

A HOME FOR OUR HISTORY



WELCOME TO THE BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK

So-yo-pow-ah-ko



BLACKFOOT
CROSSING
HISTORICAL
PARK



This place allows us to explain our history and our culture in our own words, not in the words of others.

Visitors exploring the museum, some listening to traditional stories in the Creation Tipi.



Here, we can celebrate our culture with visitors from all around the world.

TOP: Annual Siksika Nation Pow-Wow held at the Gordon Yellow Fly Memorial Arbour.

BOTTOM: Dwayne Red Old Man teaching a group of students in the west-facing amphitheatre.



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SECTION ONE



Kita-ki-tsiniko

[INTRODUCTION]

REMEMBERING THE PAST. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.

.....

The history of the *Siksikaitsipi* (Siksika) is long. It begins before our language was written down, preserved in traditional stories shared by countless generations. Our ancestors moved across the Great Plains for centuries, living in time with the seasons and the migration of the buffalo. Our history was a collection of memories, too numerous to count.

WE HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN WHO WE ARE

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park marks a new era in the history of our nation — and in the way we remember.

As well as our oral tradition, we now have a physical location where our stories can be stored. Here, we can collect important documents, regalia, and sacred artifacts. Here, we can explain the development of our written language. Here, we can set the record straight on key moments in our nation's relationship with the Crown and Canada. Here, our Elders' vision for an interpretive centre is fully realized.

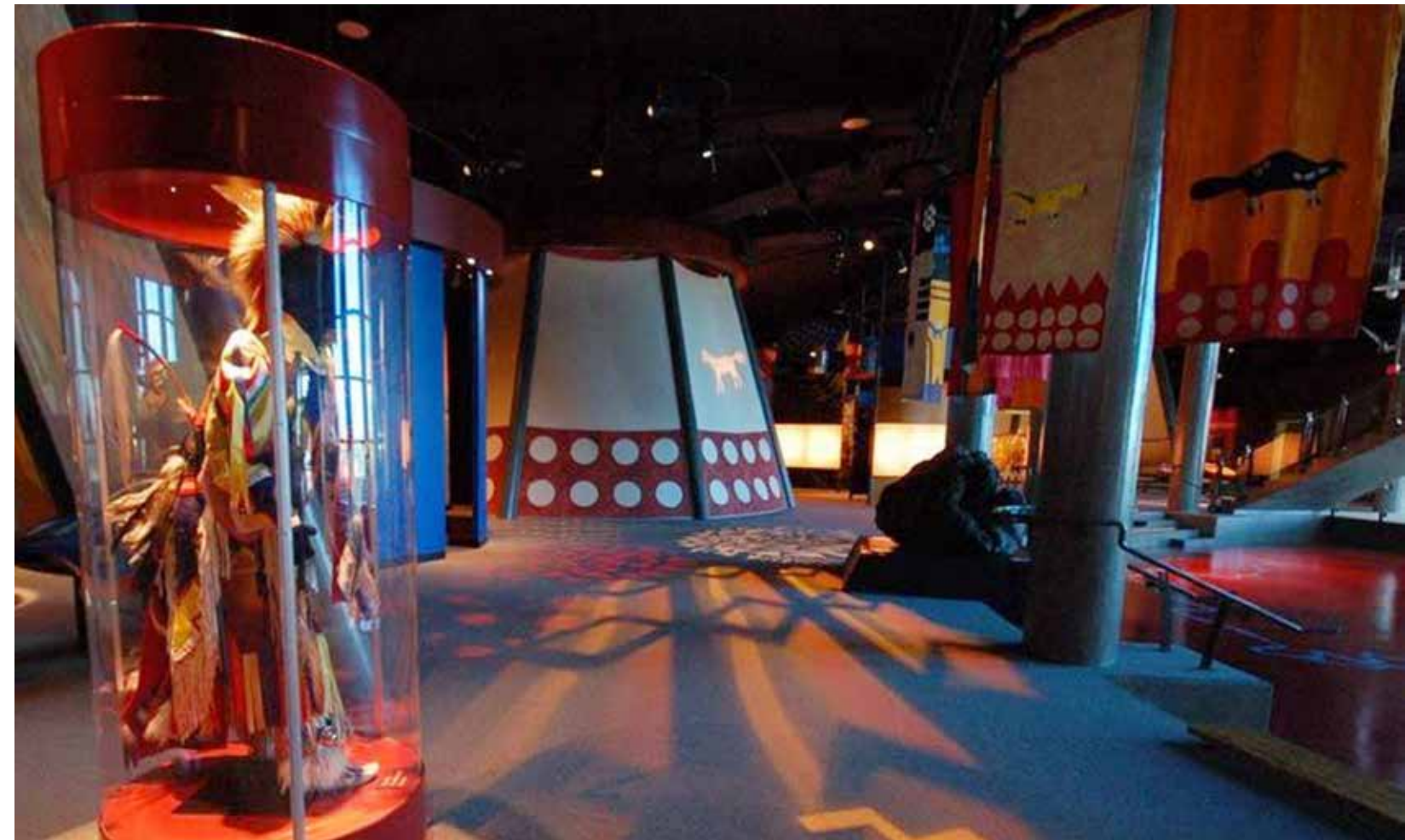
This centre is a place where our People can celebrate our culture with visitors from all around the world. It is also a place of learning, where our People — especially our young people — can gain new understanding about important moments in our history that have been distorted by others. This place allows us to explain our history and our culture in our own words, not in the words of others.

.....
**Blackfoot Crossing
is a gathering place
that is a symbol of hope
and resilience.**

As we set out on our next journey as a people, we will discover more about our past. As we learn, we will make new alliances and create new opportunities. As a nation, we are stronger when we are united. Blackfoot Crossing is a gathering place that is a symbol of hope and resilience.

On the day the centre was officially opened, two eagles were released. They are still here today, swooping over the landscape that has been our home since time immemorial.

Signed by leadership group



TOP: Lower gallery.



BOTTOM: Visitors participating in a round dance with Siksika pow-wow dancers inside the Vision Quest theatre.



TOP: Wall displays with regalia.

BOTTOM LEFT: Siksika members enjoying a Christmas Dinner, one of many events held at the Centre.

BOTTOM RIGHT: All artifacts, like this intricately beaded moccasin, are treated with care and respect by our culture curators.

THANK YOU TO ALL THOSE WHO HELPED TO CREATE THIS PLACE

The Siksika First Nation acknowledges the commitment and hard work required to operate Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park. The following people were instrumental in the conception, funding, development and creation of the building and its exhibits.

Leo and Alma Pretty Young Man Sr
Trevor "Jack" Royal
Margaret Bad Boy
Maggie Black Kettle
Stuart Breaker
Roy Clement Doore Senior
Maurice Gouthier
Beatrice Poor Eagle
Judy Royal
Gerald Sitting Eagle
Adrian Stimson
Bruce Wolf Child
Leroy Wolf Collar
Allan Wolf Leg
Russell and Julia Wright
Vincent Yellow Old Woman
...and the entire Storyline Committee.

Siksika Nation Chief and Council
Siksika Nation Tribal Administration
Siksika Nation Tourism Committee
Old Sun Community College
Blackfoot Confederacy
R.J. Goodfellow Architects
Len Novak Landscape Architect Ltd.
Stuart Olson Constructors Inc.
Glenbow Museum and Archives
Heritage Canada
Western Economic Diversification
Bank of Montreal
*...and numerous contractors, suppliers,
donors, and contributors.*

Government of Alberta, including the following delegates and supporters:

Jason Kenney, 18th Premier
Ralph Klein, 12th Premier
The Honourable Norman L. Kwong, 16th Lieutenant Governor
Jim Prentice, 16th Premier

Exhibition Coordination, Planning, and Design: Irene Kerr and Terry Gunvordahl of Exhibitio Planning and Design

We apologize if we have missed anyone.

We would also like to thank all those who assisted in the preparation of this commemorative book.

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park Tech Team: Shannon Bear Chief, Janis Many Heads, Grant Many Heads, Nicole Munro, and Sasheen Wright

SAW Strategic Design Studio
Canadian Heritage (Indigenous Languages Component — Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program)

This project has been made possible (in part) by the Government of Canada.

MESSAGE FROM STEPHEN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

CURRENT GENERAL MANAGER FOR BLACKFOOT CROSSING



OKI.

I am Stephen Yellow Old Woman, and I oversee southern Alberta's most beautiful and magnificent place to work: Blackfoot Crossing, which has been in operation for more than a decade, and I want to share with you that there are still many greater and more magnificent things to come.

.....
*Let us consider
Blackfoot Crossing as a
lodge. A sacred lodge.*
.....

