

Blackfeet Reservation

Location

The Blackfeet Reservation is located in Northwestern Montana along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. It is bounded on the north by the United States-Canadian boundary and extends 52 miles south to Birch Creek. The foothills of the Rockies form the western boundary and the eastern boundary approximates an imaginary line which starts near the junction of Cut Bank Creek and the Marias River and extends northward. Within these boundaries, the land is mainly high, rolling prairies interspersed with rivers and creeks. The mountains found along the western border range in altitude between 4,400 to 9,600 feet.

Browning, the gateway to Glacier National Park, is an incorporated town on the reservation. It has been the headquarters of the Blackfeet Indian Agency since 1894 and is the principal shopping center on the reservation. Other communities located throughout the reservation include East Glacier, Babb, St. Mary, Starr School, Heart Butte, and Seville.

Population

Enrolled Members living on or near the Blackfeet Reservation	9,585
Enrolled Members living off the Blackfeet Reservation	7,665
Total number of enrolled Tribal Members	17,250



The Creation

Chewing Black Bones, a respected Blackfeet elder, told Ella E. Clark the following creation myth in 1953. Clark later published the account in her book, *Indian Legends from the Northern Rockies*.

“ Old Man came from the south, making the mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals also. He traveled northward making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there-arranging the world as we see it today.

He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today; they show shape of his body, legs, arms and hair.

Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. He said aloud, “you are a bad thing to make me stumble so.” Then he raised up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on farther north, and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills. Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it made all kinds of roots and berries to grow; camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, serviceberries, bull-berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground.

When he created the bighorn sheep with its big head and horns, he made it out on the prairie. But it did not travel easily on the prairie; it was awkward and could not go fast. So Old Man took it by its horns, led it up into the mountain, and turned it loose. There the bighorn skipped about among the rocks and went up fearful places with ease. So Old Man said to it, “This is the kind of place that suits you; this is what you are fitted for, the rocks, and the mountains.”

While he was in the mountains, he made the antelope out of dirt and turned it loose to see how it would do. It ran so fast that it fell over some rocks and hurt itself. Seeing that the mountains were not the place for it, Old Man took the antelope down to the prairie and turned it loose. When he saw it running away fast and gracefully, he said, "This is what you are suited to, the broad prairie."

One day Old man decided that he would make a woman and a child. So he formed them both of clay, the woman and the child, her son.

After he had molded the clay in human shape, he said to it, "You must be people." And then he covered it up and went away. The next morning he went to the place, took off the covering, looked at the images, and said "Arise and walk," They did so. They walked down to the river with their Maker, and then he told them that his name was Napi, Old Man.

This is how we came to be people. It is he who made us.

The first people were poor and naked, and they did not know how to do anything for themselves. Old Man showed them the roots and berries and said, "You can eat these." Then he pointed to certain trees, "When the bark of these trees is young and tender, it is good. Then you can peel it off and eat it."

He told the people that the animals also should be their food. "These are herds," he said. "All these little animals that live on the ground—squirrels, rabbits, skunks, beavers, are good to eat. You need not fear to eat their flesh. All the birds that fly, these too, I have made for you, so that you can eat of their flesh.

Old man took the first people over the prairies and through the forests, then the swamps to show them the different plants he had created. He told them what herbs were good for sicknesses, saying often, "The root of this herb or the leaf if gathered in a certain month of the year, is good for certain sickness." In that way the people learned the power of all the herbs. Then he showed them how to make weapons with which to kill the animals for their food. First, he went out and cut some serviceberry shoots, brought them in, and peeled the bark off them. He took one of the larger shoots, flattened it, tied a string to it, and thus made a bow. Then he caught one of the birds he had made, took feathers from its wing, split them, and tied them to a shaft of wood.

At first he tied four feathers along the shaft, and with this bow sent the arrow toward its mark. But he found that it did not fly well. When he used only three feathers, it went straight to the mark. Then he went out and began to break sharp pieces off the stones. When he tied them at the ends of his arrows, he found that the black flint stones, and some white flint, made the best arrow points.

