

***The Horse in
Blackfoot Indian Culture***

With Comparative Material from Other Western Tribes

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Smithsonian Institution Press
Washington, D.C.

Smithsonian Institution
Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 159

00 99 98 97 96 7 6 5 4 3

**Library of Congress
Cataloging in Publication Data**

Ewers, John Canfield.
The horse in Blackfoot Indian culture.
(Classics of Smithsonian Anthropology)
Reprint of the 1955 ed. published by the
U.S. Govt. Print. Off., Washington, which was
issued as no. 159 of Bureau of American Ethnology
Bulletin.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.

1. Siksika Indians. 2. Horses—Great Plains.
3. Indians of North America—Great Plains. I. Title.
II. Series. III. Series: United States. Bureau of
American Ethnology. Bulletin; no. 159.
[E99.S54E8 1979] 970'.004'97 79-607784

ISBN 0-87474-419-9

Cover: Lithograph from an original illustration by
John Mix Stanley. From Isaac I. Stevens, *Narrative
and Final Report of Explorations for a Route for a
Pacific Railroad*, published in U.S. Congress, Senate,
36th Cong., 1st sess., 1853-5 (Washington: Thomas
H. Ford), 1860, vol. 12, bk. 1, lithograph 27,
p. 115.

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THE HORSE IN BLACKFOOT INDIAN CULTURE

WITH COMPARATIVE MATERIAL FROM OTHER WESTERN TRIBES

BY JOHN C. EWERS

THE ACQUISITION OF THE HORSE

Clark Wissler (1927, p. 154) has named the period 1540 to 1880 in the history of the Indian tribes of the Great Plains "the Horse Culture Period." This period can be defined more accurately and meaningfully in cultural than in temporal terms. Among all the tribes of the area it began much later than 1540. With some tribes it ended before 1880. Yet for each Plains Indian tribe the Horse Culture Period spanned the years between the acquisition and first use of horses and the extermination of the economically important buffalo in the region in which that tribe lived.

Anthropologists and historians have been intrigued by the problem of the diffusion of the European horse among the Plains Indians. It is well known that many tribes began to acquire horses before their first recorded contacts with white men. Paucity of documentation has given rise to much speculation as to the sources of the horses diffused to these tribes, the date when the first Plains Indians acquired horses, the rate of diffusion from tribe to tribe, and the conditions under which the spread took place.

The three Blackfoot tribes of the northwestern Plains, the Piegan, Blood, and North Blackfoot, were among those tribes that possessed horses when first met by literate white men. To view their acquisition in proper historical and cultural perspective it is necessary to consider the larger problem of the diffusion of horses to the northern Plains and Plateau tribes. Critical study of this problem dates from Wissler's paper, entitled "The Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Culture," published in the *American Anthropologist* (Wissler, 1914). That stimulating, pioneer effort encouraged further study of the problem. Of the more recent contributions two papers by Francis Haines (1938, a and b), based to a considerable extent upon data unavailable to Wissler a quarter of a century earlier, have been most influential in revising the thinking of students of this problem.

THE NORTHWARD SPREAD OF HORSES

SOURCES OF THE HORSES OF THE PLAINS INDIANS

Haines' major contributions were to point out that the Plains Indians acquired their first horses from a different source and at a considerably later date than Wissler had considered probable. Wissler gave credence to the theory that the first horses obtained by Plains Indians were animals lost or abandoned by the Spanish exploring expeditions led by De Soto and Coronado in 1541 (Wissler, 1914, pp. 9-10). The historian Walter P. Webb, in "The Great Plains," an important regional history published 17 years later, acknowledged his debt to Wissler in his acceptance of this theory (Webb, 1931, p. 57). However, another historian, Morris Bishop, who had made a critical study of early Spanish explorations, termed this theory, "a pretty legend" (Bishop, 1933, p. 31). Haines virtually laid the old theory to rest. After a careful review of the evidence he concluded that "the chances of strays from the horse herds of either De Soto or Coronado having furnished the horses of the Plains Indians is so remote that it should be discarded" (Haines, 1938 a, p. 117).