To the uninitiated, many people would pass by and consider this as a building. Others may consider it as more than a building, and classify it as an architectural masterpiece. Others see this as a place to visit and learn about the culture of North America's "Mightiest Tribe," the Blackfoot. Blackfoot Crossing is much more than the sum of all of that put together. Blackfoot Crossing is a sacred lodge that houses many artifacts with not only a historical significance to the Blackfoot but also, more importantly, of spiritual significance.

There was a time (really not that long ago) when the Blackfoot were being displaced out of their homelands, their lodges destroyed by the encroachment of "the civilized world." The remaining Siksika people that survived this onslaught were forced onto reserves that at first we were not allowed to leave. Many historical and spiritually significant items that were housed in the lodges that were being destroyed were given away as an act of preservation. Many of these spiritually significant artifacts are in the far-flung reaches of the world in museums, galleries, learning institutions, and, worse yet, in personal collections.

I personally believe they were let go with the intention that they would return when the lodges are restored and when it is safe to do so. These items are connected to our People in an amazing way that most of the world does not see and will never be capable of understanding. Our DNA is a part of

them as much as their composition is a part of us. These artifacts have recently begun crying out to come home.

Blackfoot Crossing is the restoration of these sacred lodges. Being in operation for over a decade should now alleviate concerns and provide ample enough evidence that this is a long-term facility capable and willing to take care of the artifacts of the Blackfoot people. It is a lodge for these items to return home to.

The future is exciting to think about, as we will see many of these long-lost artifacts now begin returning home through repatriation activities undertaken by Blackfoot Crossing. These help us increase our understanding of our history, and in turn allows us to share with those who want to hear about our magnificent history and culture.

Thank You

Stephen Yellow Old Woman,
Blackfoot Crossing General Manager
(January, 2020)



SECTION TWO



Iih to tomahtahp tsi

[ORIGINS]

THE DECISION OF OUR LEADERS

When our People were suffering from starvation, the whiskey trade, and disease, our leaders and Elders realized they had to make a crucial decision, especially with the buffalo facing extinction. Our ancestors relied heavily on the buffalo for food, clothing, tools, and more. The buffalo massacres of the 1800s dealt a great blow to a centuries-old way of life.

We can only imagine the weighty tension on the land that day – at the crossing, the shallowest point of what is known as the Bow River. Within a matter of days, all the tribes that would



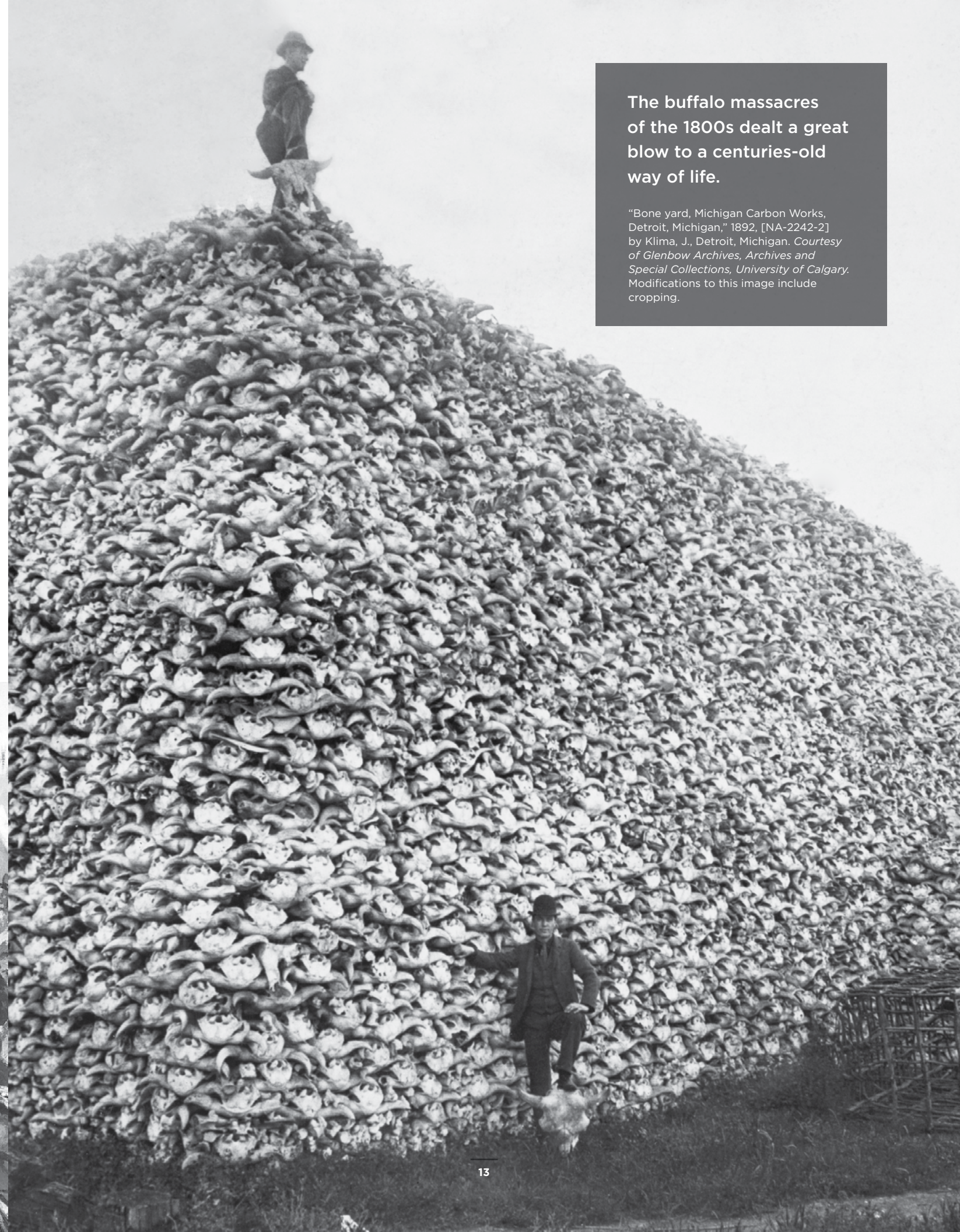
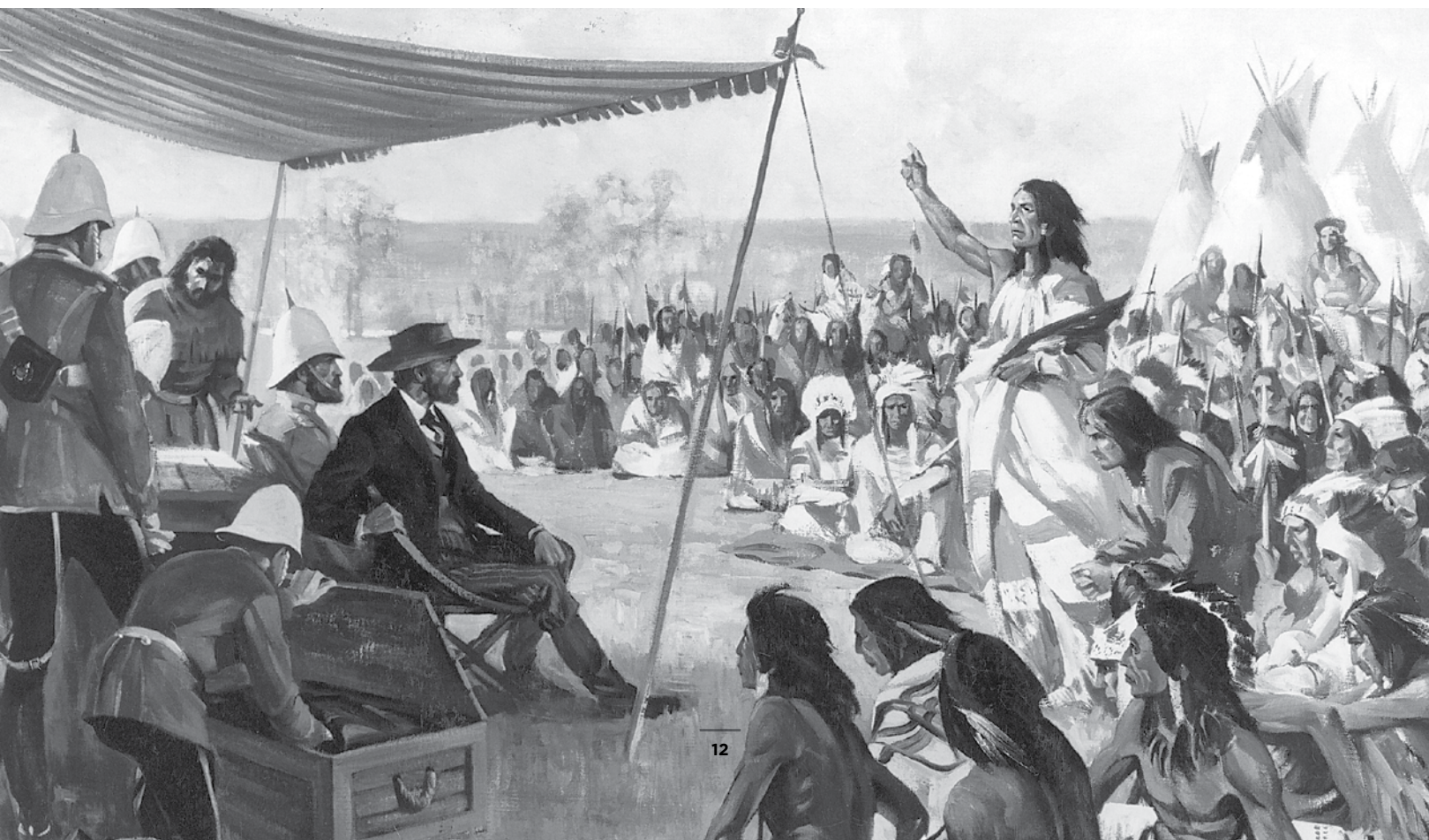
TOP: "Blackfoot Chiefs, Southern Alberta," 1884, [NB-16-565] by Unknown. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

