

I heard that when they buried a real chief, one that the people loved, they would pile rocks around the edge of his lodge and then place rows of rocks out from his burial tipi. The rock lines show that everybody went there to get something to eat. He is inviting someone everyday. People went there to live off him. Not every chief is treated like that--just the one loved by everyone. I have never seen this type of stone work but I heard of a chief in Canada who was buried like that.

Similar information was later supplied by Hugh Dempsey, of Edmonton, Alberta (personal letter, 1/8 54) in a statement elicited from an elderly Blood Indian, Harry Mills of Cardston, Alberta:

There was a circle of stones used by the Bloods to mark the place where great chiefs or medicine men died. They were bigger than the tipi rings and had five lines (it had been some years since he had seen one, but was fairly certain there were five) leading towards the centre like a wheel. In the middle a fireplace was built.

Red Crow (prominent Blood chief of last century ) had one of these on the banks of the Belly River where he died, but these have all been covered up or washed away by floods. 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.

As noted above Dempsey's informant believed that the medicine wheel was placed to mark the site where a great chief died rather than the actual place of his burial. Possibly they were used on varying occasions for either purpose. His remarks continue:

As far as I know, they never buried anybody at these circles of stone; it was just to mark the place where they died. The Bloods also used to mark important sites with cairns of stones. There is a pile of about 30 or 40 stones at the place where Sergeant Wilde was killed by Charcoal (in 1896). Somebody from the Reserve saw it just last summer. There is also a row of cairns at Whoop-Up at the site of our big fight with the Crees.

John C. Ewers (personal letter, 2/18/54) secured a similar account of the formal marking of chiefs' graves among the Blood tribe from an old Indian, Weasel Tail, since deceased. Weasel Tail was born and spent his early years on the Blood Reserve in Canada but lived the balance of his life on the Black-foot Reservation in Montana. His interpretation of the four radiating stone lanes differed from Adam White Man's in that they were said to represent great war deeds of the deceased. The relevance of this symbolism is unclear and less plausible than White Man's rationalization.