



Back on the horse: Recent developments in archaeological and palaeontological research in Alberta

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ALBERTA

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 36

The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project¹

Allan Pard^o, John Wolf Child^a, Clarence Wolf Leg^b, Blair First Rider^c, Kathy Brewer^d and Trevor R. Peck^{e*}

^o Piikani elder, deceased

^a Kainai elder, Box 1185, Cardston, Alberta, Canada, T0K 0K0

^b Siksika elder, 48 Cranridge Crescent SE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T3M 0J2

^c Kainai elder, Aboriginal Consultation Advisor, Aboriginal Heritage Section, Alberta Culture and Tourism, PO Box 2340, Cardston, Alberta, Canada, T0K 0K0

^d Kainai elder, PO Box 2340, Cardston, Alberta, Canada T0K 0K0

^e Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Alberta Culture and Tourism, 8820-112 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5G 2P8

*corresponding author: trevor.peck@gov.ab.ca

ABSTRACT

Medicine wheels are ceremonially significant boulder structures built on the plains by First Nations people. The Archaeological Survey of Alberta, recognizing the significance of medicine wheels to First Nations, commissioned inventories on provincially and federally owned lands to fully document their locations and statuses in an effort to provide stronger protection to these important sites. Currently, there are 46 known medicine wheels on these lands. The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project addressed remaining unassessed lands in Alberta for medicine wheels: southern Alberta's Blackfoot Reserves. Six previously known medicine wheels were revisited, one of which was found to have been destroyed. Five additional medicine wheels, known from oral tradition, could not be verified on the ground.

KEYWORDS

medicine wheels, Blackfoot, oral tradition, Alberta

1. Introduction

Medicine wheels are ceremonially significant boulder structures built by First Nations people. The Archaeological Survey of Alberta (Survey), within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Government of Alberta, has long recognized the significance of medicine wheels to First Nations. In recent years, in an effort to provide stronger protection to these important sites, the Survey commissioned inventories of medicine wheels on provincially owned lands (Archaeological Research Permits 07-353 and 08-354) and federally owned lands (Archaeological Research Permit 13-058) to document fully their locations and statuses. Currently, there are 46 known medicine wheels on these lands. Upon completion of these projects, the only lands remaining to be assessed for such sites were the Blackfoot Reserves of southern Alberta. These lands were the subject of the 2013 Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project.

This project teamed Blair First Rider and Trevor Peck of the Heritage Division of Alberta Culture and Tourism with elders of the Apatohsipikani (Northern Peigan), Siksika (Blackfoot), and Kainai (Blood/Many Leaders) to assess the targeted land base for medicine wheels. Elders from each of the aforementioned peoples provided guidance on all aspects of the project. The respected elders included Allan Pard (Apatohsipikani), John Wolf Child (Kainai), and Clarence Wolf Leg (Siksika). Importantly, Kathy Brewer (elder from the Amsskaapipikani [Southern Peigan]) served as translator and project coordinator. Blair First Rider, an Aboriginal Consultation Advisor with the Aboriginal Heritage Section of Alberta Culture and Tourism and Kainai elder, was instrumental in establishing relationships between all of the individuals involved in the project.

¹We dedicate this shared knowledge to the memory of our friend and respected elder, Allan Pard.

The team revisited six known medicine wheels on the Reserves - Crowfoot Creek, Ski-mátsis (Steel), Makoyepuk (Wolf Child), Nitapinaw, Péta-poka (Eagle Child), and Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheels - and gathered information about these sites. In addition, the team attempted to gather information about five other medicine wheels mentioned in oral tradition and recorded in the literature: Bad Head, Little Medicine Pipe, Mékai-sto (Red Crow), Running Wolf, and Many Horses.

2. Background

Medicine wheels fall within a category of features known as petroforms - shapes made with boulders or cobbles on the prairie surface - that includes effigies, stone circles/tipi rings, vision quests, stone cairns, and stone alignments (Thorpe 1982). Medicine wheels are rare and known to occur across the Northern Plains. Most are located in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana, but some have been recorded in Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Despite interest from the public and an obvious connection to First Nations people, medicine wheels are not a well understood phenomenon.

The term “medicine wheel” was first coined in reference to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, located atop Medicine Mountain near Sheridan, Wyoming (Grinnell 1922, Sims 1903, Brumley 1988:1). Various definitions have been presented to distinguish medicine wheels from other surface petroforms (Kehoe 1954:133, Wedel 1961:266, Forbis 1970:27, Calder 1977:200); however, Brumley’s (1988:2-3) definition of medicine wheels has become the accepted standard and is used here. Medicine wheels are:

- 1) largely constructed of unmodified natural stone, possibly with some earth intentionally incorporated into the central cairn and/or,
- 2) a combination of a least two of a) a prominent, central stone cairn, b) one or more concentric stone rings and/or c) two or more stone lines radiation outward from a central point or margin of a stone ring, and/or,
- 3) often are associated with other stone structures including stone circles, effigies, and cairn (Brumley 1988:2-3).

In addition, Brumley (1988:3) noted that a combination of two or more of the aforementioned components appear in several medicine wheels. Thus, he developed eight Subgroups of medicine wheels based on groupings that appeared to be culturally significant (Figure 1).

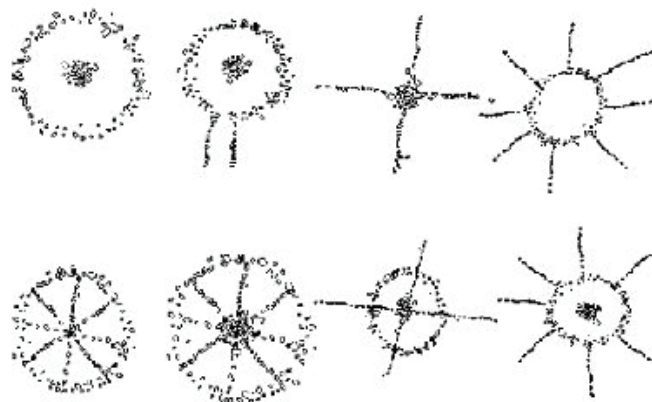


Figure 1. Brumley’s (1988) medicine wheel classification scheme. Upper Row, left to right is Subgroup 1-4; Lower Row, left to right is Subgroup 5-8 (adapted from Brumley 1988).

3. Methods

The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project consisted of three basic parts: 1) a site visit with the elders, 2) a revisit to map and photo-document each site, and 3) report production. To initiate the project, Blair First Rider and Kathy Brewer assembled a team of respected elders to participate in the project. Kathy Brewer then developed a schedule of events for the team and arranged for access to many of the lands.

Site visits were structured to relocate the sites and gather basic information from the elders about each site. Between June 23 and 27, 2013, the team conducted field work on the Kainai Reserve. At this time, we visited Ski-mátsis (Steel), Makoyepuk (Wolf Child), Nitapinaw, Péta-poka (Eagle Child), and Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheels. On July 29 and 30, the team surveyed the Siksika Reserve but failed to relocate the Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel. On August 24, Clarence Wolf Leg and Trevor Peck returned to the Siksika Reserve and relocated the Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel. On August 25, the team met at the Amsskaapipikani Reserve; however, no sites were visited.

In late September, Trevor Peck and Kathy Brewer returned to each site, often accompanied by one or more of the elders, for the purpose of documentation. Documentation included recording each site’s current condition by mapping and photographing the site. Maps were created using two baselines placed perpendicular to each other. Chains were laid along the baselines to create a grid over the entire site. A 1 by 1 metre mapping grid, with lines at 10 centimetre intervals, was placed using the chain-created grid. This process produced relatively accurate maps of the surface expression of the features. GPS points were taken at select locations on the feature to secure it in space. As well, a series of photographs were taken of each feature from a number

of angles both at ground level and from a “bird’s eye view” using an extension handle of a few metres.