BOTTOM: "The Blackfoot Treaty (Treaty 7), 1877, Crowfoot speaking," 1877, [NA-40-1] by Stapleton, A. Bruce. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

comprise Treaty 7 today would gather and sign the last of agreements between the Crown and the Plains Nations on September 22, 1877.

"The buffalo are gone from our plains."

CHIEF CROWFOOT, 1877



The buffalo massacres of the 1800s dealt a great blow to a centuries-old way of life.

"Bone yard, Michigan Carbon Works, Detroit, Michigan," 1892, [NA-2242-2] by Klima, J., Detroit, Michigan. *Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.* Modifications to this image include cropping.

THE VISION OF OUR ELDERS

.....

Just as our Elders in 1877 recognized the necessity of adapting to new ways for the survival of our nation, so did our Elders one hundred years later in 1977.

The Elders are the keepers of our culture and history, transferring their knowledge to the next generation through songs, stories, and ceremonies. The residential schools negatively impacted the way that knowledge was passed down, through its system of forced assimilation, which also kept children from learning Blackfoot. So our Elders of that time started thinking

about additional ways of preserving their knowledge beyond the oral tradition in a world that was changing fast and prioritizing recorded history in writing.

Inspired by the 100th anniversary, when Prince Charles visited the Siksika First Nation for the commemoration event of the Treaty-signing, the Elders

envisioned a permanent monument or structure to highlight and immortalize the significance of Treaty 7, as well as house cultural artifacts and function as an education facility.

Today, above the river crossing on a hill overlooking the valley, is Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, built for the promotion and preservation of the Siksika People's Language, Culture, and Traditions.



TOP: "Prince Charles at Blackfoot Crossing ceremony [with Joe Poor Eagle (right)], Calgary, Alberta," 1977, [S-64-7] by Calgary Herald, Calgary, Alberta. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.

BOTTOM: A monument to Treaty 7 stands where the original signing took place.

A PLACE OF GREAT GATHERINGS

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Before we began to gather and store our memories here at Blackfoot Crossing, this site was well-known by the Blackfoot.

For generations, our People had come here to the easiest crossing point over the rapid-flowing Bow River. Young and old could ford the river here, so that when many bands wanted to gather to hunt the buffalo, this was a natural choice.

Nature made the choice even easier by carving out a deep coulee in the surrounding plains. The cliffs down by the river create *piskun* (dead-end pounds) where buffalo could be herded for slaughter. The flat land was ideal for pitching tipis close to fresh water, and on top of the bluffs look-outs could see for miles to warn of approaching animals or people.

The importance of Blackfoot Crossing tells us a lot about the traditional way of life of our ancestors.

These are the grasslands where buffalo once roamed in their millions. There are few trees here so our People hunted in open country, unlike other Indigenous people.

The territories of the Blackfoot people do not recognize provincial or national borders. Our People lived in encampments all the way from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta to the Yellowstone River in the USA, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Touchwood Hills in the Qu'appelle Valley, according to oral history. Before the days of the Numbered Treaties between the Crown and the First Nations of Canada, the Siksika were one of three nations along with the Piikani (Peigan) and the Kainai (Blood). Allied nations, such as the Tsuut'ina (or Sarcee) and the A'aninin

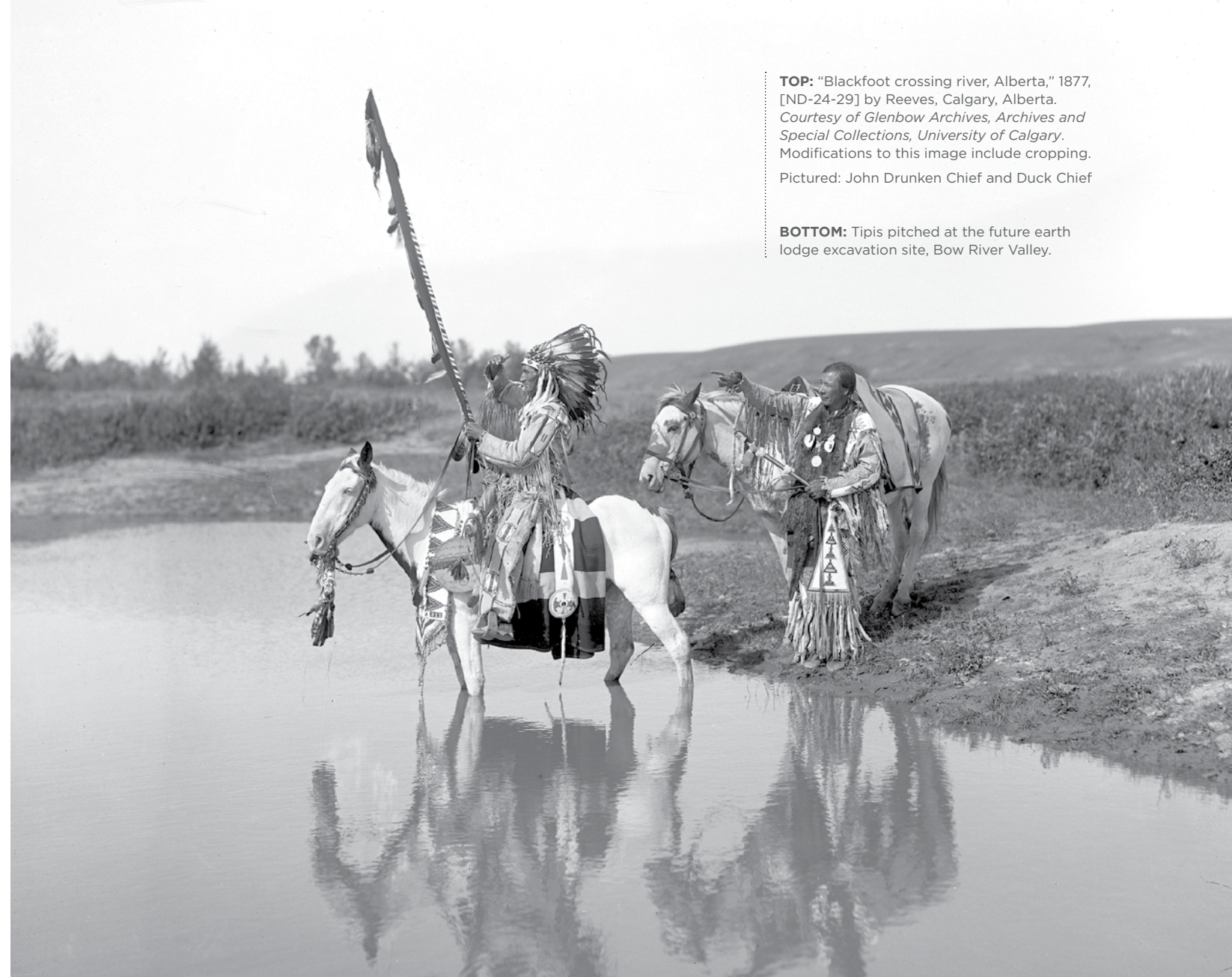
(Gros Ventre) travelled through the area or lived in Siksika territory.

