvest for our students. Chazz Racine, taking over for Steve Tatsey who retired shortly after our harvest last year, was fantastic in facilitating our schedule and committed to allow us to harvest a Buffalo from the tribe's tribal herd at least once annually. Unfortunately, Chazz was unable to attend our harvest this year, but made sure we were accompanied by experienced professionals.



*Students, Kiera Rose, Gabriel DayRider, and Sierra Brown proud of the skull they helped skin*

Adrian Costell was the first to greet us in the field when we arrived and gave us a brief overview of how the day would look. He facilitated setting up for the opening ceremony, directed us in the best way to view taking the buffalo from the herd, allowed the buffalo to present itself for harvesting, took the shot, hauled the carcass to the area they use for field dressing, and helped with the field processing including operating heavy equipment used to make the process easier. The knowledge he provided was invaluable, and his facilitation was generous, approachable, and humble, which created a perfect atmosphere for our students to feel comfortable being curious, asking questions, and immersing themselves in the experience. We look forward to having his expertise and leadership on our next harvest.



*Gabriel DayRider and Mr. Rink working on skinning the tail*

BHA was able to secure Rusty and Lori Tatsey to perform ceremony to formalize and bring sacredness and tradition to the event again this year. They both did such a fabulous job last year explaining the importance of the Buffalo to Blackfeet lifeways, Blackfeet identity, and delivering positive messages about relationality, spirituality, community, and the importance of us all honoring the lives we have been given that we really wanted them to be a part of our harvest again this year. Again, they used the opportunity to talk to our students about how traditional value systems can be incredibly important and relevant in our lives today. They talked about how those values can help protect and heal from the challenges and pitfalls of the modern world.



Students and field experts celebrating the process

Rusty and Lori were also joined in ceremony by Larry Ground and his wife Lee LittleMoustache. They both took the opportunity to add to the understandings that come with a harvest, focusing specifically on how significant it is to take a life and the responsibility that comes along with that. They also both spoke on the importance of valuing the lives we have here and offered themselves as resources to our students should they ever find themselves struggling. They also included a

small Blackfoot language lesson, teaching our students language to use to honor their lives and ask for help when needed. The ceremony concluded with Larry leading traditional songs to honor the Buffalo, the land, life, and existence before we went to the herd to take the shot.



*Mr. Hagberg admires the skinning work the students completed together*

The last two years, we had our Buffalo butchered in Babb at C & C Meats by Christina Flammond and her father, Charlie Chan. They are excited that our students are involved in harvesting their own food and have invited our school to their butcher shop anytime we have an opportunity. So, this year I notified Christina again before our trip and she joined us in the field. As always, she did an

amazing job showing our students techniques in field dressing and explaining the anatomy of the animal, and even brought her daughter, Sapphire, along who joined Christina in leading field processing and leading our students. She also talked a lot about traditional and contemporary values and the importance of being involved and skilled in our local food systems. BHA plans on another field trip next week to visit Christina and her father in Babb and learn more about butchering as she walks our students through the hands-on experience of turning that enormous buffalo carcass into delicious healthy food.



*On their own, students construct a makeshift tripod to cook meat scraps over the fire*

In our third year of this experience, we are really starting to see some deep lessons and meaning come out of it. It has created a circle of respect, relationality, learning, and growing that our students get to take part in. This year, in preparation for the event, the whole school took a Friday to cut, season and dry meat that had been frozen from the buffalo we harvested last year to use as an offering for the ceremonial leaders and other helpers and facilitators. It's become a beautiful demonstration of traditional worldview in its cyclical nature, every year doing the same thing, and every year strengthening the relationships involved and the knowledge relating to every aspect, even Blackfoot language! All academics and topics and themes covered in each subject have adjusted to include elements of this experience, from math to english to social studies, and this year, deeper understanding and lessons followed us back into the classroom the following day.



*Lee LittleMoustache observes as Christina Flammond demonstrates proper field processing techniques*

Larry Ground, his daughter Shelby, and wife, Lee joined Mr. Rink in his classroom the day following the harvest to dive deeper into the experience. Students in other classes were invited to join. They both continued the message of the sacredness of all life, especially the lives of our Blackfeet youth, and repeated their support and accessibility should our students ever find themselves in a tough situation. Larry emphasized the trauma of watching as the Buffalo was shot and dropped to the ground. He related the gunshot to the time he spent in armed conflict serving in the United States Army. He walked the class through techniques he uses to avoid ruminating on traumatic moments in our past and bring our attention to the present moment. It was very powerful for our students to revisit the moment the buffalo was shot and reflect on the seriousness of taking a life, especially such a large animal, and then to handle it responsibly. The impact this made on the students was palpable in the room, and definitely an experience that we hope to incorporate into future harvests, should Larry and Lee be willing.



*Larry and Lee join students the following day in Mr. Rink's class to  
Take a deeper dive into the experience*