The final part of the project was writing the report. A draft manuscript was produced with numerous ‘questions’ left for Kathy Brewer to address. Most of these questions related to knowledge that only the elders could supply. The elders’ responses were incorporated in to a final report; this paper provides an abbreviated version of the report.

4. Results

In providing results, this section is divided into two parts: Archaeological Sites and Oral History.

4.1. Archaeological sites

Of Brumley’s (1988) eight possible subgroups of medicine wheel types, only Subgroup 3 and Subgroup 4 medicine wheels were encountered during this project (Figure 1). The Nitapinaw Medicine Wheel is interpreted as a Subgroup 3 medicine wheel, while the Crowfoot Creek, Ski-mátsis (Steel), Makoyepuk (Wolf Child), Péta-poka (Eagle Child), and Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheels are interpreted as belonging to Subgroup 4. The following discussion provides more information on both of these subgroups.

Subgroup 3 medicine wheels consist of a prominent central cairn with two or more stone lines (“spokes”) extending outward in various directions (Brumley 1988:31). Following Kehoe (1954:134), Brumley cited observations made by John McLean in 1880 at Fort Macleod in southwestern Alberta about a Subgroup 3 medicine wheel being constructed:

When a great chief or warrior died a lodge was placed over him, and when this was thrown down by the wind, the body of the deceased was laid upon the ground, and a cairn of stones erected over it. There is a cairn called by the Indians the “Gamblers’ Cairn,” near the store of I.G. Baker, in the town of Macleod. Several years ago a Piegan camp of Indians located on this spot was attacked with small-pox, and the disease proved so fatal that fifty dead lodges were left standing. Among those who died was Aikútce; i.e., the Gambler, head chief of the Piegan tribe. His people placed a lodge over him, and when that had been blown down by the western winds, he was reverently laid upon the ground and the cairn of stones erected. The original cairn was three or four feet in diameter, with rows of stones between forty and fifty feet each in length, leading to the cairn (MacLean 1896:579)

This historic passage provides observations that link the Peigan directly to a feature which can be observed archaeologically, that being Brumley’s Subgroup 3 medicine wheel. At present, we know of no other historical reference to the construction of such features. As such, Subgroup 3 medicine wheels can be considered diagnostic of the Nitsitapii (Blackfoot speaking people) (Vickers and Peck 2009). Like Brumley (1988) and Vickers and Peck (2009), we conclude that these features provide a direct link between the historic Nitsitapii and the prehistoric Old Women’s Phase. The Old Women’s Phase is generally believed to represent the material culture of people ancestral to the Blackfoot. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of Subgroup 3 medicine wheels (modified from Brumley 1988:34; Vickers and Peck 2009:482).

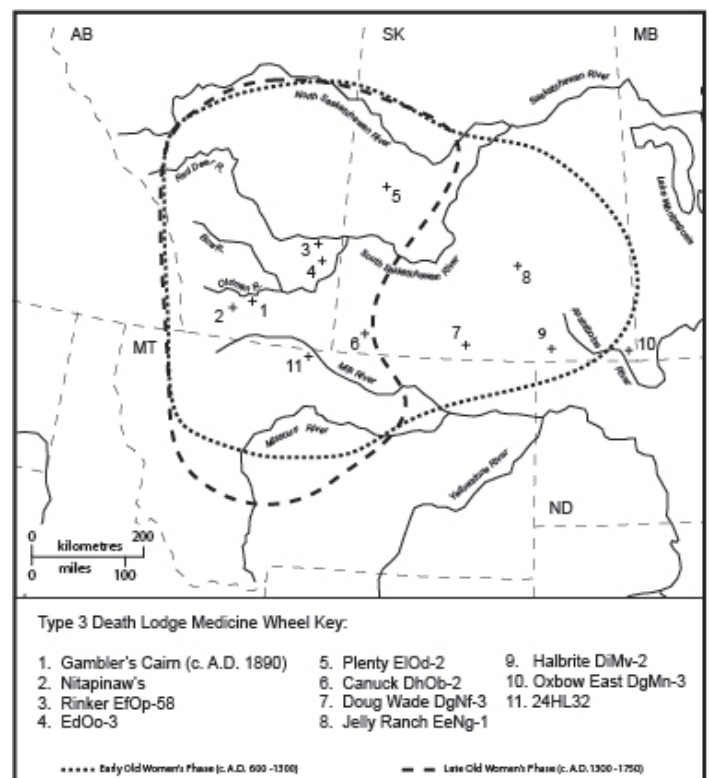


Figure 2. Distribution of Subtype 3 medicine wheels in relation to the Old Women’s Phase, which is believed to represent the material culture of the ancestral Blackfoot (adapted from Vickers and Peck 2009).

Subgroup 4 medicine wheels were defined by Brumley (1988:39) as a stone circle the size of a tipi ring with two or more radiating stone lines. In the early 1980s, Brumley (1985) excavated the Ellis Medicine Wheel (EcOp-4) on the Suffield Military Reserve in southeastern Alberta. Excavation within the tipi ring or stone circle forming the medicine wheel produced 66 fragments of human bone. An analysis of the remains suggested a single, adult-aged male had been placed east of the central hearth area of the

lodge (Brumley 1985:164). Other material found at the site included four projectile points consistent with an Old Women's Phase cultural ascription. A radiocarbon date - 450 ± 160 ^{14}C yr BP (Beta-8948) - obtained on a stake from within the medicine wheel also supports an Old Women's Phase cultural ascription. Brumley concluded that Subgroup 4 medicine wheels provide a direct link between the historic Nitsitapii (especially the Kainai) and the prehistoric Old Women's Phase. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels and the Old Women's Phase.

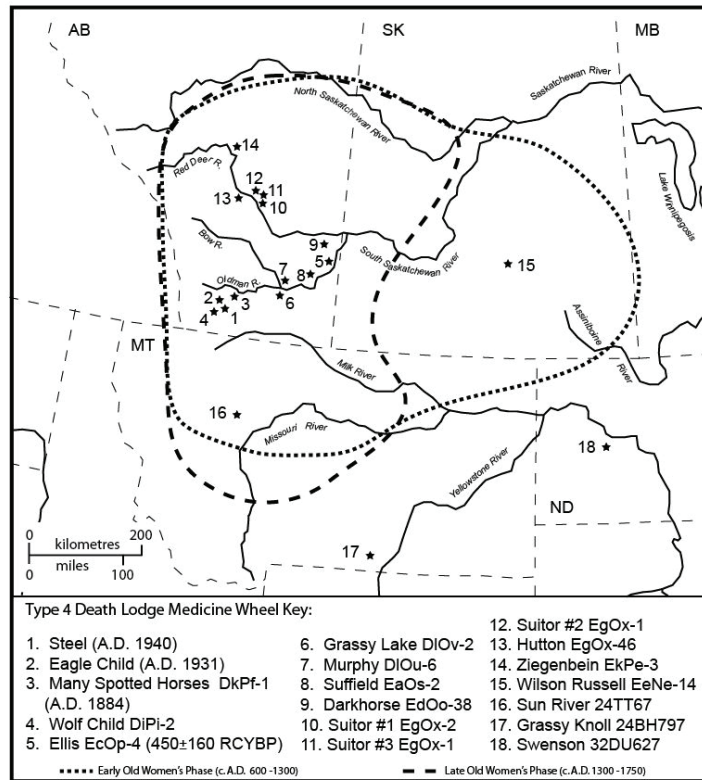


Figure 3. The distribution of Subgroup 4 medicine wheels relative to the Old Women's Phase, which is believed to represent the material culture of the ancestral Blackfoot (adapted from Vickers and Peck 2009).