When the people had learned to make bow and arrows, Old Man taught them how to shoot animals and birds. Because it is not healthful to eat animals' flesh raw, he showed the first people how to make fire. He gathered soft, dry rotten driftwood and made a punk of it. Then he found a piece of hardwood and drilled a hole in it with an arrow point. He gave the first man a pointed piece of hardwood and showed him how to roll it between his hands until sparks came out and the punk caught fire. Then he showed the people how to cook the meat of the animals they had killed and how to eat it. He told them to get a certain kind of stone that was on the land, while he found a harder stone. With the hard stone he had them hollow out the softer one and so make a kettle. Thus, they made their dishes.

Old Man told the first people how to get spirit power: "Go away by yourself and go to sleep. Something will come to you in your dream that will help you. It may be some animal. Whatever this animal tells you in your sleep you

must do. Obey it. Be guided by it. If later you want help, if you are traveling alone and cry aloud for help, your prayer will be answered. It may be by an eagle, perhaps by a buffalo, perhaps by a bear. Whatever animal hears your prayer you must listen to it.”

That was how the first people got along in the world by the power given to them in their dreams. After this, Old Man kept on traveling north. Many of the animals that he had created followed him. They understood when he spoke to them, and they were his servants. When he got to the north point of the Porcupine Mountains, he made some more mud images of people, blew his breath upon them, and they became people, men and women. They asked him, “What do we eat?”

By way of answer, Old Man made many images of clay in the form of buffalo. Then he blew breath upon them and they stood up. When he made signs to them, they started to run. Then he said to the people, “Those animals-buffalo-are your food.”

“But how can we kill them?” the people asked.

“I will show you.” He answered.

He took them to a cliff and told them to build rock piles: “Now hide behind these piles of rocks,” he said. “I will lead the buffalo this way. When they are opposite you, rise up.”



After telling them what to do, he started toward the herd of buffalo. When he called the animals, they started to run toward him, and they followed him until they were inside the piles of rock. Then Old Man dropped back. As the people rose up, the buffalo ran in a straight line and jumped over the cliff.

“Go down and take the flesh of those animals.” said Old Man. The people tried to tear the limbs apart, but they could not. Old Man went to the edge of the cliff, broke off some pieces with sharp edges, and told the people to cut the flesh with these rocks. They obeyed him. When they had skinned the buffalo, they set up some poles and put the hides on them. Thus they made a shelter to sleep under.

After Old Man taught the people all these things, he started off again, traveling north until he came to where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet. There he made some more people and taught them the same things. From there he went farther north. When he had gone almost to the Red Deer River, he was so tired that he lay down on a hill. The form of his body can be seen there yet, on the top of the hill where he rested. When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled farther north until he came to a high hill. He climbed to the top of it and there he sat down to rest. As he gazed over the country, he was greatly pleased by it. Looking at the steep hill below him, he said to himself, “This is a fine place for sliding. I will have some fun.” And he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all the Blackfeet Tribes as ‘Old Man’s Sliding Ground.’”

Old Man can never die. Long ago he left the Blackfeet and went away toward the west, disappearing in the mountains. Before he started, he said to the people, “I will always take care of you, and someday I will return.”

Even today some people think that he spoke the truth and that when he comes back he will bring with him the buffalo, which they believe the white men have hidden. Others remember that before he left them he said that when he returned he would find them a different people. They would be living in a different world, he said, from that which he had created for them and had taught them to live in.”

Land Status

Total acres within the Reservation's Boundary	1,534,619 acres
Individually allotted lands	649,187 acres
Tribally owned lands	316,840 acres
Government lands	9,187 acres
Fee title or state lands	559,405 acres

Presently, the land is used for ranching, farming, oil and gas development, and harvesting timber. The principal crops are wheat, barley, and hay.

It is believed that traditional territorial lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy extended from the North Saskatchewan River south to Yellowstone Park, their western boundary being the Rocky Mountains and extending to the eastern boundary of Montana following the Missouri River.