This conclusion has been supported by more recent scholarship. John R. Swanton, who has been a thorough student of the De Soto Expedition over a period of years, concurred in Haines' interpretation of the De Soto evidence (Swanton, 1939, pp. 170-171). Arthur S. Aiton, in publishing Coronado's Compostela muster roll, commented significantly, "Five hundred and fifty-eight horses, two of them mares, are accounted for in the muster. The presence and separate listing of only two mares suggests that we may have been credulous in the belief that stray horses from the Coronado expedition stocked the western plains with their first horses." Furthermore, he found no record of the loss of either mare during Coronado's expedition to the Plains (Aiton, 1939, pp. 556-570). Herbert E. Bolton, profound student of early Spanish explorations in the Southwest, has pointed out that even though Coronado may have taken some mares to the Plains which had not been listed in the Compostela roll, the biological possibility of strays from this expedition having stocked the Plains with Spanish horses was slight. He also noted the lack of any mention of encounters with stray horses or mounted Indians in the accounts of Spanish expeditions to the Great Plains in the later years of the 16th and early years of the 17th century (Bolton, 1949, pp. 68-69, 400).

Exploring the alternatives, Haines found that the early 17th-century Spanish stock-raising settlements of the Southwest, particularly those in the neighborhood of Santa Fe, furnished "just the items necessary

to encourage the adoption of horses by the Indians to the east—friendly contact through trade, ample supply of horses, and examples of the advantages of the new servants" (Haines, 1938 a, p. 117).

DATING THE NORTHWARD SPREAD OF HORSES AMONG THE INDIANS

Different concepts of the sources of the horses of the Plains Indians led to very different interpretations of the rate of their diffusion among these tribes. Wissler's assumption that horses were available to the Plains Indians as early as 1541, caused him to consider it possible that they might have spread northward during the remainder of that century so rapidly that they could have reached the Crow and Blackfoot on the headwaters of the Missouri as early as 1600 (Wissler, 1914, p. 10). Haines, however, found "the available evidence indicates that the Plains Indians began acquiring horses some time after 1600, the center of distribution being Santa Fe. This development proceeded rather slowly; none of the tribes becoming horse Indians before 1630, and probably not until 1650" (Haines, 1938 a, p. 117). The logical and historical soundness of Haines' position has been acknowledged by more recent students of the problem (Wyman, 1945, pp. 53-55; Mishkin, 1940, pp. 5-6; Denhardt, 1947, p. 103. Acceptance of this position is also implied in Bolton, 1949, p. 400).

In tracing the northward spread of horses from the Southwest to the Plains and Plateau tribes we must acknowledge the meagerness of the historical data bearing on this movement. Wissler logically assumed that "those to get them first would be the Ute, Comanche, Apache, Kiowa and Caddo" (Wissler, 1914, p. 2). If we exclude the Comanche, this assumption seems to be in accord with more recent findings. Horses were first diffused northward and eastward to those tribes on the periphery of the Spanish settlements of the Southwest. Marvin Opler found in Southern Ute traditions a suggestion that those Indians acquired horses from the Spanish "probably around 1640" (Linton, 1940, pp. 156-157, 171). Spanish records, dated 1659, reported Apache raids on the ranch stock of the settlements which continued into the next decade. The Apache carried off as many as 300 head of livestock in a single raid. At the same time the Apache engaged in an intermittent exchange of slaves for horses with the Pueblo Indians (Scholes, 1937, pp. 150, 163, 398-399). The French explorer La Salle heard that the Gattacka (Kiowa-Apache) and Manrhoat (Kiowa) were trading horses to the Wichita or Pawnee in 1682. He believed the animals had been stolen from the Spaniards of New Mexico (Margry, 1876-86, vol. 2, pp. 201-202). In 1690, Tonti found the Cadodaquis on Red River in possession of about 30 horses, which the Indians called *cavalis*, an apparent derivation from the

Spanish "caballos." While among the Naouadiché, another Caddoan tribe, farther south, he found horses "very common," stating "there is not a cabin which has not four or five" (Cox, 1905, pp. 44-50).