TREATY 7

Chief Crowfoot, known to us as Isapo-Muxika, chose Blackfoot Crossing as the location for a large gathering of chiefs to consider the terms of Treaty 7. It was a traditional gathering place, known to all Blackfoot and their allies.

Treaty 7 was the last Numbered Treaty. It was signed at Blackfoot Crossing on September 22, 1877 by representatives of the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Tsuut'ina, Stoney-Nakoda and the British Crown in Canada. Many years later, Crowfoot and his adopted son, Pihtokahanapiwiyin or Poundmaker, were buried here.

..... The Bow River crossing in the olden days.



..... **TOP:** "Blackfoot crossing river, Alberta," 1877, [ND-24-29] by Reeves, Calgary, Alberta. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping. Pictured: John Drunken Chief and Duck Chief

..... **BOTTOM:** Tipis pitched at the future earth lodge excavation site, Bow River Valley.



THE MAKING OF BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK

Instrumental in this vision, the late **Leo Pretty Young Man Sr**, former Chief of the Siksika First Nation (from 1971–81, 1983–87) was an important figure in the early stages of planning to build an interpretive centre.

Under his guidance, an Elders' committee came together to develop a storyline for Blackfoot Crossing, making sure that the memories of the nation would be faithfully preserved. At first, the group consisted of Leo and Alma Pretty Young Man, Russell and Julia Wright, Margaret Bad Boy, and Beatrice Poor Eagle. Later on, other advisors became involved including: Roy Clement Doore Senior, Gerald Sitting Eagle, and Vincent Yellow Old Woman.

Pretty Young Man Sr passed away in 1995, over a decade before seeing the historical park completed. His likeness is detailed in the wall fountain located in the foyer of Blackfoot Crossing, so that our People and all visitors may know and remember his contributions.

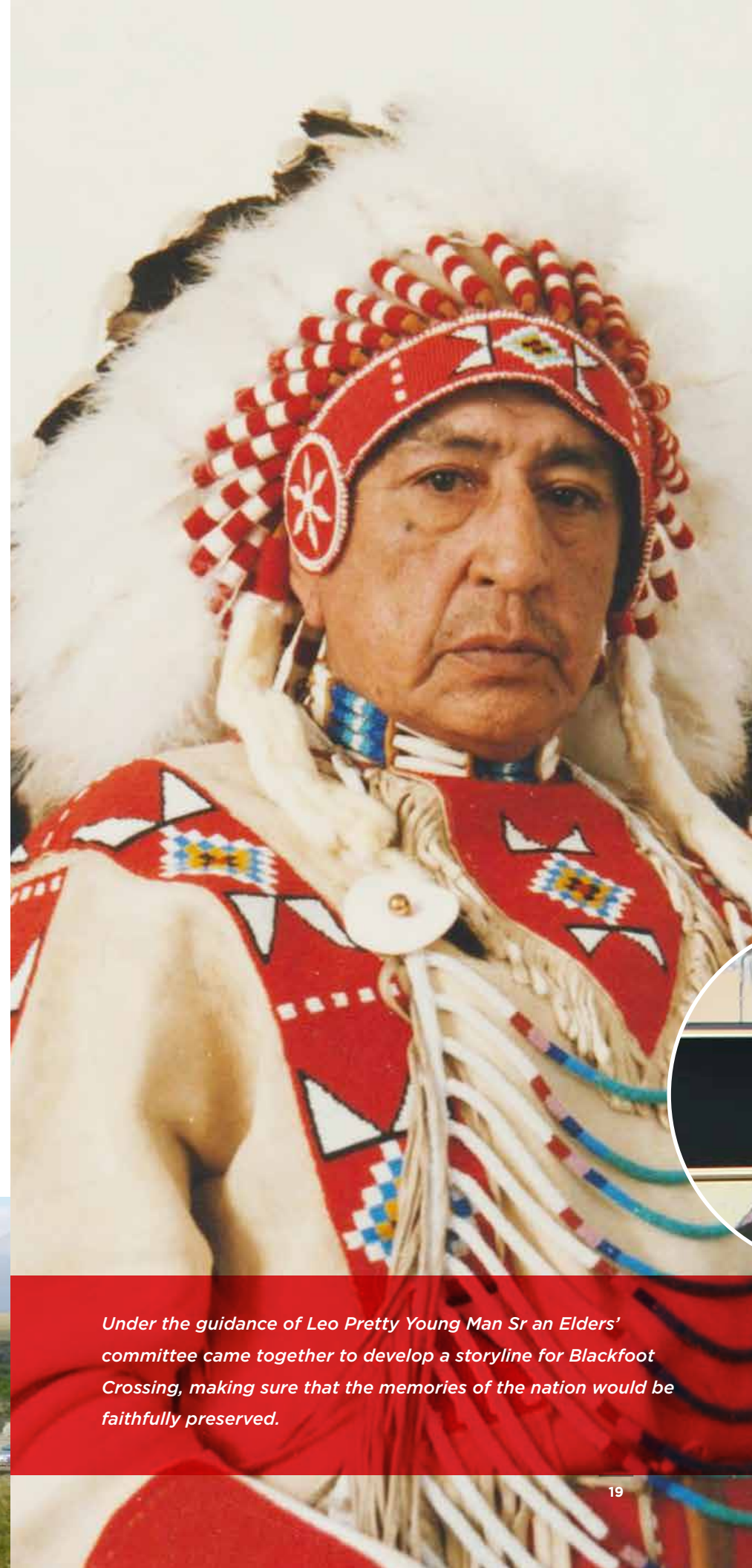
The decision was made in 2003 to begin building the park

During the developmental years, there were marketing, feasibility, and financial studies that took place as well as environmental assessments. A lack of resources delayed progress for many years. The six square kilometres of land were set aside by referendum in 1989. The vision was still alive in the early 2000s when Chief Adrian Stimson was able to assign funding. Slowly, plans were put in place, leading to incorporation. Eventually, a decision was made to begin building the park in 2003.

Jack Royal was also heavily involved in the completion of Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park. Drawing on his experience as the CEO of the Siksika Nation and Head of Major Projects and Council Initiatives in prior years, he became the first general manager of Blackfoot Crossing in 2007 until 2017.

Jack remembers the 1977 Treaty 7 commemoration, having been a child when Prince Charles had come to represent the Crown. Thousands of people were in attendance. Many years later, Jack spoke to Leo Pretty Young Man Sr, who recalled that it was around that time Elders and leaders decided that a permanent structure

Blackfoot Crossing under final construction, April 2007.



should be built to mark the significance of the site. “This was their wish – that we build something there to remind our People, the Blackfoot people — *Siksikaitsitapi* — that we entered into a treaty with the Queen in Right of Canada and the Crown. They also thought that we could start bringing back home Siksika items that were all over the world — we would build a repository for them to come home to,” recalls Jack.

Ron Goodfellow of Goodfellow Architects worked with the Elders, taking their input into consideration while designing the facility. Among the Elders consulted was the late **Maggie Black Kettle**, former head of *Motokiiks*, the Buffalo Women’s Society. Traditional protocol is necessary before incorporating certain symbols and designs into any project, and usually consists of a ceremony and tobacco offering. Mrs. Black Kettle advised on which aspects of Blackfoot culture



Under the guidance of Leo Pretty Young Man Sr an Elders' committee came together to develop a storyline for Blackfoot Crossing, making sure that the memories of the nation would be faithfully preserved.

ABOVE LEFT: The late Leo Pretty Young Man Sr, former Chief of the Siksika Nation (image courtesy of Pretty Young Man family).

