

Sun Dance is the anthropologists' term for the annual religious offering of the plains Indian tribes to their sky gods. The early fur-traders in the Northwest named it the Medicine Lodge, the adjective in this case having a spiritual meaning. As applied to the Blackfeet tribes' offering, it would seem to be the better term, for dancing is the least important part of its ceremonial rites. The Blackfeet name for it is O-kan', and they say that the meaning of the word has been lost. Yet it seems to be sleep, or dream, for closely allied to it are, ots-okan' (his sleep); and opup' okan' (his vision sleep).

The Medicine Lodge, as we shall continue to call it, is the result of a vow made to ~~the~~ Sun. With the Crows, Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos, a man makes the vow, but with the Blackfeet it is a woman, for it was a woman, Tall-Feathers Woman, who, even more than Scar-Face, brought from Sun himself the request that the people should build it for him and his wife and son. So is it that, when a woman's husband, son, or other near relative is ill, or off to war and in great danger, she may, if pure and virtuous, publicly vow to Sun that, if he will make well the sick one, or help the absent one to survive all dangers, she will in the coming summer build a Medicine Lodge. If more than one woman makes the vow in the course of a year, it is the first one of them who is the real lodge-giver and the others are his assistants.

As of old every summer, each tribe of the confederacy puts up a Medicine Lodge: the Blackfeet, east of Calgary, in the latter end of June; the Piku'ni (Mountain Blackfeet), July 1 to 10; the Bloods, July 10 to 20; and the North Piku'ni right after the Blood ceremonies. Visitors in Glacier Park and in Watertown Lakes Park can attend the interesting ceremonies daily, as it is but an hour's drive to the Piku'ni ceremonials, and less than two hours to those of the Bloods and North Piku'ni on their respective reservations.

The Medicine Lodge ceremonial rites of the four tribes differ somewhat, in a number of details. Anthropologists have recorded those of the Piku'ni (Mountain Blackfeet), so we give herewith those of the Kai'na (Bloods), as we have witnessed them for several summers, camping right with the tribe the whole time.

In each of the four tribes there is a medicine roll, or bundle, named the Natoas (SUN-TURNIP), which must be owned by the sacred woman who has vowed to build the Medicine Lodge. If she hasn't it, she must purchase it from its owner, the sacred woman of the previous summer, who then becomes her mother, and assists her in fulfilling her vow, teaching her such parts of the rites as she has to learn, particularly the sacred songs.

In the long ago, previous to the time set for the beginning of the Medicine Lodge ceremonies, the hunters brought to the sacred woman and her assistants one hundred buffalo tongues, which they cut into thin sheets and dried for sacrificial food; for Sun had said to Scar-Face that buffalo tongues were sacred food, his food,