

The Sacred Pipe

On Friday, July 11, just at sunset the Sacred Pipe was brought into the Sun Dance lodge. This is the Flat Pipe, and is by far the most important ceremonial object in the Arapaho tribe. The announcer requested silence on the part of the spectators, and asked them to remove their hats and control their children and to stand well away from the entrance to the lodge, and keep a wide path clear for the Pipe Keeper. The Pipe Keeper, Adam Shakespeare, brought the Pipe in. His position is perhaps the highest in the ceremonial organization of the Arapahoes. The Pipe itself was hidden from view in its wrappings. What could be seen was a fairly large oblong bundle about three feet long, the outer covering of which was red list cloth (a rainbow selvedged wool broadcloth imported from Europe). This bundle was tied with what looked like strips of cloth smeared with red paint and a wide strip of brown fur (Otter fur?) was also tied around the middle of the bundle. Many long, dark eagle feathers were attached to the bundle, and hung down like the fringe on a quiver or gun case.

The Pipe Keeper carried the bundle slung across his back by a leather carrying strap passed across his upper chest and shoulders. He walked slowly and deliberately, with his face lowered and eyes on the ground ahead of him. He was followed by two other men whom I presume were assistants. One carried the stand on which the bundle would be placed, and the other carried a painted rawhid bundle or envelope which was square in shape. These men came from the direction of the Pipe Keeper's tipi some distance to the west of the Sun Dance lodge. They walked east along the south side of the lodge and passed between the spectators gathered close to the entrance. They entered the lodge and walked clockwise to a spot I think was about southeast of the center post and stopped. The four-legged pyramidal stand was set up and tested to see that it was steady. Then the pipe bundle was placed upon it hung crossways of the stand on its south side. Then the announcer stated that anyone who wanted to "cover" the Pipe could do so while it was in