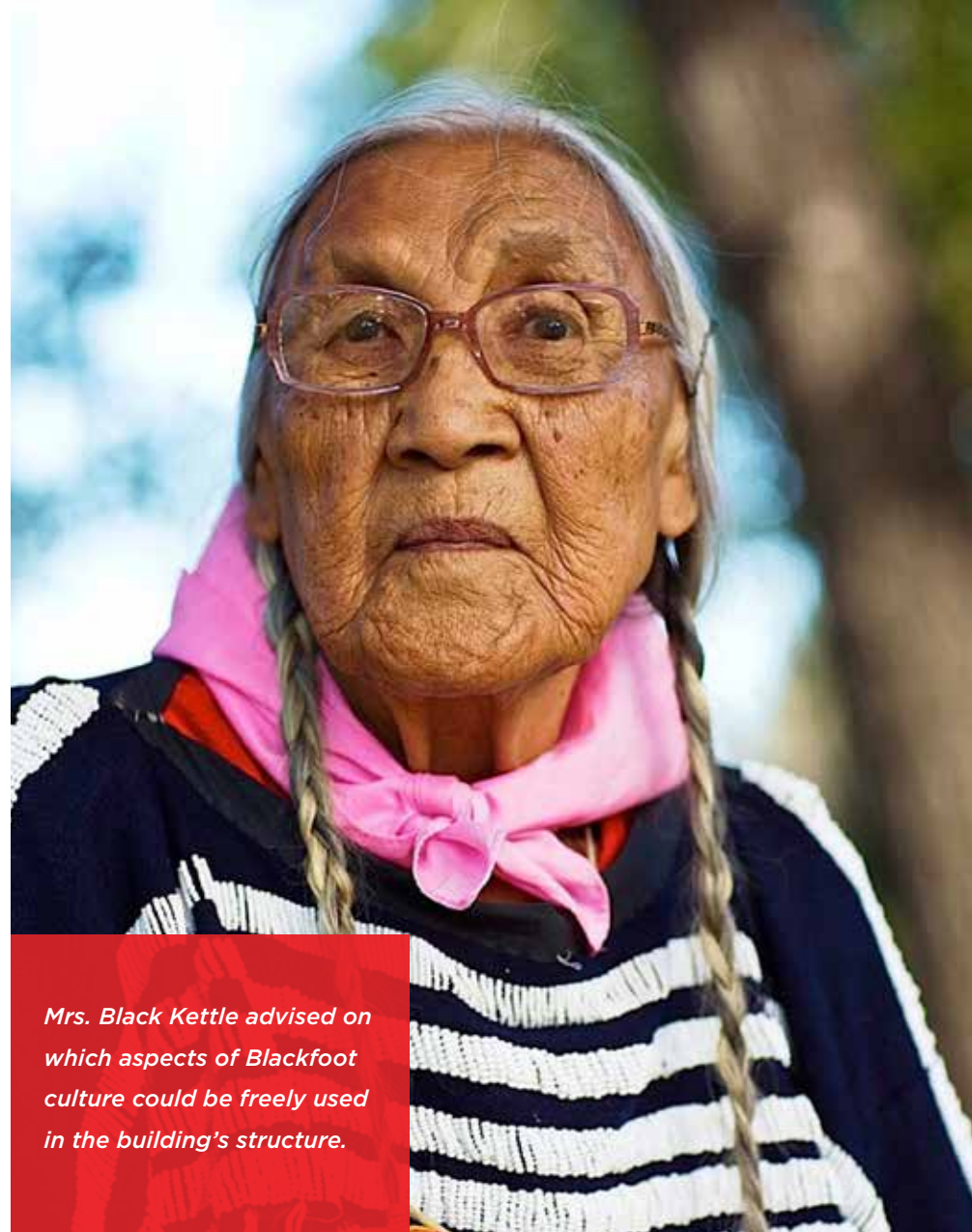
ABOVE RIGHT: Trevor “Jack” Royal.

could be freely used in the building's structure. She also expressed the desire to educate people on women's importance in traditional Blackfoot society, such as the way they laid out the tipi and the role they played in the buffalo hunt.

There is significant meaning found everywhere in Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, designed with great care and devotion.

It took three years to build the adventurous design, and on July 18, 2007, Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park was officially opened.

Jack remembers an emotional day, full of pride in a long-awaited achievement: "We had people from all across Canada; we had the minister, the premier, and we had a huge event. We wanted to not only showcase the cultural side of who we were as Blackfoot people, our traditional side, but also be contemporary. So we had one of our People that was a prominent opera singer as well as traditional performances. And our Elders were there, lots of Elders. Lots of people were emotional to see this finally bear fruit, especially some of the older people. That's what stood out for me. People were proud."



Mrs. Black Kettle advised on which aspects of Blackfoot culture could be freely used in the building's structure.



ABOVE TOP: The late Maggie Black Kettle, former Head of Motokiiks (image courtesy of Black Kettle family).

ABOVE BOTTOM (L - R): Roy Clement Doore Sr, Jason Doore, and Vincent Yellow Old Woman.



July 18, 2007: Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is officially open.



NEXT PAGE TOP: Opening day ribbon cutting ceremony. (L - R) Alma Pretty Young Man, Adrian Stimson, Miss Siksika Royalty, and Vincent Yellow Old Woman.

NEXT PAGE BOTTOM: Visitors exploring the museum on opening day.



TOP: Blackfoot Chiefs looking down to the museum from one of the hilltop lookout points.

BOTTOM: Opening day. (L-R) Adrian Stimson Sr (former Chief of the Siksika Nation), Phil Fontaine (former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations), Ralph Klein (12th Premier of Alberta).



Dancers in regalia during opening day ceremonies. **(TOP)** Ladies. **(BOTTOM)** MEN.

BUILDING FOR THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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The existence of Indigenous-owned museums is a fairly recent trend, as more and more Indigenous people take control of the historical narrative, and tell their history in their own words.

“When it was built, there was nothing of its magnitude in Canada and possibly North America,” says Jack of Blackfoot Crossing, “It was the largest undertaking of a cultural museum of its type.” As *Siksikaitapi*, we are proud to own one of the biggest Indigenous museums in Canada with the goal of becoming a leading resource in Blackfoot culture and history. Visitors will have the chance to hear and learn about our worldview in our own words in the heart of our homeland.

With this goal comes the challenge of promoting and preserving culture without commodifying it. At Blackfoot Crossing, we carefully maintain a balance by consulting with our Elders, our traditional societies, and our own people as a whole. Some artifacts cannot be viewed by anyone except those that have the rights to them or have the authority to transfer those

rights to another person through ceremonies. Following protocol is highly important, as exemplified by what we allow on display in the exhibits.

Above all, Blackfoot Crossing exists for our People, especially our youth. Our language in particular is facing a critical point in preservation, and the key to its survival lies with our children. As a learning centre, Blackfoot Crossing seeks to educate our children on not only the Blackfoot language but also the culture itself. Our People built this place first and foremost for future

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**Above all,
 Blackfoot Crossing exists
 for our People, especially
 our youth.**

generations; they will always be our first priority.

“We invested in our Blackfoot way of life, the language, the history, the ceremonies, the songs, [and] all our contributions we made,” says Jack, “That was the biggest investment. And the challenge was that those things don’t make money.” Blackfoot Crossing does not exist strictly as a business to generate revenue and draw visitors. It is a place of education, and a place to protect and preserve ancient cultural items and archaeological findings. Blackfoot Crossing is solely and financially maintained by the Siksika Nation as well as through grants. We do not receive regular support from the provincial or federal governments. It is a challenging journey, but a worthwhile one, for we invest in our future, and we cannot put a price on our traditional and modern ways of life.



“We invested in our Blackfoot way of life, the language, the history, the ceremonies, the songs, [and] all our contributions we made...”

JACK ROYAL



TOP: Students learning traditional skills, such as putting up a (mini) tipi.

MIDDLE: Siksika summer student engaging in interpretive storytelling.

BOTTOM: The Centre receives school groups year-round.





SECTION THREE



Ahnoh ksi tsiko

[TODAY]

CENTRED ON THE LAND OF THE INII



Our People were hunters of the buffalo that were once so plentiful across the Great Plains. Blackfoot Crossing's landscape is especially meaningful since it contains so many features that are relevant to the buffalo, known as *inii* in Blackfoot.

The site overlooks the Bow River where our People have crossed safely since time immemorial. In fact, recent archaeological digs have uncovered an earth lodge village, evidence of a meeting of cultures over the centuries.

The site of the structure gives extensive views of buffalo pounds along the riverside. Here, thousands of animals would have been corralled by expert

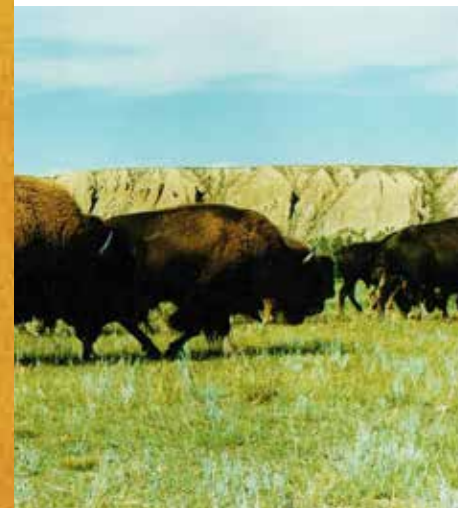
hunters. Slaughtered animals would have been processed for food, clothing and utensils down by the river.

Leaving Highway 842, you approach along a slow S-curve through a shallow coulee between two hills. Just like herded buffalo, you are directed by two rows of stones that form a runway to the entrance.