4.1.1. *Sti-Mátsis, Steel, Fire Steel (DiPg-10)*

The *Sti-mátsis* (Steel, Fire, whetstone) Medicine Wheel is a memorial to *Sti-mátsis* (Steel, literally Fire Steel), a great Blood warrior. The site is located on the Plume farm about 5 kilometres north of Spring Coulee and about 0.5 kilometres from the St. Mary's River. The Steel Medicine Wheel is on land owned by Wayne Plume, son of Steel. The current caretaker of the land on which the site is located is Wayne's nephew, Jim Plume.

As a ceremonialist, both Steel and his wife were well-known to the people of the Blood Reserve. As members of the Horn Society, they were well respected people. The

1863 Blood tribe pay-sheet records indicate that he was born in 1833. Chief Red Crow's Uncle, Pinukwiim or See From Afar, led a group of men down to Mexico; on their journey they ran into the Mandan people and their earth lodges. This visit with the Mandan people proved to be fruitful as they were given sacred items to bring home with them. Pinukwiim was given a pipe that is called the 'Different People Pipe,' and his wife was given a sacred head dress. The head dress is still used today in the Motoki Society of the Blood people and the pipe was later transferred to Steel; it is still used today in the Horn Society.

Previous Work. The site was originally recorded by Hugh Dempsey (1956). The site has not been revisited since, although it has been referred to by Brumley (1988) and Vogt (1990). Dempsey (1956) provided a large amount of invaluable information including the observation: "The most interesting 'medicine wheel,' from all aspects, is the memorial to Steel, a great Blood Warrior. It is of the most classic design and the fact that it was constructed in 1940, probably makes it the most recent and last such stone maker." Dempsey also provided a schematic map of the site (Figure 4).

Current Study. The site was situated much as Dempsey (1956:178, Figure 1, 180-181) had described. The medicine wheel was said to be south of *Sti-mátsis* (Steel's) home, which still stands on a lower terrace to the south of the current Plume Home. The medicine wheel began as a large tipi ring placed for a gathering of the Horns Society.

The medicine wheel was found to be much like Dempsey's (1956:178, Figure 1) schematic image had portrayed it (Figure 4), although there are some important differences. The original spokes have been truncated by agricultural practices (Figure 4). Dempsey (1956:178, Figure 1) indicated that each of the four spokes extend 30 feet. At present, the longest remaining spoke is the eastern spoke, which is 4.5 metres or about 13 feet long. In addition, the remaining spokes are not the straight lines of single stones Dempsey depicted, but are rather less straight and composed of less regularly spaced stones. The tipi ring, depicted by Dempsey as a perfect circle, now is more flattened on the northwestern side. Dempsey (1956:178) indicated that 77 stones were used in the tipi ring. We counted 81 stones, but four of those could be considered the first stones of a spoke. The two hearth features are less regular than portrayed by Dempsey, and they are located slightly more to the east. Dempsey (1956:178) observed 14 stones in each of the hearths. We observed 12 stones in the western hearth and ten stones in the eastern hearth, although we made no attempt to excavate in areas where a stone appeared to be absent. Interestingly, the hearth stones were all relatively long, cylindrical, dark

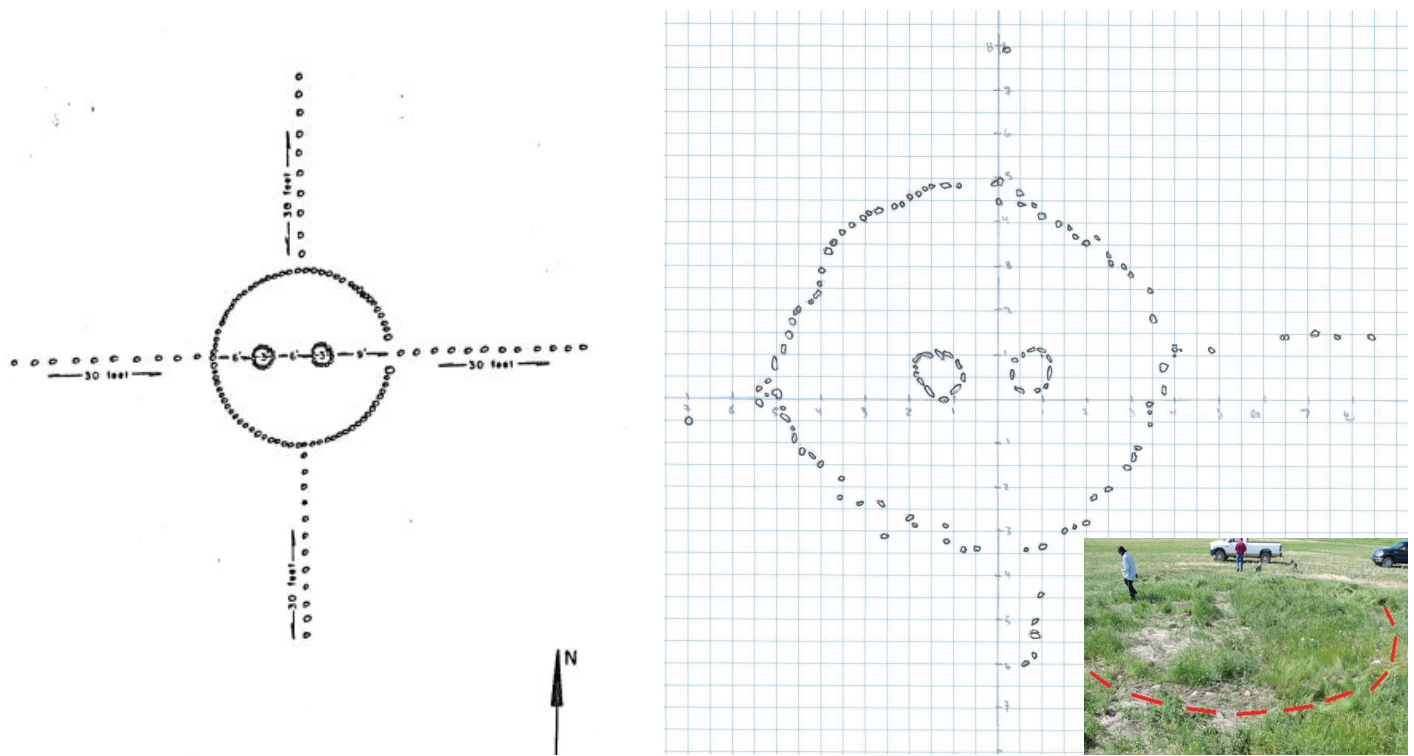


Figure 4. The Sti-mátsis (Steel, Fire Steel) Medicine Wheel. The panel on the left is adapted from Dempsey's (1956:178; Figure 1) map. The right panel shows the map produced during the current study. The inset photograph shows the current site condition, facing south; the red dashed line is just outside the stone circle of the medicine wheel.

cobbles while the tipi ring and spoke cobbles were more rounded 'generic' glacial cobbles. Lastly, Dempsey (1956:178, Figure 1) noted that larger stones flanked three foot entrance. These stones appear to have remained roughly in place, although the original 3-foot entrance now is closer to 5 feet, indicating that some movement occurred.

Significance. The Sti-mátsis (Steel) Medicine Wheel is one of 14 known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels in Alberta, with only four possible such structures known to existing outside Alberta. Importantly, this medicine wheel can be connected to a known historical figure - Sti-mátsis (Steel, Fire Steel) and, as Dempsey (1956:180) noted, it was constructed in 1940, likely making it the most recent and last such stone maker.

4.1.2. Makoyepuk, Wolf Child (DiPi-2)

The Makoyepuk (Wolf Child) Medicine Wheel is a memorial monument to Makoyepuk, a Kainai Chief. The site is located 8 kilometres east of Glenwood and 10 kilometres south of Standoff on the east edge of Bullhorn Coulee, which contains a tributary creek to Layton Creek, itself a tributary to the Belly River. The Makoyepuk Medicine Wheel is located in the Farm Four area of the Blood Reserve on lands formerly owned by Guy Wolf Child, son of Makoyepuk.