Data on the spread of the horse northward over the Plains in the late years of the 17th century are sparse. In 1680, Oto Indians who visited La Salle at Fort Crèvecoeur (near present Peoria, Ill.) brought with them a piebald horse taken from some Spaniards they had killed (Pease and Werner, 1934 a, p. 4). Deliette reported that prior to 1700 the Pawnee and Wichita obtained branded Spanish horses "of which they make use sometimes to pursue the buffalo in the hunt" (Pease and Werner, 1934 b, p. 388). In the summer of 1700, Father Gabriel Marest included Missouri, Kansa, and Ponca, along with the Pawnee and Wichita, as possessors of Spanish horses (Garraghan, 1927, p. 312). These brief references suggest that by the end of the century most and probably all Plains Indian tribes living south of the Platte River had gained some familiarity with horses. Nevertheless, testimony, of the French explorers La Harpe, Du Tisne, and Bourgmont (Margry, 1886, vol. 6) in the first quarter of the 18th century indicates that horses still were scarce among the tribes living eastward of the Apache and northward of the Caddo.

In 1705, the Comanche, an offshoot of the Wyoming Shoshoni, first were seen on the New Mexican frontier. In company with linguistically related Ute, they came to beg for peace, but on their departure stole horses from the settlements (Thomas, 1935, p. 105). In succeeding years they launched repeated bold attacks upon New Mexico, riding off with horses and with goods intended by the Spanish for trade with the Apache living northeastward of the Rio Grande Pueblos. Comanche thefts were extended to the Apache villages as well. Specific mention was made in Spanish records of one raid in which 3 Comanche and Ute Indians ran off 20 horses and a colt from an Apache rancheria in 1719. At that very time Governor Valverde was leading a punitive expedition against the troublesome Comanche (ibid., pp. 105-109, 122).

Plains tribes northeast of the Black Hills were met by white traders before they acquired horses. When La Vérendrye accompanied an Assiniboin trading party to the Mandan villages on the Missouri in 1738, those Assiniboin had no horses. La Vérendrye made no mention of any horses among the Mandan. However, he was told that the Arikara, northernmost of the Caddoan-speaking peoples, living south of the Mandan on the Missouri, owned horses, as did nomadic tribes living southwestward toward and beyond the Black Hills (La Vérendrye, 1927, pp. 108, 337). Two Frenchmen, left by La Vérendrye at the Mandan villages through the summer of 1739, witnessed the visit of horse-using tribes to the Mandan for trading purposes (ibid., pp.

366-368). These tribes cannot be identified with certainty. However, the two Frenchmen learned that they feared the "Snake" Indians. Therefore, it seems improbable these people were Shoshoni or their Comanche kinsmen. They may have been the Kiowa and Kiowa Apache, who were mentioned by La Salle as actively engaged in the northward diffusion of horses a half century earlier, and who were known to have traded horses to the horticultural peoples on the Missouri in later years.

In 1741, La Vérendrye's son took two horses with him on his return from the Mandan villages (ibid., p. 108, 387). This event seems to have marked the beginning of the trade in horses from nomadic tribes southwest of the Missouri, through the Mandan to the peoples north and east of them. Hendry (1907, pp. 334-335) traveled with an Assiniboin trading party in 1754, which employed horses for packing but not for riding. Twelve years later the elder Henry (1809, pp. 275-289) saw horses in some numbers among the Assiniboin and mentioned their use in mounted warfare. Umfreville reported (in 1789) "it is but lately that they [horses] have become common among the Nehe-thawa [Cree] Indians" (Umfreville, 1790, p. 189). The French trader Jacques d'Eglise, in 1792, saw horses equipped with Mexican saddles and bridles among the Mandan in the first description of that tribe after the visits of the La Vérendryes a half century earlier (Nasitir, 1927, p. 58). It is most probable that a trickle of trade in Spanish horses through the Mandan to the Assiniboin and Plains Cree existed throughout the last half of the 18th century.