To the south is a series of smooth-sided Buffalo Rub Rocks, which can still be found across the prairies today. The animals rubbed their hides against the rocks seeking relief from biting insects. Over the centuries rub rocks developed a distinctive sheen from the oily wool.

LEFT & RIGHT: Buffalo grazing in the old Siksika buffalo paddock located by the Bow River (photographer: Todd Munro).

CENTRE: Buffalo display in the museum, highlighting the importance of the animal to our culture.



To the north are stone piles, known as aakiiksi, or 'the women.' During the hunt, women took the lead in spooking the buffalo towards the pounds or over a cliff at a buffalo jump. Our women were experts in hiding behind rocks until the moment came to leap out, waving their robes to stampede the herd in the right direction. This task was among the many responsibilities that Blackfoot women held.



The site overlooks the Bow River where our people have crossed safely since time immemorial

TOP: The stone piles, known as aakiiksi ('the women').

BOTTOM: Dr. Dale Walde teaching at the earth lodge village dig site. (image courtesy of Dr. Dale Walde, Department of Archaeology, University of Calgary).



Here on the high ground the prairie stretches out in all directions with significance for the Blackfoot — southwest towards Beaver-Two Medicine in Montana where Siksika tradition sites the origins of the world. To the northeast, you are looking towards the Crawling Valley hunting grounds and southeast to the Majorville Medicine Wheel. Further south are the Milk River and Writing-on-Stone (Áísínai'pi) where ancestral stories are commemorated by rock glyphs and pictographs.

Upriver and to the west are ancient burial grounds of the Siksika (not to be confused with the Great Sand Hills further east). Since 1877, the nearby land has been known as Treaty Flats. It is here that the interpretive centre rises up as a symbol of past and future.

RIGHT: A buffalo rub rock at the museum's entrance.



CHIEF CROWFOOT'S VILLAGE

HONOURING THE SIKSIKA TIPI TRADITION



Our People traditionally lived all around our lands with various camp sites dedicated for specific purposes according to the seasons and buffalo migration. We lived in tipis — a highly efficient mobile living system that evolved over centuries. Blackfoot Crossing celebrates that tradition with a summer tipi village where visitors can stay overnight with modern comforts.

The original Plains tipi is made from buffalo hide. It is stretched across cottonwood poles (sometimes lodgepole pine) that were pulled by dogs at first, and later by horses. We call the time of smaller tipis the Dog Days, or *Iitotasimahpi Imitaiks*. The time of larger tipis is known as the Horse Days, or *Ao'ta'sao'si Ponokomita*, which we are still living in today. The poles for the tipi were fashioned into a sled, known as a travois, then the tipi cover and household items were packed onto it. The dog or the horse pulled the travois across the plains until the family reached their next camp.

The edges of the first tipis were held down by stones — leading to the thousands of tipi circles to be found all across the plains. In the time of larger tipis, pegs were used to hold down the edges.

The design of the Centre draws heavily on the tradition of the tipi — in both shape and colour.

Some families decorated their tipi with a distinctive design that often came from dreams and visions, especially if a family member held a significant or spiritual role in the camp. Such designs are considered sacred and cannot be reused or modified without permission or a transferral of rights from one person to another. Other designs identified which camp you were entering by a common motif. For example, Siksika symbols would feature flat land with an occasional hill to indicate where they usually camped. Likewise, you would find the foothills motif on Kainai tipis,

and mountains identified the Piikani. The common puffball design represents the stars, or *kakatosi*. Other families chose not to add designs to their tipis for reasons all their own.

Siksika women always positioned the tipis to take full advantage of the prevailing prairie winds. To do so, they had the Great Bear (Big Dipper) constellation painted onto the smoke flaps at the top of the supporting poles. Typically, the entrance faced east toward the rising sun, drawing smoke from the fire out through the top of the tipi.



TOP: Visitors exploring Chief Crowfoot Tipi Village.



MIDDLE LEFT: Drying meat in the Chief Crowfoot Tipi Village for Siksika Experience Day, 2019.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Siksika tipi, featuring a deer and snake design with the foothills and stars represented at the bottom (photographer: Wade Healy).

BOTTOM: "Sun Dance Camp, Blackfoot reserve, Alberta," 1920s, [NA-336-7] by Unknown. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. Modifications to this image include cropping.



REPATRIATION

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Repatriation of Blackfoot items and regalia is an ongoing process, and a major goal for Blackfoot Crossing, already home to thousands of artifacts

Many of these items currently in our archives were procured through auctions or else donated by generous former owners. Only a few staff have the spiritual rights to touch or even view certain items. This is how we continue to exercise traditional protocol within our archives, treating each artifact respectfully with regard to spirituality and conservation.

There are more Blackfoot cultural items waiting to be found across North America and the rest of the world. How these items found themselves so far from home can vary in explanation, ranging from auctions and personal transactions to outright theft. Blackfoot Crossing hopes to bring home as many items as possible.

Part of the hope lies in current and future provincial, federal, and international legislation that mandates the return of Blackfoot items to their rightful place. As Royal states, “We need to have repatriation support us where those things are legally given back to us without having to pay, because if we start talking about how much money we have to pay, it’s priceless.” We could not possibly place a price on items where monetary value is nothing compared to cultural value.

Blackfoot Crossing has been working to repatriate Chief Crowfoot’s regalia from overseas since 2015.

Only a few staff have the spiritual rights to touch or even view certain items. This is how we continue to exercise traditional protocol within our archives, treating each artifact respectfully with regard to spirituality and conservation.

THE WORLD PRAIRIE CHICKEN DANCE CHAMPIONSHIPS

.....

The prairie chicken dance, or *kitokipaaskaan*, is uniquely Blackfoot, complete with its own society.

There are no other First Nations who have such a dance, whose origins are inspired by the prairie chicken’s distinctive springtime mating dance through an old story of how the dance came to the Blackfoot people. As a result, the prairie chicken dance is considered sacred, and Blackfoot Crossing chooses to honour its sacred status with a celebration and competition in the spirit of our traditional pow-wows.

The idea for this type of event came from a Blackfoot Crossing staff brainstorming session. After the museum had been in place for a couple of years, the general manager and the staff at that time decided to take the next step in preparing something that could be held annually to attract more

visitors and encourage community gatherings. Eventually, they decided that Blackfoot Crossing should hold its own pow-wow event during the summer ahead of the annual Siksika Nation Pow-Wow and Fair in August.

.....
Inspired by the prairie chicken’s distinctive springtime mating dance, there are no other First Nations who have such a dance.
.....

This idea soon grew to be known as the World Prairie Chicken Dance Championships – thanks to the

involvement of a Kainai Elder, Bruce Wolf Child, also known as *Mahkooyipookah* (Wolf Child).

After the construction of the arbour in the valley below the Centre, Mr. Wolf Child met with Jack Royal to tell him about a dream in which Mr. Wolf Child had envisioned an outfit, a song, and a ceremony that later became an integral part of the World Prairie Chicken Dance Championships. Mr. Wolf Child then prepared the outfit, which would be used to lead the competitors during a grand entry into the pow-wow celebration, commemorating the start of the championship. Jack was then given rights to the outfit and the ceremony, and still holds those rights today until he chooses to transfer them to somebody else.

In the past, Blackfoot Crossing hosted the World Prairie Chicken Dance Championships.





THEN AND NOW

THIS PAGE: "Blackfoot in full traditional clothing, dancing at Cluny, Alberta," 1967, [NA-2557-79] by Unknown. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.

NEXT PAGE: Modern Prairie Chicken dancer (photographer: Wade Healy).



FLOOD IMPACT AND RECOVERY

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In 2013, Southern Alberta experienced catastrophic flooding that struck the region hard, including the Siksika Nation. Blackfoot Crossing was also impacted when the Bow River overflowed into the outdoor park in the valley below the museum. Pathways and vegetation were destroyed, as well as the archaeological dig. Everything from the bridge to the storyboards and the playground was washed away.

Miraculously, the three tipis in the Chief Crowfoot Tipi Village within the outdoor park held fast against the waters that reached as high as eight feet. We consider this a testament to the resilience of our People, holding up just as our ancestors did when faced with destructive floodwaters of change throughout the last century.

TOP LEFT: Three tipis withstood the devastating floods of 2013.

TOP RIGHT: The remains of the archaeological dig after the flood waters receded.

BOTTOM: It took months to clear away debris, as well as repair all damaged areas of the outdoor park.