Makoyepuk, or Wolf Child, was known to his family

and the community at large as John Epps (Hungry Wolf 1977:273). Makoyepuk was remembered as a warrior who went on raids and raiding parties that went out to steal horses from the Blackfoot's traditional enemies.

John Wolf Child (elder in this project), who is the great nephew of the late Makoyepuk, remembers stories of his great uncle Makoyepuk as they were shared with his father, the late Albert Wolf Child, who was a cousin of Guy Wolf Child. Like his father, Guy was a member of the Horn Society on the Blood Reserve.

Makoyepuk was unique in character and was recognized in the community because of the topknot he wore in his hair and his fine features. The topknot was adorned with a variety of feathers, some given to him for protection and others picked up in his travels in the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Previous Work. The site was initially recorded by Dempsey on June 2, 1961. He placed the site on the east edge of Bullhorn Coulee on the Blood Reserve across from Mrs. Alice Wolf Child's home. He described the site as consisting of an "...outside circle of small stones about 18 feet in diameter. Inside circle of large stones about 8 ft. in diameter. Depression of about 18" within the circles with whole area covered with buckbrush" (Dempsey 1961). To accompany this description, Dempsey provided a sketch of the site (Figure 5).

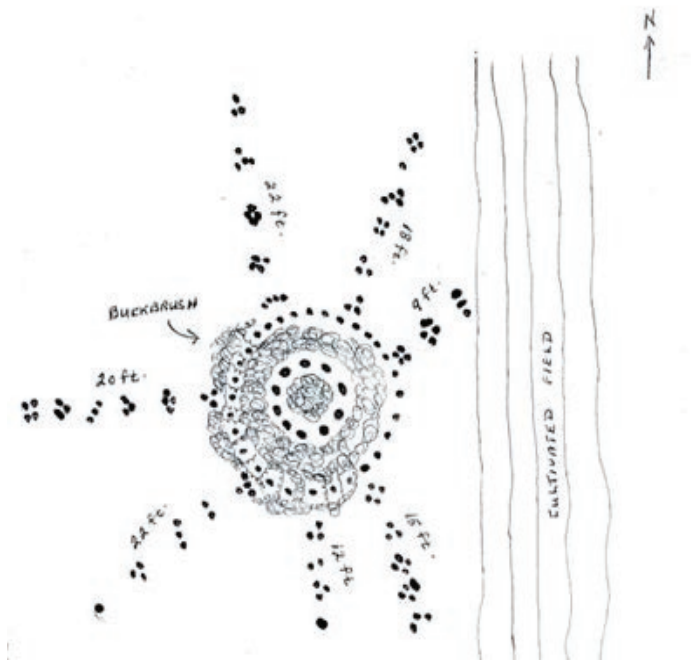


Figure 5. The Makoyepuk (Wolf Child) Medicine Wheel. The panel on the left is adapted from Dempsey’s 1961 map (Dempsey 1961). The upper right panel shows the medicine wheel when it was intact (Glenbow C224-1). The lower right panel shows scattered stones of the disturbed medicine wheel and the impact of cultivation on the site observed during the current study.

In 1976, Walde (1976:39-40) produced a surveyed map of the site. At that time he noted that cultivation to the east of the site had removed one spoke, originally 9 feet long in Dempsey’s 1961 map. Walde also noted numerous rectangular depressions immediately to the west of the medicine wheel and suggested that they may be burials. These are the only documented visits to the site (Dempsey 1961; Walde 1976, 1977).

Current Study. The originally reported site location was confirmed by numerous landmarks including the coulee, the nearby depressions, and the orientation of the fence-line, but the site itself was not relocated. There is little doubt that it has had been destroyed by cultivation (Figure 5). A comprehensive search of the western part of the site failed to find any rocks remaining in situ.

Significance. The Wolf Child Medicine Wheel was one of 14 known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels in Alberta. There is substantial evidence to suggest these structures commemorate significant individuals in the ancestral Blackfoot community. Its destruction is a great loss.

4.1.3. Nitapinaw (DjPf-23)

The Nitapinaw, or perhaps Nita-pinn-awa, Medicine Wheel can be translated as “the real chief.” The site is located

on the prairie upland on the north side of a coulee, near its eastern tip, on the west side Oldman River, southwest of Lethbridge. The site is on lands formerly owned by Alan Shade and family. Despite substantial inquiries by Kathy Brewer into the name and nature of the medicine wheel, little information was obtained.

Previous Work. The site was initially recorded as part of an Oldman River Basin Reservoir Study; however, Quigg (1975:70) did not record the medicine wheel feature at that time. In 1984, Conaty and Tailfeathers (1985:47-51) revisited the site and recorded the medicine wheel, along with 100 stone circles, possible drive lines, historic graves, and surface scatters. The medicine wheel was not discussed specifically; however, a sketch map and a photograph were included in the report (Figure 6).

Current Study. The site was relocated on the prominent point of land in the very southeast part of the site area. The medicine wheel is on the valley uplands along the north side of a coulee near the easternmost point of the prominent upland. Conaty and Tailfeather’s sketched the medicine wheel in the shape of a cross (Figure 6). The map produced by the current study suggests the medicine wheel is not a ‘true’ cross but more of an “x-shaped” structure with a bulky middle central cairn (Figure 6).