The third quarter of the century witnessed a rapid expansion of the horse frontier among tribes living to the eastward of the Missouri. In 1768 Carver (1838, p. 188) found no horses among the Dakota of the Upper Mississippi, and placed the frontier of horse-using tribes some distance to the westward of them. Yet by 1773 Peter Pond saw Spanish horses among the Sauk on the Wisconsin River. Two years later he observed that the Yankton Dakota had "a Grate Number of Horses" which they used for hunting buffalo and carrying baggage (Pond, 1908, pp. 335, 353). Since the Yankton probably obtained their horses from the Teton, Hyde's 1760 estimate of the date of Teton Dakota acquisition of horses appears reasonable (Hyde, 1937, pp. 16, 18, 68). According to Teton tradition, they acquired their first horses from the Arikara on the Missouri. It was probably during the third quarter of the 18th century that the Cheyenne began to acquire horses also (Jablow, 1951, p. 10).

At the close of the 18th century the Red River marked the northeastern boundary of Plains Indian horse culture. In 1798, David Thompson noted that the Ojibwa east of that river had no horses (Thompson, 1916, p. 246). Two years thereafter Alexander Henry

the younger purchased two horses from visiting Indians who lived on the Assiniboin River to the west, and commented significantly, "Those were the first and only two horses we had on Red river; the Saulteurs had none, but always used canoes" (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, p. 47). In January, 1806, Zebulon Pike observed that traders at the Northwest Company post on Lac de Sable, near the Mississippi, had "horses they procured from Red river of the Indians" (Pike, 1810, p. 60). In the summer of that year Henry encountered nine lodges of canoe-using Ojibwa at the forks of Scratching River in present south-eastern Manitoba, hunting buffalo. They owned some horses and were planning to go to the Missouri to purchase more (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, p. 286). These were the Plains Ojibwa in process of transition from woodland canoeemen to Plains Indian horsemen.

By 1805 horses had also been diffused far to the northwest in larger numbers. The Lewis and Clark Expedition established first recorded white contact with the Plateau tribes in 1805-06. On their return from the Pacific coast they were able to purchase four horses from Skilloot Indians at the Dalles, paying twice as much for them as they had paid for horses obtained from Shoshoni and Flathead on their outward journey (Coues, 1893, vol. 2, pp. 954-955). As they moved eastward they found horses more plentiful, indicating that the Dalles was near the northwestern limit of horse diffusion at that time. Lewis and Clark were impressed with the large numbers of horses owned by many Plateau tribes. Yet the Lemhi Shoshoni told them of related peoples living to the southwest of them (probably Ute) "where horses are much more abundant than they are here" (Coues, 1893, vol. 2, p. 569). The explorers found Spanish riding gear and branded mules among the Shoshoni. They believed these animals came from the Spanish settlements, which the Indians reported to be but 8 to 10 days' journey southward (Coues, 1893, vol. 2, p. 559; Ordway, 1916, p. 268).

Northern Shoshoni tradition claims that their kinsmen, the Comanche, furnished them their first horses (Clark, 1885, p. 338; Shimkin, 1938, p. 415). If we may credit this tradition, it seems possible these Shoshoni may have begun to acquire horses a few years after Comanche raids were launched on the New Mexican settlements in 1705. It is probable, too, that the Ute of western Colorado served as intermediaries through whom Spanish horses passed northward to the Shoshoni during the 18th century (Steward, 1938, p. 201). However, these movements cannot be historically documented.

Nevertheless, the sizable herds of horses seen among the Lemhi Shoshoni and their neighbors by Lewis and Clark in 1805, presuppose an extended period of horse diffusion on a considerable scale toward the Northwest prior to that date. Haines (1938 b, p. 436) has postulated a route of diffusion west of the Continental Divide from Santa

Fe to the Snake River by way of the headwaters of the Colorado, the Grand, and Green Rivers. This was the most direct route to the Northwest from New Mexico. We may note, also, that it passed through the country of Shoshonean tribes offering a peaceful highway for Comanche and Ute such as was unavailable on the western Plains, infested as that region was with hostile Apache and Kiowa. There was little incentive to divert horses westward from that route, as the Great Basin afforded inadequate pasturage for horses.