SECTION FOUR



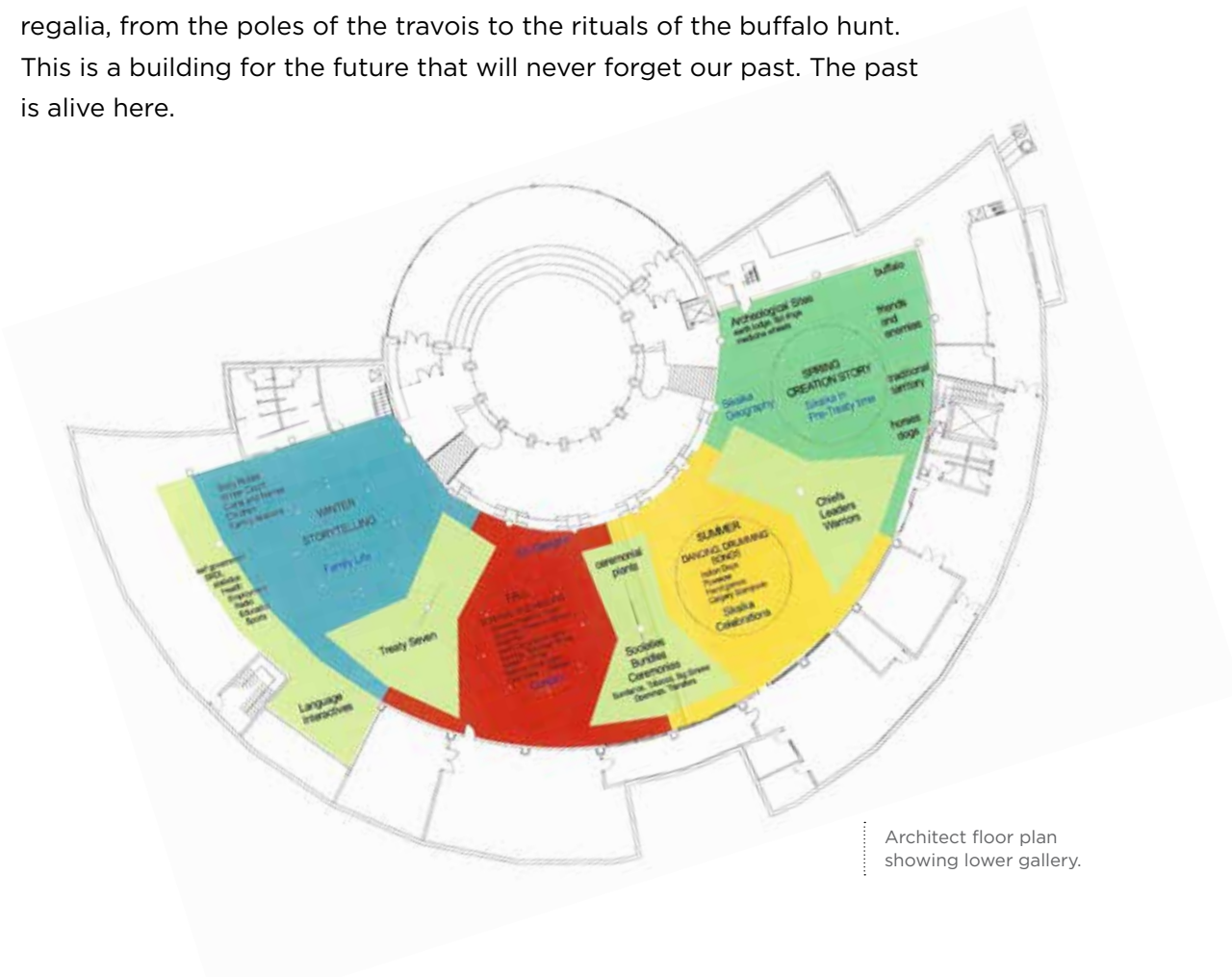
Ahni stapa no sinistsi

[MEANINGS]

ARCHITECTURAL INSPIRATION

A LIVING BUILDING THAT TELLS OUR NATION'S STORY

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is alive with the memories of Siksika Elders, the colours of our land and the hopes and dreams of our People. Everywhere you turn, the building speaks to prairie life, from the earth to the sky, from the hides of tipis to the feathers of sacred regalia, from the poles of the travois to the rituals of the buffalo hunt. This is a building for the future that will never forget our past. The past is alive here.



Architect floor plan showing lower gallery.

The arbour skylight is surrounded by seven smaller tipi-shaped skylights, one for each of the sacred societies that make up Siksika leadership.



photographer: Wade Healy

INSPIRED BY TIPIS AND NATURE
Imagine a large tipi laid out in the sun for painting. Its apron would form a large, open cone, broad at the foot and tapering towards the top. This was the architectural inspiration for the shape of the Interpretive Centre.



The roof has three bands of colour from top to bottom — red, tan and black. These are the colours of the fall hunt, the hide of the buffalo and the black earth that gave the Siksika their name.

You can also see the 'puffballs' cut out of the roof steel in homage to the star symbols on traditional foothills tipis.



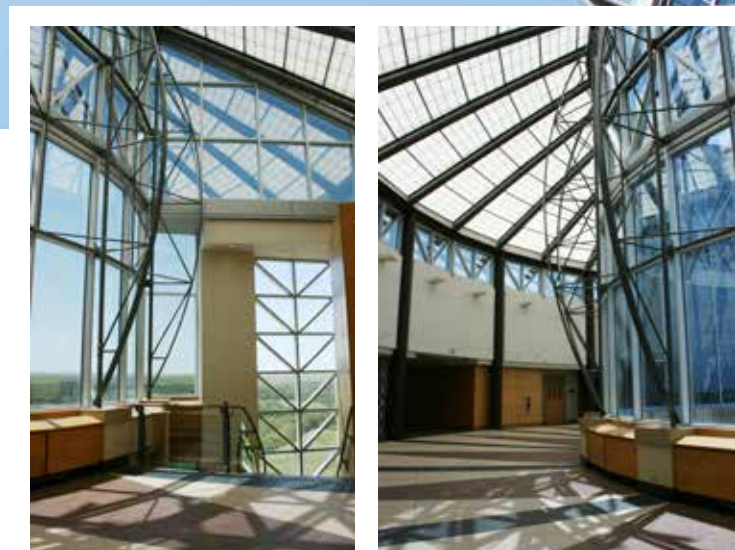


HONOURING OUR CHIEFS
The long spouts projecting from the roof remind us of the ceremonial headdresses of Blackfoot Chiefs.

LEFT: Blackfoot wearing traditional headdress in the early 1900s (image courtesy of Glenbow Archives and Blackfoot Crossing).

RIGHT: Stanley Grier, Chief of the Piikani Nation, wears a traditional Blackfoot headdress while speaking at the Blackfoot Confederacy and Alberta Protocol Signing, September 2019.

UP TO THE ROOF
The central section of the roof is a semicircular arbour formed by 50-foot high structural steel poles. It is designed to remind us of the lodgepole pine poles used to create tipis — and transformed by the Motokiiks (Buffalo Women's Society) into a sacred lodge during the summer Okan (Sun Dance), which also used cottonwood poles in its construction.



BOW STRINGS AND TRAVOIS
These poles are in turn supported by bow-string trusses at one end (above left) and interlaced steel travois (above right).

SHELTER FROM PRAIRIE WINDS

As in the days of old, the building entrance is sheltered from the prevailing west winds. Above is coloured glass in the shape of an Eagle Feather Fan, calling on the protection of the sacred golden eagle.



OUTSPREAD WINGS

The west-facing wings of the building suggest a great hawk settling on the brown prairie soil and yellow grasses. The windows form segmented arrows, signifying the life force of the grasslands that fed the great herds of buffalo.

MEANINGFUL PATIOS

The west-facing patio decks each have seven tables — the seven stars in the Great Bear constellation that is often portrayed on the smoke flaps of the tipi.



CHIEF'S WALK (LEFT WALL)

You enter from the east into the Chief's Walk, named by Chief Leo Pretty Young Man Sr. The high straight wall to your left runs east-west, a reminder of the sun's daily journey.