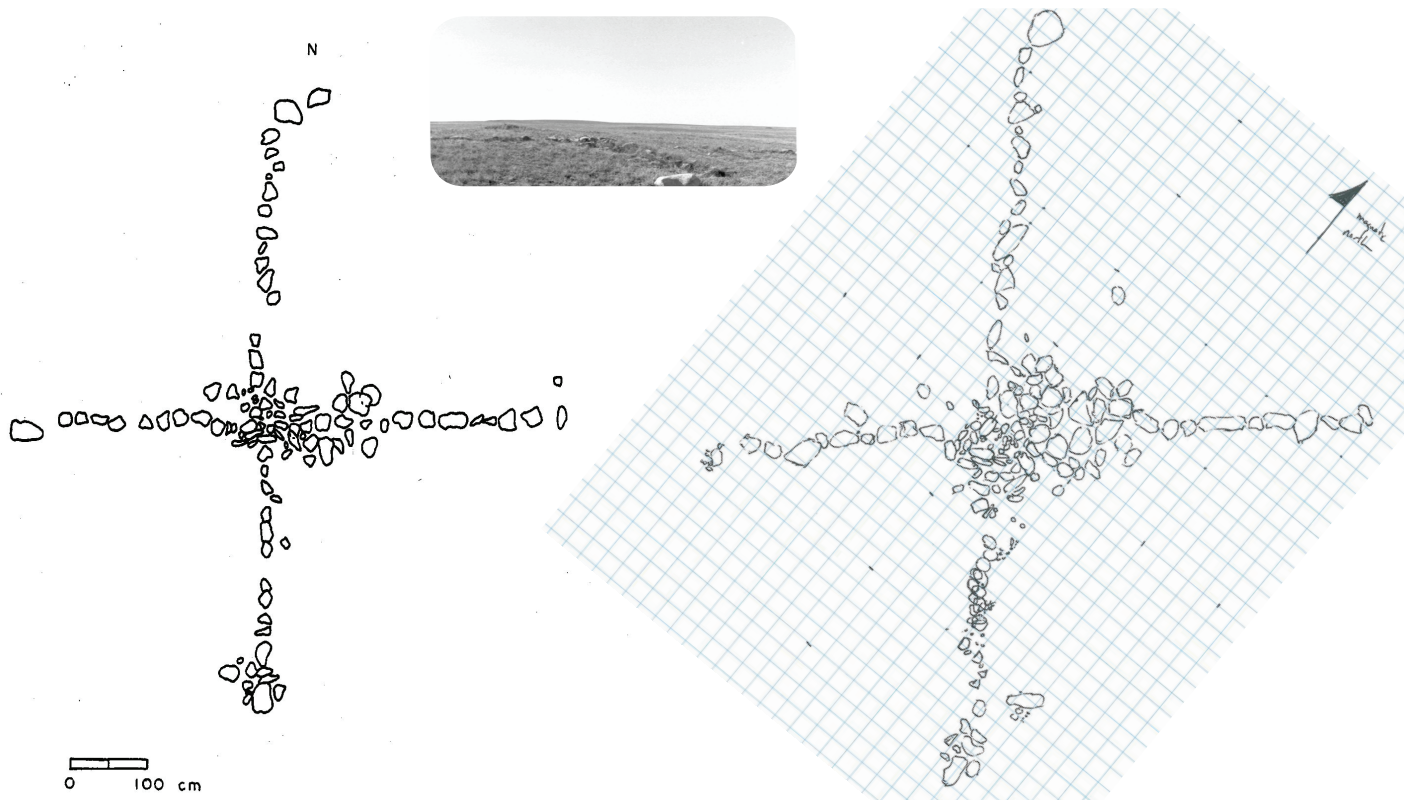


Figure 6. The Nitapinaw Medicine Wheel. The panel on the left and photograph are adapted from Conaty and Tailfeathers (1985:49). The right panel shows the map created during the current study.

In essence, the medicine wheel consists of a low central cairn from which four spokes radiate. The central cairn is about 2 metres east-west by 1.4 metres north-south. The eastern, northeastern spoke is about 2.5 metres, the northern, northwestern is about 3.3 metres long, the western, southwestern spoke is 2.2 metres long, and the southern, southeastern spoke is 2.7 metres long. No cultural material was found associated with the medicine wheel. In the course of their surveys, Conaty and Tailfeathers (1985) and Quigg (1975) noted numerous stone circles and cairns; however, recording these additional features was not within the scope of the current project, so they are not reported here.

Significance. The Nitapinaw Medicine Wheel consists of a low central cairn with four radiating spokes. This is a Subgroup 3 medicine wheel. Ethnographic evidence (Brumley 1988:31; Vickers and Peck 2009:481-483) has been used to suggest this form of medicine wheels represents memorials to great Blackfoot chiefs or warriors. The Nitpinaw is one of four known in Alberta; another six Subgroup 3 medicine wheels are known in Saskatchewan; and one Subgroup 3 medicine wheel is known just across the border in Montana (Vickers and Peck 2009:481-483).

4.1.4. Péta-Poka, Eagle Child (DjPh-20)

The Eagle Child Medicine wheel is a memorial to Eagle

Child (Péta-poka). The site is located on the Kainai Reserve about 2.4 kilometres west of the St. Paul's School, formerly St. Paul's Anglican Church, about 50 metres west of Eagle Child's residence. The residence has collapsed and little remains of the structure, but the medicine wheel is still largely intact. The land is currently owned by Merle (Joey) Mountain Horse.

Péta-poka, or Eagle Child, was a member of the One Spot Clan on the Blood Reserve. Born in 1856, Péta-poka lived with his family in the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy. When he was 21, Péta-poka and his family were present at the signing of Treaty 7.

At the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877, members of the Blood Tribe had not yet been assigned individual treaty numbers. About 28 years later, treaty numbers were assigned to the heads of households and their respective family members. As was the tradition then, some men had several wives and families all living together. From the available information, it appears that Péta-poka had at least two wives, and children from both spouses, living with him at the time. Péta-poka and his family were then assigned Treaty Number 12. Accordingly:

- His first wife's name was Yellow Buffalo Stone Woman. Information indicated that she was 34 years of age. With

this union they had one son whose name was Tom Eagle Child, age 14.

- His second wife's name was Killed Last, aged 45. With this union they had one son who was known as Stabbed On Short, 20 years old.

In Kathy Brewer's interview with Martin Eagle Child, grandson of Péta-poka, he recalled that his grandfather did have two wives and children with both wives. Martin stated that later on in his life, Martin met more of his grandfather's children who were living on the Blackfeet Reserve. He laughed and stated that, because his grandfather was so good looking, he had children on other Reserves including some in the United States.

Previous Work. The site was initially reported by Dempsey (1956:180) (Figure 7). Dempsey stated:

...the Eagle Child wheel...was constructed in 1931 after this man's death. It is located about 150 feet west of his house on the Blood Reserve, and about ½ miles south-west of St. Paul's Anglican School. The tipi ring portion is 12 feet in diameter and contains 54 field stones ranging from four to 12 inches in diameter. There are no hearth stones. When examined in the summer of 1955, the north and south lines contained six stones, the east line seven stones and the west line four stones. All extended in lines four to six feet in length and, by the spaces, would appear to have been disturbed by cattle or horses.

According to available information, Eagle Child had lived in the house, but moved to his tipi shortly before his death in 1931. The radiating lines were set in place by Francis Eagle Child following his father's death.

Current Study. The site is situated as Dempsey (1956:180) described; however, the Eagle Child residence had long since collapsed. The site has undergone impacts, likely from grazing cattle. The stone circle is largely intact but the spokes, which were short to begin with, are almost non-existent.

The medicine wheel consists of a stone circle about 4 metres across or 13 feet, composed of 49 cobbles (see Figure 7). Dempsey originally recorded the site as 12 feet across with 54 cobbles. No hearth is currently visible; however, a depression about 40 x 40 x 5 centimetres, where a hearth would have been situated, was observed; Dempsey (1956:180) did not make mention of a depression. There are also remnants of spokes at roughly the cardinal directions;

the northern spoke consists of four stones; the eastern spoke appears to be absent (with one possible stone), the south spoke consist of four stones; and the western spoke consist of three stones. This is different from Dempsey's (1956:180) counts of six, seven, six, and four stones, respectively. Dempsey (1956:180) even considered that the spokes may have been disturbed by cattle back in the 1950s, with their lengths ranging from 4 to 6 feet (Figure 7).

Significance. The Péta-poka (Eagle Child) Medicine Wheel is one of 14 known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels in Alberta, with only an additional four more known outside of Alberta (Vickers and Peck 2009:483-485). More importantly, the medicine wheel can be connected to a known historical figure: Péta-poka (Eagle Child).

4.1.5. *Aka-Kitsipimi-ota, Many Spotted Horses (DkPf-1)*

The Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheel is a memorial to the noted Blood war chief Many Spotted Horses. The site is located on the Kainai Reserve on Weasel Fat's Bottom, a floodplain on the south side of the Oldman River, east of Hwy 509 just before it crosses the Oldman. The original memorial apparently was destroyed but re-marked by the Blood in the 1960s. The site location is commonly known to the Blood Tribe members as "Weasel Fat Bottom," lands considered to be community property.

Aka-kitsipimi-ota, Many Spotted Horses, was said to have been a great warrior and a rich man in material possessions and was acknowledged as Chief of the Many Fat Horses Band. In 1855 he signed a peace treaty for his people. Because of his wealth and many feats against his enemies, he was permitted to own a 30 buffalo skin tipi. This honour was bestowed to only a limited few who had committed a brave deed and were known to have performed great service to their people and family. This tipi had two doorways and two fireplaces, and was split into two sections when moved. His wealth was also evident in the material possessions that he owned, proving to his people that he was capable of being their leader at the time. The North West Mounted Police note that in 1877 at the signing of Treaty 7, Many Spotted Horses had 300 pinot horses, 10 wives, and 31 children.