Through the Northern Shoshoni, horses were distributed to the Plateau tribes. Tribal traditions of the Flathead and Nez Percé credit the Shoshoni with furnishing them their first mounts (Turney-High, 1937, p. 106; Haines, 1939, p. 19). The Coeur d'Alene, Pend d'Orielle, Kalispel, Spokane, Colville, and Cayuse tribes of the northwestern Plateau obtained their first horses either directly from the Shoshoni or indirectly from tribes previously supplied by Shoshoni (Teit, 1930, p. 351). Although a Crow tradition recorded by Bradley (1923, p. 298) refers to their acquisition of horses from the Nez Percé, it seems more probable that the first horses obtained by the Crow came from the Comanche (Morgan, MS., bk. 9, p. 12).

THE PROCESS OF DIFFUSION

Previous writers have been more concerned with the historical problem of *when* the Plains Indians obtained horses than with the cultural problem of *how* horses were diffused. Certainly the paucity of 18th century documentation sheds little light on the diffusion process. However, when we add to this documentation the information in the literature of the first decade of the 19th century, we find much that is helpful in seeking an explanation of this process.

At the beginning of the 19th century two main routes for the diffusion of horses to the tribes of the northern Plains were observable. One route led from the Upper Yellowstone eastward to the Hidatsa and Mandan villages on the Missouri. The Crow Indians of the Middle Yellowstone served as intermediaries in a flourishing trade in horses and mules, securing large numbers of these animals from the Flathead, Shoshoni, and probably also the Nez Percé on the Upper Yellowstone in exchange for objects of European manufacture. At the Mandan and Hidatsa villages they disposed of some of these horses and mules, at double their purchase value, in exchange for the European-made objects desired for their own use and eagerly sought by the far-off Flathead and Shoshoni. Thus tribes of the Upper Yellowstone and Plateau began to receive supplies of knives, axes, brass kettles, metal awls, bracelets of iron and brass, a few buttons worn as hair ornaments, some long metal lance heads, arrowheads of iron and brass, and a few fusils of Northwest Company trade type,

before their first direct contacts with white traders in their own territories. Thus also, horn bows and possibly other products of the western Indians reached the village tribes on the Missouri, and bridle bits and trade blankets of Spanish origin arrived at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages by a long and circuitous route. On their summer trading visits to the Mandan and Hidatsa the Crow also exchanged products of the chase (dried meat, robes, leggings, shirts, and skin lodges) for corn, pumpkins, and tobacco of the villagers. In 1805, the Northwest Company trader Larocque, the first white man to spend a season with the Crow, reported that this trade was well-organized (Larocque, 1910, pp. 22, 64, 66, 71-72). This trade was also noted by Lewis and Clark (Coues, 1893, vol. 1, pp. 198-199; vol. 2, pp. 498, 554, 563), Henry (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, pp. 398-399), Mackenzie (1889, p. 346), and Tabeau (1939, pp. 160-161).¹

We cannot be sure how long this trade was in existence before the opening of the 19th century. However, the experienced fur trader Robert Meldrum, who probably knew the Crow Indians better than any other white man of his time, told Lewis Henry Morgan that when he first went among the Crow (1827) old people of that tribe told him they "saw the first horses ever brought into their country," and that they obtained these horses from the Comanche. Morgan estimated, "This would make it about 100 years ago that they first obtained the horse," i. e. ca. 1762 (Morgan, MS., bk. 9, p. 12). Denig (1953, p. 19) and Bradley (1896, p. 179) independently dated the separation of the Crow from the Hidatsa about the year 1776 or a few years earlier. It is probable that the Crow Indians did not become actively engaged in this trade until they had acquired enough horses to make it practical for them to leave the Hidatsa and become nomadic hunters.

The other major route by which horses were diffused northward to the tribes of the northern Plains at the beginning of the 19th century I assume to have been an older one, and probably the route followed by the Comanche themselves in supplying the Crow with their first horses. It led from the Spanish settlements of New Mexico and Texas to the vicinity of the Black Hills in South Dakota via the western High Plains, thence eastward and northeastward to the Arikara, Hidatsa, and Mandan villages on the Missouri. The important middlemen in this trade at the beginning of the 19th century were the nomadic Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne.