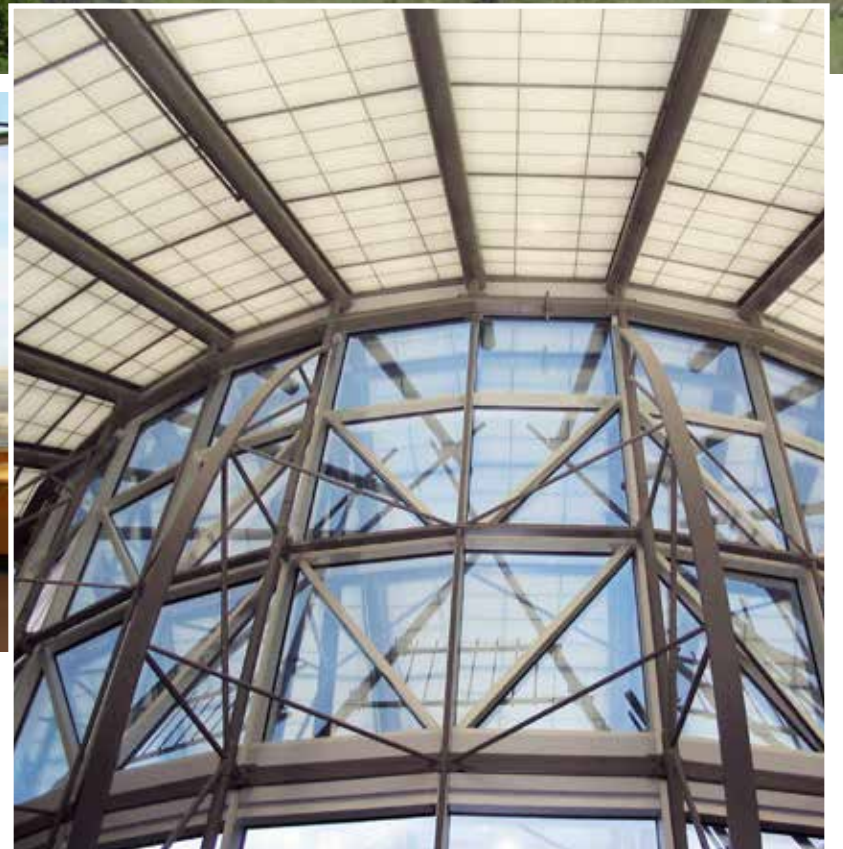


CHIEF'S WALK (RIGHT WALL)

To your right is a wall that winds like the waters of the Bow River, representing the never-ending passage of time. This wall was named Winter Count Wall by Allan Wolf Leg, honouring the tradition of painting important events on hide calendars. Below this wall is a Prairie Garden full of native plants.

MORE THAN GLASS

The huge energy-efficient glass curtain wall is reflective blue, representing the sky, and gold for the earth.





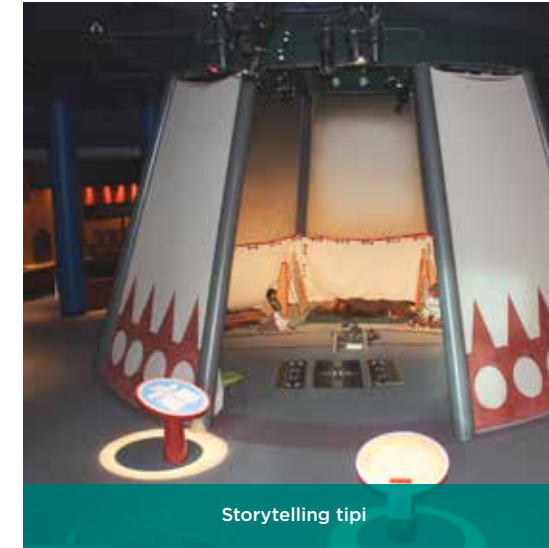
TIPIS WITHIN TIPIS
TOP: The interior of the building is a nested tipi design. On the main level, the dimensions of the tipis are from the Horse Days, at around 22 feet in diameter. Higher up, in the skylights, are the smaller Dog Days tipis.



MIDDLE: The texture of the plaster on the main level tipis is reminiscent of scraped buffalo hide and they are stained with sacred yellow ochre used in rituals.

BOTTOM: In the library on the main level, where our oral history will be stored, a radial light pattern above the library desk shows a plan view of a tipi structure or a Medicine Wheel with multi-coloured layering on the south wall that recalls the pow-wow dancers of the late 20th-century.

The lower gallery tipis bring to life the four seasons and the four phases of Blackfoot history.



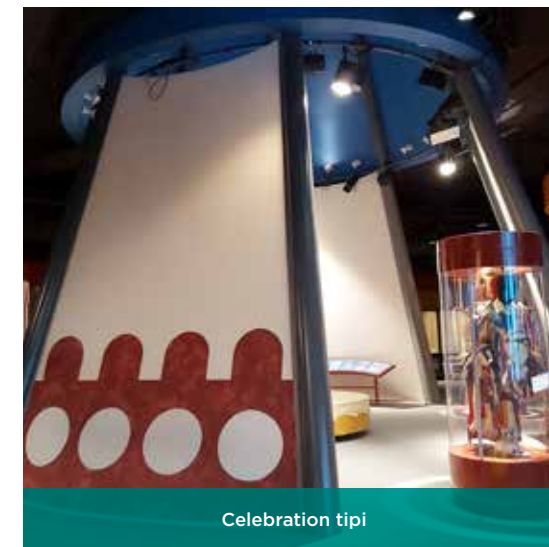
Storytelling tipi



Survival tipi



Yellow is for the Dog Days and the nation's origins. Red is for the great fall hunts and the arrival of horses and guns, known as the Horse Days. Blue is for winter and the bleak days of the Indian Agents and residential schools. Green speaks to the spring — and the nation's cultural renewal.



Celebration tipi



Creation tipi





WARRIORS AND POW-WOWS

The amphitheatre is a semi-circular sunburst — a great place for dance demonstrations. The light poles surrounding the space are shaped like the coup sticks used by warriors to show their bravery.



RIGHT: Warfare is also remembered in the theatre where medicine shields sit in the wall sconces with the drums that accompany pow-wows.

Above the stage are the stars of the winter sky and below is the Siksika coat of arms — yellow, green, blue, dark red, black and white.



THE SIKSIKA WORLDVIEW



Siksika's spiritual beliefs rest on the traditional knowledge of our spiritual leaders and ceremonialists. In the Siksika worldview, the explanation for the origin and function of the universe, as well as for man and his relationship with his environment, can be found in stories passed down through oral tradition.

Our ancestors embraced our relationship with all beings and the cosmic world through ritual and song. The grandfathers welcomed the sunrise through the sacred smudge of sweetgrass, and asked for guidance and good fortune during the sun's journey over the tall grasses of Blackfoot land. When evening came the smudge was again lit, and in humility the grandfathers gave thanks to the Creator for his generosity.

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 We are thankful to
 the bounty of nature for the
 opportunity to build
 this Centre.

Nature is at the heart of Blackfoot culture. Everywhere you look in the Interpretive Centre you will find references to birds, plants and animals, and the colours of the prairie.

The browns in the gift shop and library are based on the native soil of the grasslands, while the pale pinks and greens of the corridors offer a glimpse of the prairie rose and summer grasses. The wood panelling in the main entry and Sundance Gallery are like the sedimentary layers of the river bank.

The Sundance Gallery floor is a sunburst interpretation of the sun's life-giving rays, while the Cafeteria design is based on the buckskin leggings of warriors.

Given our worldview, it is important that the Interpretive Centre is a thoroughly eco-friendly building, having achieved LEED certification. The Building Management System controls all heating and cooling to reduce energy usage. All of our appliances are low-water use and can detect leaks. High energy efficiency is achieved through low-voltage systems, photo-cell technology, and automated control switches.

The Winter Count display shows how significant events were recorded on buffalo hide as a pictorial calendar.



STORY OF THE SIKSIKA HERALDRY

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In June 1992, Siksika became the first Nation to register its Symbol as a Coat of Arms with the Heraldic Authority of Canada.

It is listed as Volume One, Number One in the First Nations section. The Siksika Nation Coat of Arms was designed by Mark Wolf Leg Junior. The buffalo in the Coat of Arms was chosen as the symbolic animal of the Siksika because it provided our ancestors with

food, clothing, and shelter. The arrow in seven pieces represents the seven societies in the tribe such as The Horn, Crow, Black Soldier, Motoki, Prairie Chicken, Brave Dog, and *Motokiiks*. The medicine pipe symbolizes peace and crosses. The tomahawk, the weapon

of war which was put to rest forever. The circles represent the duration of the treaty signed by Chief Crowfoot on September 22, 1877; as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the water flows.



FINAL WORD



We are proud to say that Blackfoot Crossing has been in operation for more than a decade, overcoming all sorts of obstacles from financial struggles to destructive flooding. Thousands and thousands of visitors from all over the globe have come to learn about the famous Blackfoot name, and the culture and history behind it. Most importantly, our People — the Siksika, the Kainai, and the Piikani — have contributed and gained further knowledge and understanding of our ancestors and traditions.

As we look toward the future, we are filled with optimism, knowing that Blackfoot Crossing will continue to educate, preserve, and tell the story of where we came from, where we are now, and where we will be for centuries to come.

Siksika Day 2019.