Descendants of Many Spotted Horses would include Heavy Shields, Eagle Tail Feathers, Hind Bull, and other families. The Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheel is still very important and is utilized by the Blood Tribe, as well as other First Nations people from the other local tribes. As a result of a resurgence of traditional Blackfoot customs, vision quests to the site and offerings are still being made, as was evident in the site visit in the summer of 2014.

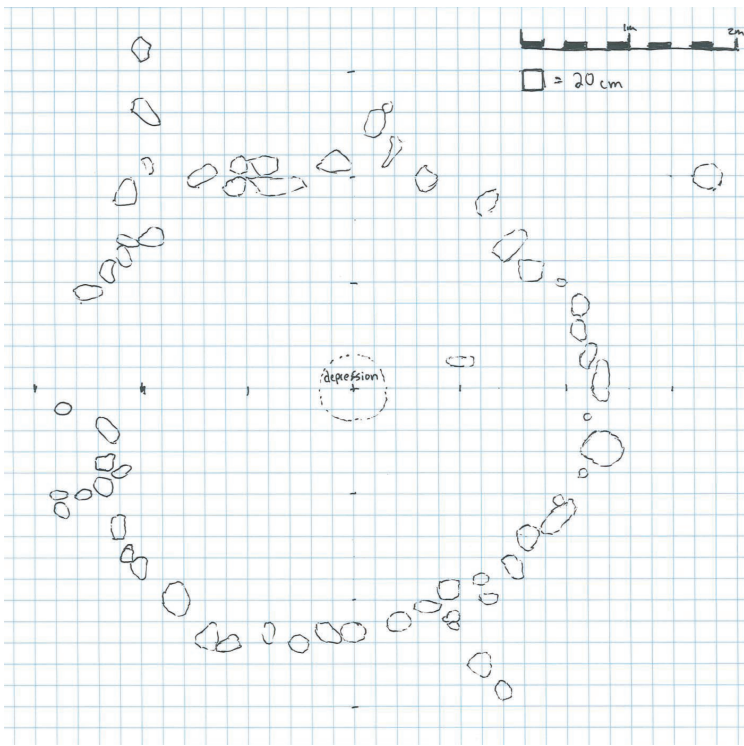


Figure 7. Peta-Poka (Eagle Child) Medicine Wheel. Sketch map from the current study on the left. Historic photo of the medicine wheel facing north (upper right, Glenbow C222-1). Photo of the medicine wheel taken during the current study (lower right); red line is just outside the stone circle.

Previous Work. Very little is known about the Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheel. Dempsey (1956:179) noted that: "...Many Spotted Horses, a noted Blood war chief who died in 1884, had a 'medicine wheel' on the Blood Reserve near Whoop-Up. A search revealed only the chief's tipi ring, but the stones of his 'medicine wheel' which were at an inaccessible point on Weasel Fat's Bottom, had reportedly been scattered. Local Indians had replaced the stones as much as possible, but it was felt that this interference limited the usefulness of this wheel for comparative study." Two previous maps of the site are available: one by Walde (1976) and another by the Alberta Archaeological Association, Lethbridge Centre in 1971 (for the former see Figure 8).

Current Study. On June 26, 2014, John Wolf Child led Allan Pard, Clarence Wolf Leg, Blair First Rider, Kathy

Brewer, and Trevor Peck to the Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheel. As it became apparent that it was actively being used, the decision was made to not disrupt the activities at the site by attempting to map it, knowing that surveyed maps of the site already exist on file (Figure 8).

In place of re-surveying the site, notes were taken about deviations between the existing site map and the current state of the site. The entire feature was observed to be intact and more-or-less as illustrated in the surveyed maps, with one exception. At the easternmost hearth, a focal point for placing modern offerings, many of the rocks used in the construction of the hearth have been moved for the placement of items such as tobacco, eagle feathers in leather pouches, and blankets. The site is currently enclosed within a fence; in this sense, it is protected (Figure 8).

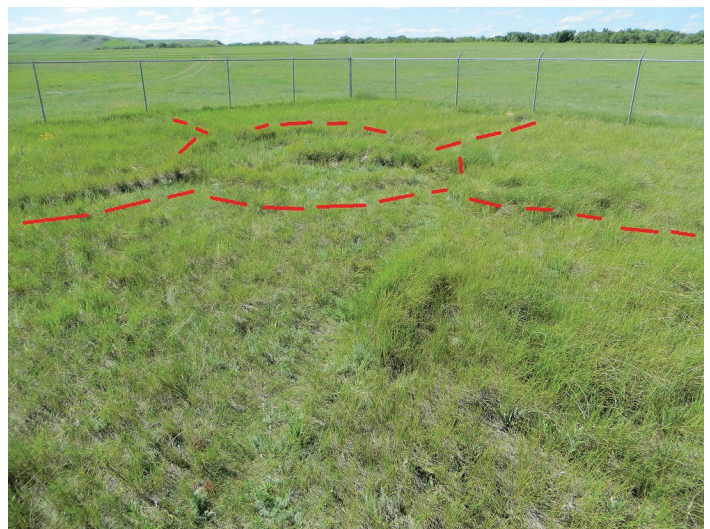
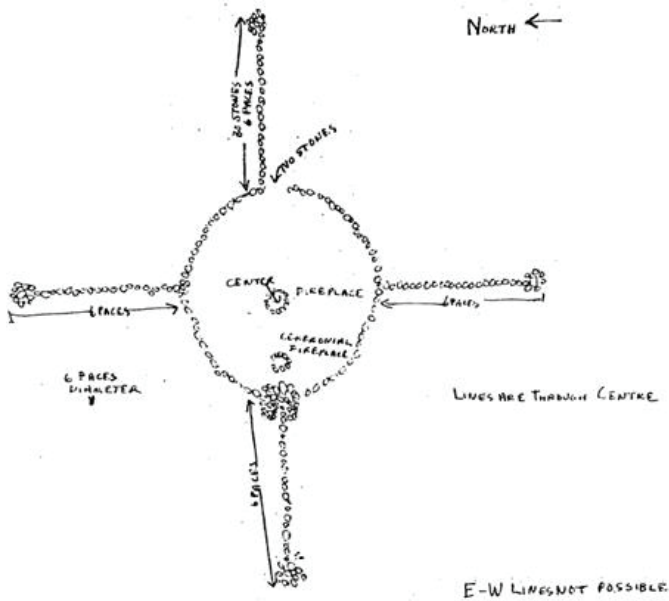


Figure 8. Aka-Kitsipimi-ota (Many Spotted Horses) Medicine Wheel. Map modified from Walde (1976) on left. Archaeological Survey of Alberta photo upper right (date unknown), and photograph taken during current study, lower right.

Significance. The active use of the site is slowly altering it, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The original state of the site has been documented. The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project has provided an update on its status. Further, the site is a re-marking of the original medicine wheel. As Dempsey (1956:179) initially reported, its status as a reconstructed medicine wheel limits the usefulness of the feature for comparative purposes.

4.1.6. Crowfoot Creek (EePe-26)

The Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel is located near the southwest corner of a high terrace at a point 44 metres north of the bluff edge. A cattle trail is 23.5 metres to the south and leads down slope to a ford crossing Crowfoot Creek. Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel is about 200 metres to the west of the creek. The terrace on which the site is located is flat with panoramic views of Crowfoot Creek to the west

and southwest and Bow valley to the south.

Previous Work. The site was recorded initially by Reeves and Shortt (1994) and has not been revisited since. Reeves and Shortt (1994) described the medicine wheel as consisting of four component parts: 1) an inner cairn, 2) a ring, 3) spokes, and 4) terminal outer cairns at the end of the spokes (Figure 8). The initial report indicated there was ‘a central cairn surrounded by a series of cobbles forming a ring. The stone circle or ‘tipi ring’ surrounding the cairn was not a perfect circle, with measurements of 3.75 metres along its N-S axis and 4.2 metres along its E-W axis. A total of seven “spokes” or “arms” extended from the stone circle. Each of these spokes varied in length, shape, and compass-bearing, and ended in a “terminal” cairn at the outer extremity of the arm (Reeves and Shortt 1994).