Antoine Tabeau, a French trader from St. Louis, who was among the Arikara in 1803-4, was told that prior to that time the Arikara were accustomed to transport tobacco, maize, and goods of European

¹ Mackenzie (1889, p. 346) reported that 250 horses and 200 guns with 100 rounds of ammunition for each were exchanged in the Crow-Hidatsa trade of June, 1805. Twelve lodges of Shoshoni, comprising the remnant of a tribe that had been destroyed, accompanied the Crow trading party that summer (Larocque, 1910, pp. 22, 73).

manufacture "to the foot of the Black Hills" where they met the Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne in a trading fair. There they secured dressed deerskins, porcupine-quill-decorated shirts of antelopeskin, moccasins, quantities of dried meat, and prairie turnip flour in exchange for their wares. Coincident with that trade was the barter of European firearms for horses, which Tabeau described:

The horse is the most important article of their trade with the Ricaras. Most frequently it is given as a present: but, according to their manner, that is to say, it is recalled when the tender in exchange does not please. This is an understood restriction. This present is paid ordinarily with a gun, a hundred charges of powder and balls, a knife and other trifles. [Tabeau, 1939, p. 158.]

Tabeau was told that the nomadic traders obtained their horses directly from the Spaniards at "St. Antonio or Santa Fe," either buying them at low prices or stealing them, at their discretion (*ibid.*, pp. 154-158).

Lewis and Clark made brief mention of Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and possibly some Comanche as wandering tribes who "raise a great number of horses, which they barter to the Ricaras, Mandans &c. for articles of European manufactory" (Coues, 1893, vol. 1, pp. 58-59). In the summer of 1806, Henry accompanied the Hidatsa on a visit to the Cheyenne to trade guns and ammunition (then scarce among the Cheyenne) for fine horses (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, pp. 367-393).

Although this north-south trade route may have been employed for the northward diffusion of horses for several decades before the west-east trade route (previously described) was opened, it is most probable that the Arapaho and Cheyenne were not involved in it as intermediaries before their abandonment of the sedentary horticultural life in favor of a nomadic existence. Cheyenne conversion to nomadism probably began no earlier than 1750, and some villages of that tribe clung to the horticultural life until after 1790 (Strong, 1940, pp. 359, 371; Trudeau, 1921, pp. 165-167). According to Arapaho tradition that tribe also made the transition from sedentary to nomadic life (Elkin *in* Linton, 1940, p. 207). Presumably Arapaho conversion to nomadism did not long antedate that of the Cheyenne. Of the nomadic tribes actively engaged in supplying horses to the village tribes on the Missouri by the northward route in 1804, this leaves only the Kiowa-Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche as probable initiators of this trade. Since the Comanche are credited with supplying horses to their kinsmen, the Northern Shoshoni, in the 18th century, it is most probable that the Kiowa-Apache and Kiowa played more important roles in the early trade in horses with the village tribes of the Missouri.

The Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa villages served as foci for the further diffusion of horses to the tribes dwelling east and north of that river at the beginning of the 19th century. In late summer the nomadic Teton Dakota obtained horses, mules, corn, beans, pumpkins, and tobacco from the Arikara in exchange for products and byproducts of the hunt and European trade goods. Each spring the Teton met their Dakota relatives, the Yankton, Yanktonai, and Eastern Dakota at a great trading fair on the James River in present South Dakota, where they bartered some of the horses received from the Arikara, together with buffaloskin lodges, buffalo robes, and shirts and leggings of antelopeskin, with other Dakota tribes for the materials of the latter's country (walnut bows and red stone pipes are specifically mentioned), and European manufactured goods (guns and kettles are named) which those tribes obtained from white traders on the St. Peters (Minnesota) and Des Moines Rivers. Tabeau (1939, pp. 121, 131) reported that this Sioux trading fair sometimes attracted as many as 1,000 to 1,200 tents, housing about 3,000 men bearing arms. Lewis and Clark made repeated mention of this trade (Coues, 1893, vol. 1, pp. 95, 99, 100, 144, 217). They regarded it of special significance because it made the powerful Teton Dakota independent of white traders on the Missouri and hostile to the extension of the trade from St. Louis up the Missouri which would serve only to place deadly fire-arms in the hands of their enemies.