Historical Background

The present day Blackfeet are descended from tribes known as the Blackfeet (Siksika), Kainah or Bloods, and Piegans, all of Algonquin linguistic stock. These three tribes shared a common culture, spoke the same language, and held a common territory. Members of these tribes lived in the present Province of Saskatchewan until 1730, when they started to move southwestward where the buffalo and other game were more abundant. Although there is some controversy over the origin of their name, "Blackfeet" is thought to refer to the characteristic black color of their moccasins, possibly painted by the Indians themselves or darkened by fire ashes.

Prior to the 1800s the Blackfeet had little opportunity to engage in conflicts with either the white man or other Indians. The location of their territory was such that the Blackfeet were relatively isolated and, thus, they encountered the white man later than most tribes. During the first half of the 19th century, white settlers began entering the Blackfeet territory bringing with them items for trade.

The Blackfeet were indirectly introduced to a great variety of trade material through Cree and Assiniboine traders who traded furs and buffalo hides to traders of the Hudson's Bay Company in the northeast. Realizing the efficiency of the white man's metal tools, utensils, and weapons, the Indians were eager to trade for wares that made life easier.

The horse and gun soon revolutionized the Blackfeet culture. The white man's guns offered a formidable new defense against their enemies. Competition for the better hunting territories and the desire to acquire horses led to intertribal warfare. The Blackfeet quickly established their reputation as warriors and demanded the respect of other Indian tribes and the white man alike.

Although they were not officially represented or even consulted, a vast area was set-aside for the Blackfeet Tribes by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. In 1855, the government made a treaty with the Blackfeet and several of their neighboring tribes, which provided for use of a large portion of the original reservation as a common hunting territory.

In 1865 and 1868, treaties were negotiated for their lands south of the Missouri, but were not ratified by Congress. In 1873 and 1874, the Blackfeet southern boundary was moved 200 miles north by Presidential orders and Congressional Acts. The land to the south was opened to settlement. During the winters of 1883 and 1884, the

Blackfeet experienced unsuccessful buffalo hunts. After the disappearance of the buffalo, the Blackfeet faced starvation and were forced to accept reservation living and dependence upon rationing for survival.

In 1888, additional lands were ceded and separate boundaries established for the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Fort Peck Reservations. In 1896 an agreement was once again made between the United States government and the Blackfeet Tribe. This time the United States government was asking for the sale of the Rocky Mountains, which bordered the reservation to the west.

It was believed that there were valuable minerals there. A commission was sent out to negotiate and heated disagreements ensued with tribal members over how much land and money this agreement would involve. The end result was a cession of land that now makes up Glacier National Park and the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Today this agreement is still in dispute over how much land and money was agreed upon. The Blackfeet Tribe still holds some rights in Glacier National Park and in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. As long as the people continue to appreciate what the Creator gave them, there will continue to be disagreement over stewardship of the land once occupied by this great nation.

Organizational Structure

The Blackfeet Indian Tribe was organized in 1935 under the Reorganization Act. It exists both as a political entity and a business corporation. All tribal members are shareholders in the corporation. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is made up of nine members, selected from four districts on the reservation: Browning, Seville, Heart Butte, and Old Agency. The nine Blackfeet Tribal Business Council members conduct both the political and business affairs of the tribe and corporation. The councilmen are elected by secret ballot of eligible tribal members and served staggered four year terms. The tribal council elects and appoints its own officers and hires its own staff. In the past, the Council has been granted broad political powers. Today the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council oversees several tribal programs and departments, and is one of the major employers on the reservation.

Blackfeet Tribal Programs and Departments

- Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
- Council Staff
- Finance Department
- Legal Department
- Human Resources/Personnel Department
- Enrollment Department
- Planning and Economic Development
- Commerce Department
- Documents Department
- Self-Insurance Department
- Tribal Security
- Procurement Department
- Land Department
- Forestry Department
- Forest Development Department
- Tribal Employment Rights Office – TERO
- Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program
- Agriculture Department
- Veteran's Program