Current Study. The site was found to be largely as described by Reeves and Shortt (1994). The central “cairn” appeared

more like a central stone circle/hearth. The original map is relatively accurate as a schematic illustration; however, exact rock locations and counts were not entirely correct. Reeves and Shortt's (1994:150) map has been reproduced in this report (Figure 9).

The attempt to remap the site was not successful for two reasons: 1) the site was found to be essentially intact as it was mapped by Reeves and Shortt (see Figure 2, Reeves and Shortt 1994:150), and 2) the program had run out of field time and other commitments were infringing on the team's ability to remain in the field. As noted above, Reeves and Shortt's (1994:150) map has been reproduced in this report for reference (Figure 9).

In interpreting the site, Reeves and Shortt (1994:39) suggested it had certain affinities to both Subgroup 4 and 7 medicine wheels. Observations made during the current study tend to disagree with Reeves and Shortt's (1994:39) assessment of the site as a Subgroup 7 medicine wheel. Subgroup 7 medicine wheels consist of a prominent central stone cairn surrounded by a stone ring with two or more stone lines extend outward from the margins of the stone ring. Reeves and Shortt (1994:39) noted that the cairn was not prominent (in fact it may be a hearth) and the surrounding stone circle is much smaller at the Crowfoot Creek site than at other Subgroup 7 sites.

Reeves and Shortt (1994:39) also suggested that the medicine wheel was similar to Subgroup 4 medicine wheels. Subgroup 4 sites consist of a stone ring the size of a tipi ring with two or more stone lines extending outward from its margins. The Crowfoot Creek site displays exactly this layout. Subgroup 4 medicine wheels also have small stone circles/hearths in the central of the tipi ring and the stone lines/spokes often have terminal cairns. In addition, almost all Subgroup 4 medicine wheels sites are surrounded by associated stone circles/tipi rings. These five features (i.e., tipi ring-sized circle, stone lines/spokes extend outward from the margins of the tipi rings, central hearth, terminal cairns, and association with other stone circles/tipi rings) all suggest that the Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel is a Subgroup 4 medicine wheel (Figure 9).

Significance. Reeves and Shortt (1994:40) stated "the Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel is a rare and unique cultural resource." The current team strongly agrees with this this assessment. The Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel is one of 14 known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels in Alberta, with only four more known outside of Alberta (Vickers and Peck 2009:483-485).

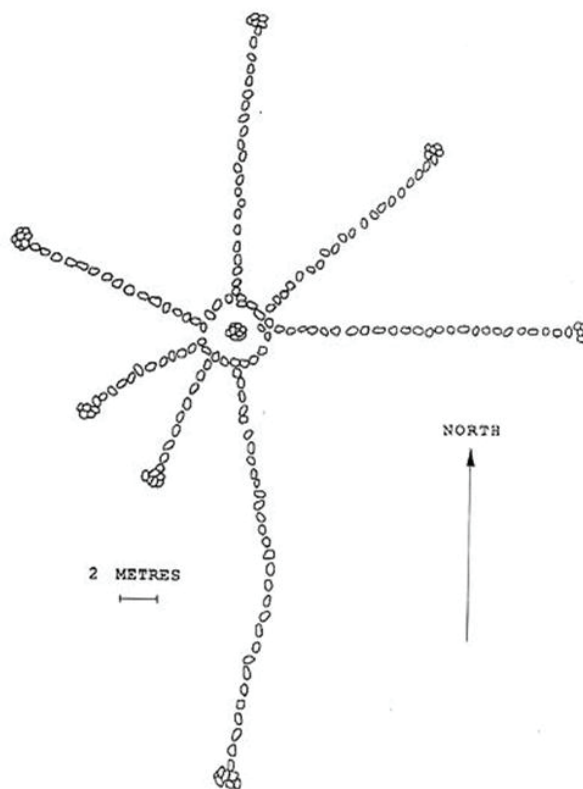


Figure 9. Crowfoot Creek Medicine Wheel. Map modified from Reeves and Shortt (1994), top. Photograph taken during current study, bottom.

4.2 Oral Traditions

This section discusses medicine wheels that were noted from oral tradition and recorded in the literature but have not been physically relocated. None of the medicine wheels mentioned in this section were relocated by the current study; however, they are discussed briefly here because the potential exists for them to be found.

4.2.1. Bad Head

Dempsey (1956:179) mentioned that there may be a medicine wheel on Arrowwood Creek on the Siksika Reserve. He stated: “One Gun knew of two wheels which he claimed were intact on the North Blackfoot Reserve [Siksika], east of Calgary. He said that ‘at Blackfoot Crossing there is one for Little Medicine Pipe, a Blackfoot who died in the smallpox epidemic of 1869-70, and on Arrowwood Creek is one for Bad Head, a Blood Chief.’” The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project team, led by Clarence Wolf Leg, briefly surveyed along the east side of Arrowwood Creek but did not relocate the site. This survey was not exhaustive, however, and much ground remains to be covered. Kathy Brewer discussed the Bad Head Medicine Wheel with Herman Yellow Old Woman of the Siksika. He indicated that the elders of the past said they had seen only parts of the medicine wheel at the time the Bow River Irrigation District flooded the site. It is possible that the Bad Head Medicine Wheel has been destroyed as a result of the construction of the Bow River irrigation canal.

4.2.2. Little Medicine Pipe

Dempsey (1956:179) also noted the possibility of a second medicine wheel on the Siksika Reserve. Again he stated: “One Gun knew of two wheels which he claimed were intact on the North Blackfoot Reserve [Siksika], east of Calgary. He said that ‘at Blackfoot Crossing there is one for Little Medicine Pipe, a Blackfoot who died in the smallpox epidemic of 1869-70, and on Arrowwood Creek is one for Bad Head, a Blood Chief.’” As with the Bad Head Medicine Wheel, this medicine wheel was not relocated.

4.2.3. Many Horses

Ewers (1955:287) briefly referred to a death lodge prepared for Many Horses. Many Horses and his wife were murdered by the Atsina (Gros Ventre) in 1866. The remaining family members erected a death lodge for the horse-wealthy leader. However, it is unclear if this lodge had radiating spokes; the offerings apparently included the execution of ten of his favourite horses (Ewers 1955:287). The location of the death lodge is not mentioned but might be determined to some degree given that before erecting the lodge the Amsskaapipikani [Peigan] retaliated against the Atsina. Calf Looking, father of Lazy Boy, oversaw the distribution of Many Horses wealth. There may be enough information to indicate the general location of the lodge. Further research is required.

4.2.4. *Mékai-Sto* (Red Crow)

Red Crow was a highly influential Blood chief of the Blackfoot from 1879 to his death. He died on August 28,

1900, on the banks of the St. Mary (Dempsey 1956:179, Kehoe 1954:133). Chief Red Crow was born in 1830 to the Fish Eater Clan. In his early life Red Crow was known as a distinguished warrior and leader who went on raids against the Crows, Cree, Assiniboin, Shoshone, and Nez Perce Tribes. Red Crow was the son of Black Bear (father) and Handsome Woman (mother). His father was also a great Chief of the Blood Tribe in the 1800s.