From the Mandan and Hidatsa villages horses passed to the Assiniboin, Plains Cree, and Plains Ojibwa of northern North Dakota and southern Canada. The actual trading took place at the villages of the horticultural tribes, during periodic visits from the nomadic ones. Trudeau, in 1796, told of the Assiniboin obtaining horses, corn, and tobacco from the Mandan and Hidatsa for guns and other merchandise (Trudeau, 1921, p. 173). Tabeau (1939, p. 161) and Lewis and Clark (Coues, 1893, vol. 1, p. 195) referred to the exchange of horses and agricultural products of the Mandan and Hidatsa for the "merchandise" (arms and ammunition were named) of the Assiniboin and Plains Cree.

The Mandan and Hidatsa also served as bases for the horse supply of white traders operating in the country north and east of them. Lewis and Clark's statement that Mr. Henderson of the Hudson's Bay Company came to the Hidatsa villages in December 1804, with tobacco, beads, and other merchandise to trade for furs, and "a few guns which are to be exchanged for horses" is significant of the preferred position given to both guns and horses in this trade (Coues, 1893, vol. 1, p. 207).

On the map (fig. 1) I have summarized graphically the foregoing data on trade routes employed in the diffusion of horses northward to the majority of the Plains Indian tribes dwelling north of the Platte River at the beginning of the 19th century.

A study of this map in conjunction with the preceding text seems to justify some conclusions relative to the pattern of this diffusion.

First, I am impressed with the fact that the trade in horses on the northern Plains at that time was almost without exception a trade be-

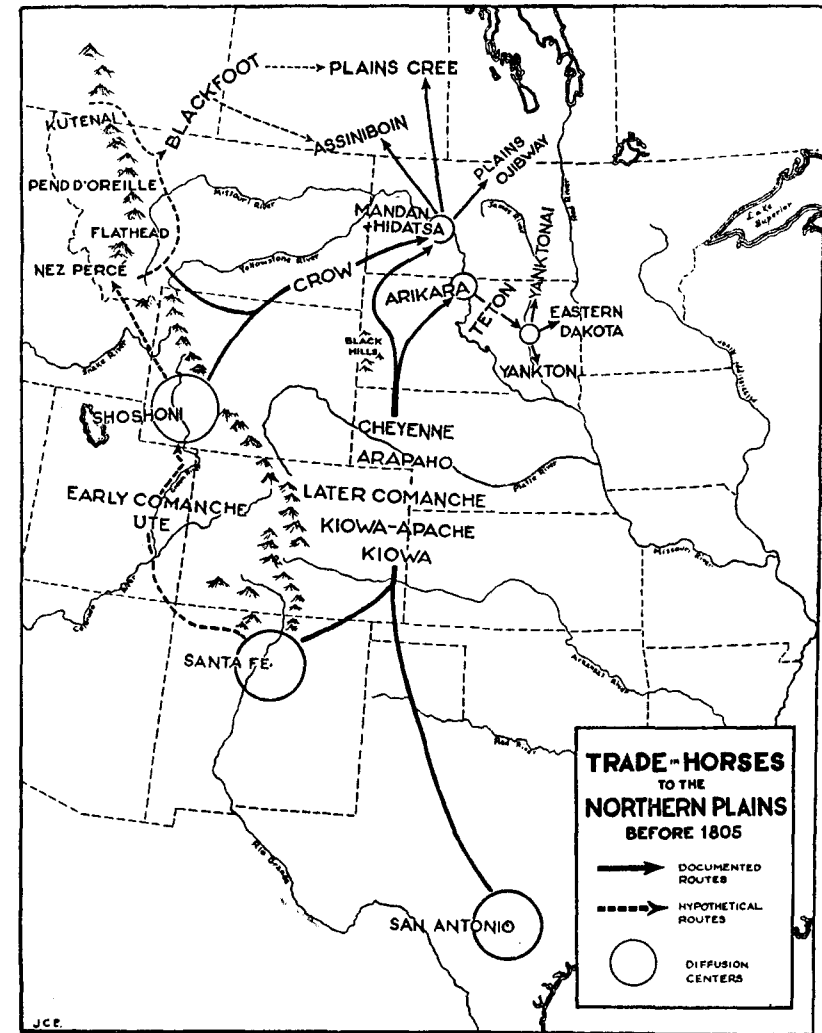


FIGURE 1.—Map showing trade in horses to the northern Plains before 1805.