- Johnson O'Malley Program - JOM
- Higher Education Program
- Community Services/Hardship Program
- Facility Management/Maintenance Department
- Glenn Heavy Runner Memorial Swimming Pool
- Nurturing Center
- Commodity Program
- WIC Program
- Medicine Bear Shelter
- Buffalo Program
- Heart Butte Senior Citizens Center
- Oil & Gas Department
- Southern Piegan Diabetes Program
- Indian Health Service Security
- EMS Program
- Tribal Health Program
- Community Health Representatives Program
- Chemical Dependency Program
- Minerals Management Program
- Water Resources Program
- Domestic Water Department
- Fish & Wildlife Program
- Transportation Planning Program
- Home Improvement Program – HIP
- Law Enforcement Services
- Juvenile Program
- Tribal Credit
- Tribal Court
- Geographic Information Systems Program – GIS
- Chief Mountain Hot Shots
- Welfare Reform Program
- Family Services Program
- Social Services
- Indian Child Welfare Act Program – ICWA
- Environment Program – EPA
- Welfare to Work Program
- Eagle Shields Center
- Personal Care Attendant Program – PCA
- Blackfeet Transit
- Head Start Program
- Blackfeet Care Center

Bureau Operated Programs:

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Blackfeet Agency office is located on the edge of Browning, coming in from the east on Highway 89.

- Executive Direction – Superintendent
- Administrative Services
- Natural Resources
- Real Estate Services (Realty)
- Facility Management

Housing

The Blackfeet Indian Housing Authority was created in the 1960s in order to address the need for affordable housing on the reservation. Currently the Blackfeet Housing Authority manages 935 units. The units are either rentals or home ownership. Home ownership programs have made it possible for families to have decent, safe, and affordable housing. Due to the large unemployment rate on the reservation



and the continuous population growth, affordable housing is an issue that the staff of the Blackfeet Housing continues to strive for. The Blackfeet Tribe and Blackfeet Housing are committed to provide decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing.

Education

In contrast to half a century ago, a great percentage of Blackfeet today are fluent English speakers. Several of the modern schools on the reservation are administered by a locally elected school board, under the Board of Public Education, and subject to compulsory school laws.

Elementary and high school students attend public schools located in Browning, Heart Butte, East Glacier, Babb, and Croff Wren. In addition, the Blackfeet Boarding Dormitories are operated to provide homes during the school year for elementary children from isolated districts.

Another option for elementary students is the Nizipuhwahsin (Real Speak) schools created in 1994. They offer K-8 education taught in the Blackfoot Language. Approximately 60 students attend the school during the standard academic year. The Piegan Institute operates the schools. The Piegan Institute is a private non-profit organization. The Nizipuhwahsin schools are located in Browning.

Also located in Browning is the De La Salle Blackfeet School, which offers grades 4-8. The De La Salle Blackfeet School is committed to providing a quality, innovative, and faith-based education to empower its students to become successful learners and able participants in the shaping of their community.

Students and community members have the opportunity to further their education by attending the Blackfeet Community College. The college is a two-year higher education institution fully accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

Employment and Income

Unemployment is a major problem on the Blackfeet Reservation. Currently the unemployment rate ranges between 60 and 80 percent. Much of the labor force depends on firefighting and other seasonal type jobs. In order to bring the high employment rate down, 3,000 new jobs must be created.

In recent years all agencies on the Blackfeet Reservation have pulled together to address the unemployment issue. In 1999 the Tribe formed an economic development corporation to establish enterprises that will create jobs and boost the economy. Currently Siyeh Development Corporation has started several enterprises which employs over 200 people. The enterprises include Glacier Peaks Casino, Little Peaks Casino, Glacier Family Food Store, Starlink Cable, Oki Communications, and Blackfeet Heritage Center.

Other tribally affiliated businesses include Two Medicine Water Company which provides water to the towns of East Glacier and Browning. The other is the newly built Holiday Inn Express and Suites, which has 86 rooms, 16 suites, a pool and waterslide, as well as a fitness center.

Income for tribal members is derived from agriculture, livestock production, timber, light industry, tourism, and construction. The leading job providers on the reservation are Indian Health Service, School District No. 9, Blackfeet Tribe, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Local craftsmen supplement their income by selling arts and crafts to the summer tourists and at locally sponsored events such as North American Indian Days.

Recreation

The Blackfeet Tribe continues to address the development of tourist trade on the Blackfeet Reservation. The potential for outdoor recreational development on the reservation has always been exceptional. Over 175 miles of rivers and streams and eight major lakes offer some of Montana's best fishing. The possibilities are greatly enhanced by virtue of the reservation's close proximity to Glacier National Park.