The evidence for a medicine wheel to memorialize Red Crow comes from Dempsey (1956:179-180, see also Dempsey 1994:14). He stated:

Of the three markers [referring to the Steel, Eagle Child, and Red Crow medicine wheel], Red Crow’s is the earliest. It was made immediately following his death on August 28, 1900. Red Crow was head chief of the tribe from 1870 until his death and was one of the most influential men in the nation. An elderly informant, Mrs. Bruised Head, who was present at the event, provided the following description of his medicine wheel:

I was staying at Red Crow’s tipi at the time. He went across the river to round up his horses and, when he didn’t return, his wife, Long Time Singer, went to look for him. She found him laying [sic] on the gravel at the edge of the river. I saw her crying and we knew what had happened. We all went across with Red Crow’s wagon and brought his body over. Both religious denominations were at the funeral, together with many white people. When it was finished, we started to move camp. But before we left, we place the markers on the four sides of his tipi ring. Red Crow had used pegs on his tipi, but also had stone between them. When the lodge was removed, the circle of stones was incomplete, so we took rocks from other tipi rings and completed it. Then we placed the four radiating lines. There was no ceremony; several of us in the family did it because it was the custom as far back as the days when we used dogs; they were just the marks of a warrior chief.

After this, we left the camp site. That night, Bull Horn, a minor chief, camped in the next bottom. He had not heard about Red Crow’s death. Next morning he went to the camp site and when he saw the marks around Red Crow’s tipi ring he began crying, for he knew that Red Crow was dead.

Harry Mills, a Kainai, noted that the Mékai-sto (Red Crow) Medicine Wheel had been covered up or washed away some time before the early 1950s owing to its location along the banks of the Belly River [sic., St. Mary River] (Kehoe 1954:133). With authority, Dempsey (1994:13) confirmed that Red Crow's last camping place, having been marked with a complete circle and radiating lines, disappeared under the St. Mary irrigation dam in the 1950s and, although inundated, may still be intact to this day.

4.2.5. *Running Wolf*

Harry Mills also mentioned another medicine wheel on the Kainai Reserve. He stated: "There is another one for Running Wolf to mark the place where he died at the Belly Buttes. It's not far from the Sun Dance ground, so I could show it to you if you were at the next Sun Dance" (Kehoe 1954:133).

5. Conclusions

The Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project team revisited the six known medicine wheels, Crowfoot Creek, Sti-mátsis (Steel), Makoyepuk (Wolf Child), Nitapinaw, Péta-poka (Eagle Child), and Many Spotted Horses, and gathered information about these sites. In addition, there were at least five other medicine wheels mentioned in oral tradition and recorded in the literature for which the team tried to gather information; these included Bad Head, Little Medicine Pipe, Mékai-sto (Red Crow), Running Wolf, and Many Horses.

Makoyepuk (Wolf Child) is a Subgroup 4 medicine wheel that has been destroyed. Crowfoot Creek, Sti-mátsis (Steel), Péta-poka (Eagle Child) are three of 13 known Subgroup 4 medicine wheels in Alberta, with only three more known from Montana (Vickers and Peck 2009:483-485). Many Spotted Horses Medicine Wheel is remarking of a Subgroup 4 medicine wheel. Nitapinaw is one of three known Subgroup 3 medicine wheels in Alberta; another six Subgroup 3 medicine wheels are known in Saskatchewan; and one Subgroup 3 medicine wheel is known just across the border in Montana (Vickers and Peck 2009: 481-483). These are rare and significant sites which continue to be impacted through the complete destruction of the site, loss of structural elements of degradation of their context. Yet, there is still hope that other medicine wheel site may be found. Five possible medicine wheels - Bad Head, Little Medicine Pipe, Mékai-sto (Red Crow), Running Wolf, and Many Horses - from oral tradition may exist on the landscape in southern Alberta.

6. Acknowledgement

The interest and positive comments shared by the elders, members, and various departments of the Blackfoot Reserves serve as a gauge as to how valuable and needed this project has been to the Blackfoot Confederacy. Those involved in this project need to be acknowledged.

Special acknowledgement goes to the elders who spent time away from their families, homes, and communities to assist the project team in locating these sites. These elders include John Wolf Child (Kainai), Allan Pard (Pikunni), Clarence Wolf Leg (Siksika), and Blair First Rider (Kainai). We also thank Chase Brewer (Siksika/Kainai, Kathy Brewer's grandson).

Appreciation also goes to the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Historic Resources Management, Department of Culture and Tourism. It was through an Innovation Grant provided by Alberta Culture and Tourism that this work was made possible.

Hugh Dempsey and Adolf Hungry Wolf are also thanked for the journey they made before us. Their valuable knowledge and insight in recording the stories and sites have been utilized in this report. The information has proved most valuable. These sites represent Blackfoot place names, land marks, and places that captured the origin and creation stories of the Blackfoot People of southern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan and northwestern Montana.

7. References

- Brumley, J. H. 1985. The Ellis Site (EcOp 4): A Late Prehistoric Burial Lodge/Medicine Wheel Site in Southeastern Alberta. In: *Contributions to Plains Prehistory: The 1984 Victoria Symposium, Archaeological Survey of Alberta Occasional Paper No. 26*, edited by D. Burley. pp. 180-232. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Brumley, J. H. 1988. *Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains: A Summary and Appraisal*. Manuscript Series No. 12. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Calder, J. M. 1977. *The Majorville Medicine Wheel Site, Alberta*. Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper No. 62. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
- Conaty, G. T., and E. Tailfeathers. 1985. Blood Tribe Historic Sites Development Project 1984: Final Report, Archaeological Survey of Alberta Permit 84-065, Archaeological Survey of Canada Contract 1630-4M-102. Report for Archaeological Survey of Canada, National Museum of Man; Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta; and Blood Tribe Administration, Alberta.

- Dempsey, H. A. 1994. *The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt and Other Blackfoot Stories*. Fifth House Ltd. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
- Dempsey, H. A. 1956. Stone Medicine Wheels - Memorials to Blackfoot War Chiefs. *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 46:177-182.
- Dempsey, H. A. 1961. Glenbow Foundation Archaeological Survey, site form on file, Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Ewers, J. C. 1955. *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 159. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D. C.
- Forbis, R. G. 1970. *A Review of Alberta Archaeology to 1964*. Publications in Archaeology No. 1. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
- Grinnell, G. B. 1922. The Medicine Wheel. *American Anthropologist* 24:299-310.
- Hungry Wolf, A. 1977. *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy: An Illustrated Interpretation of the Old Ways*. Harper & Row, New York.
- Kehoe, T. F. 1954. Stone "Medicine Wheels" in Southern Alberta and the adjacent portions of Montana: Were they designed as grave markers? *Journal of Washington Academy of Science* 44:133-137.
- Quigg, M. J. 1975. Archaeological Assessment of the Oldman River Basin Reservoir Study, Permit 75-045. Consultant's report on file, Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Reeves, B. O. K., and M. Shortt. 1994. Final Report Siksika Nation Heritage Site Inventory Results of the 1993 Field Season Siksika Nation, Alberta, Canada. Submitted to Department of Communications, Government of Canada. CRM 315. Report on file, Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Sims, S. C. 1903 A wheel-shaped stone monument in Wyoming. *American Anthropologist* 5:107-110.
- Thorpe, S. 1982. Petroformic Art: A Consideration of Northern Plains Ceremonial Boulder Configurations. Archaeology 598 paper for Richard Forbis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.
- Vickers, J. R., and T. R. Peck 2009. Identifying the Prehistoric Blackfoot: Approaches to Nitsitapii (Blackfoot) culture history. In: *Painting the Past with a Broad Brush: Papers in Honour of James Valliere Wright*, edited by D. L. Keenlyside and J.L. Pilon, pp. 473-497. Mercury Series-Archaeology Paper 170. Gatineau, Quebec.
- Vogt, D. E. 1990. *An Information Analysis of Great Plains Medicine Wheels*. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.
- Walde, K. 1976. Medicine Wheel Survey, Permit 76-035. Consultant's report on file, Archaeological Survey of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta.
- Walde, K. 1977. Medicine Wheel Survey. In: *Archaeology in Alberta, 1976*, edited by J. M. Quigg, pp. 93-99. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Wedel, W. R. 1961. *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma.