

“Buffalo Stones”

Mr. Ben Weber, of Sedgewick, Alberta, writes:

In the second paragraph of Chapter V of Mrs. Kehoe's **Hunters of the Buried Years**, it says in part, “The chanting became tense as the four elders seated around the little image of a bison strained to put all their magical powers into the song.”

I am enclosing a photo of what I believe to be “the little image of a bison,” thinking it might be of interest to readers of the **Blue Jay**.

This stone was found in an area southwest of Sedgewick, where many indications of Indian camps exist. The image is approximately 11¼” long, 7” high, 3½” thick.

Mrs. Alice Kehoe comments:

The stone photographed by Mr. Weber appears to be what is commonly known as a “ribstone” (from its ribbed appearance). These are occasionally found on hilltops in Alberta and northern Montana. Some “ribstones” seem to have been roughly carved by the Indians to heighten the resemblance to a buffalo, others seem to have been pecked at random or to represent abstract symbols. “Ribstones” include three kinds of stones: (1) stones,

particularly sandstone, on which bone objects and arrow shafts may have been shaped and smoothed; (2) stones on which an Indian “doodled” while waiting for friends at a rendezvous; (3) sacred stones which were supposed to be the residence of a spirit. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to decide which of these types a particular “ribstone” belongs to. There may also be confusion between aboriginally-carved “ribstones” and naturally-eroded or fossil stones, although naturally ribbed stones do not show the grinding marks left by the carvers of the “ribstones.” Several Alberta “ribstones” have been described by James G. MacGregor in an article in the **Alberta Historical Review**, Vol. 7, No. 4, Autumn, 1959.

“Ribstones” are not the same as the magical buffalo stones used in the ritual calling a herd into a drive or pound. The stones in the calling ritual are quite small, fitting into little bags that are kept inside medicine bundles and carried about as the band moves. Blackfoot buffalo stones are usually ammonites (a fossil shell). G. B. Grinnell recounts the legend of the finding of the



Photo by B. Weber

magic buffalo stones, **iniskim**, in his **Blackfoot Lodge Tales** (now reprinted in paperback, \$1.50 U.S. from the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln), pp. 125-6. Not all tribes used the buffalo stone in the calling ritual. The Cree, for example, prayed directly to the spiritual Master of the buffalo.

The "ribstones" that were sacred might or might not be thought to be connected with buffalo. Placed as they were on high hills, frequently near trails, they served as landmarks, and were really wayside shrines. Passing Indians stopped beside the rocks, prayed for success on their journeys or whatever else they desired, and left tobacco, ornaments, or a bit of clothing at the rock as an

offering to the resident spirit. See Grinnell's **Tales**, pp. 262-3.

We would be interested to know whether Mr. Weber's "ribstone" was found on a hill or in a camp. If it lay alone on a hilltop, and had beads and other relics about its base, it was probably a sacred "medicine rock." If it lay among tipi rings or in the midden of a buffalo pound, it may possibly have been a grinding stone for the manufacture of bone and wood artifacts. It was probably not an **iniskim**, however. Our uncertainty about the true function of Mr. Weber's "ribstone" points up, again, that little can be said about any prehistoric artifacts unless we know exactly how they lay when first discovered.

Rockhound Notes

One more June meeting of the S.N.H.S. has come and gone. The many pleasant memories of the event will linger on through the months ahead. Judging from the number of members who crowded around the "rockhound" display, the evening of the business meeting, there were plenty of rockhounds in attendance. I regret that I was unable to meet all those interested in the display, but appreciate the keen interest shown in this phase of natural history.

Regarding the special "Rockhound Newsletter" that the S.N.H.S. made available to those members requesting it: thirty persons wrote asking for it, and several most interesting letters were received about it. Incidentally, there are still a few copies of this newsletter available.

The suggestion has been made that the rockhounds in the Society keep in touch with each other by continuing their correspondence through a central "clearing house" as it were, and that, for the time being, I receive this correspondence, such correspondence to be dealt with as seems advisable. This might be by personal reply, or briefly through the channels of the S.N.H.S.—either in the notes and letters section of the **Blue Jay** or in the Society's newsletter. I think there is merit in this suggestion and that we should try it out to

see if it serves the needs of our group in the Society.

Summer is the time when rockhounds have the best opportunity to collect. How about writing us about your experiences, and your problems?

Yours truly spent a most interesting three days, following the Cypress Hills Park meeting, wandering around the Cypress Hills area in search of petrified wood, fossils, etc. Those hills and coulees can be recommended as places to get exercise and an appetite as well as some interesting specimens for your collection.—**Watson Crossley**, R.R. 4, Grandview, Manitoba.

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