The town of Browning is the center of activity on the Blackfeet Reservation. The major businesses are located in Browning; Blackfeet Tribal Business Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian health Service, Blackfeet Housing, Browning Public Schools, and Blackfeet Community College.

Opened in 1941, a principal attraction on the Blackfeet Reservation is the Museum of the Plains Indians operated under the direction of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. The museum also features Native American artists and their work throughout the year.

A camping facility owned by the Blackfeet Tribe called Chewing Blackbones is located on the eastern shore of Lower St. Mary's Lake, which opened in 1978. It is situated near the entrance to Glacier National Park on U.S. Highway 89 near St. Mary's and four miles south of Babb. Facilities include camping grounds with full hookups, picnic kiosks, and a boat launching area. Visitors are welcome to camp at most of the lakes located on the Blackfeet Reservation, however, most are without facilities.

Also available through the Tribe is Sleeping Wolf Campground, which is located $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile west of Browning on Hwy 89 and offers full hookups, showers, and laundry. One mile northeast of East Glacier is Two Medicine Lodges Campground which has an unbelievable view of the Rocky Mountains to the west, as well as the Bob Marshall Wilderness to the south and east.

Other Things To Do:

- Play at Glacier Peaks Casino or Little Peaks Casino
- Fishing
- Guided Driving Tours
- Self Guided Tours – Blackfeet Trail
- Rodeos
- Hiking and Camping
- Horseback Riding/Trail Rides
- Cross Country Skiing
- Boating
- Pow Wows

Visit:

- Blackfeet Heritage Center
- Duck Lake Campground
- Holiday Inn Express and Suites
- Glacier Family Foods



Annual Festivities

Throughout the year there are many celebrations and other activities taking place on the Blackfeet Reservation. These are events that allow communities to come together and celebrate, visit, and enjoy. The largest of the celebrations takes place the second week of July, the North American Indian Days Celebration. The celebration includes youth activities such as a kid's rodeo and 4H activities, dancing, singing, drumming, special dance contest, feast, stick games, give-a-ways, and a parade. Other activities include Indian Relays at the Blackfeet Stampede Park, flat track racing, running of the horses, and occasional other community sponsored activities.

Community Sponsored Events:

- Baker Massacre Memorial
- Blackfeet Community College Pow Wow
- Blackfeet Days
- Thanksgiving Pow Wow
- Christmas Pow Wow
- New Year's Pow Wow
- Head Start Mini Pow Wow
- Heart Butte Society Celebration
- Man Power Pow Wow and Stick Game Tournament
- The Flood of 1964 Memorial
- School Sponsored Events
- Native American Heritage Week
- Eagle Claw Society Inductions
- Homecoming Parade/Dance
- Red Ribbon Week
- Prom Dance
- Graduation Commencement

Resources About the Blackfeet Tribe for Students/Educators

Books

The Blackfeet: An Annotated Bibliography. Bryan Johnson. Garland Publishing, 1965.

Blackfeet and Buffalo: Memories of Life Among the Indians. James Willard Schultz, University of Oklahoma Press, Reprinted 1981.

Blackfeet Indian Stories. George Bird Grinnell, C. Scribner's Sons, 1913.

Blackfoot Lodge Tales; The Story of Prairie People. George Bird Grinnell, University of Nebraska, 1892.

The Blackfeet Raiders of the Northwestern Plains. John Canfield Ewers, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967.

Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfeet. Hugh Aylmer Dempsey, University of Oklahoma Press.

A Dictionary of Blackfeet. Donald Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, University of Toronto Press.

Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians. Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, University of Nebraska Press, 1908.

The Sun Came Down. Percy Bull Child, Harper & Row Publishers.

The Ways of My Grandmothers. Beverly Hungry Wolf, 1980, New York, N.Y.

Web Sites

Blackfeet Country <http://www.blackfeetcountry.com>

Browning Public Schools <http://www.bps.k12.mt.us/>

Bureau of Indian Affairs <http://doi.gov/bureau-indian-affairs.html>