tween nomadic and horticultural peoples, and that this horse trade was coincident with the exchange of products of the hunt for agricultural produce on the part of these same tribes. This barter between hunting and gardening peoples enabled each group to supplement its own economy with the products of the other's labors. There

was little incentive for trade between two horticultural tribes or between two hunting peoples, as neither possessed an abundance of desirable products which the other did not have. However, the natural environment of the western Plateau yielded wild foods and other natural resources which were not found on the Plains. Therefore, the nomadic Plateau tribes stood in much the same desirable trading relationship to the Plains Indian nomads as did the gardening peoples of the Plains. So we find that horses were diffused from the Flathead to the nomadic Crow, to the horticultural Hidatsa and Mandan, to the nomadic Assiniboin, Plains Cree, and Plains Ojibwa, with the same alternate rhythm as occurred in the northward progression of horses from the Spanish settlements to the nomadic Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne, to the horticultural Arikara, to the nomadic Teton Dakota, to the horticultural Eastern Dakota.

There is good evidence that the pattern of trade in the respective products of their different economies between gardening and nomadic tribes was an old one in the Plains, and that it antedated the introduction of the horse into the area. Definite references to the trade of Plains Indians in pre-horse days reveal the pattern.

The Coronado expedition in 1541 observed that the nomadic Querechos and Teyas of the southwestern Plains—

. . . follow the cows, hunting them and tanning the skins to take to the settlements in the winter to sell, since they go there to pass the winter, each company going to those which are nearest, some to the settlement of Cicuye, others toward Quivera, and others to the settlements situated in the direction of Florida . . . They have no other settlement or location than comes from travelling around with the cows . . . They exchange some cloaks with the natives of the river for corn. [Winship, 1896, pp. 527-528.]

In the fall of 1599, Vicente de Saldivar Mendoca met a roving band of Plains Indians not far from the Canadian River—

. . . coming from trading with the Picuries and Taos, populous pueblos of this New Mexico, where they sell meat, hides, tallow, suet, and salt in exchange for cotton blankets, pottery, maize, and some small green stones which they use. [Bolton, 1916, p. 226.]

The two Frenchmen left at the Mandan villages by La Vérendrye in 1739, reported the existence of a similar trade in words suggesting that it had been active for a period of years:

. . . every year, in the beginning of June, there arrive at the great fort on the bank of the river of the Mandan, several savage tribes which use horses and carry on trade with them; that they bring dressed skins trimmed and ornamented with plumage and porcupine quills, painted in various colors, also white buffalo skins, and that the Mandan give them in exchange grain and beans, of which they have ample supply.

Last spring two hundred lodges of them came; sometimes even more come; they are not all of the same tribe but some of them are only allies. [La Vérendrye, 1927, pp. 366-367.]

Undoubtedly some of the articles received by the Mandan in this trade were passed along to the Assiniboin. In 1738, La Vérendrye himself had found that the Mandan offered not only grains and tobacco, but also colored buffalo robes, deerskins and buckskins carefully dressed and ornamented with fur and feathers, painted feathers and furs, worked garters, headbands, and girdles to the Assiniboin in return for guns, powder, balls, axes, knives, kettles, and awls of European manufacture (*ibid.*, pp. 323, 332). Horses do not appear to have been articles of trade at the Mandan villages at that time, but it is clear that the Assiniboin middlemen, operating far in advance of white traders, were offering to the Mandan firearms and ammunition as well as other trade goods obtained from Whites.

It is necessary to consider the diffusion of firearms to the Plains Indians as a factor related to and influencing the routes of trade followed in the northward diffusion of horses. If there was any possession as keenly sought by the historic Plains Indians as was the horse, it was the gun. As much as these Indians wanted the rapid mobility afforded by the horse, they sought the deadly firepower provided by the gun. Any tribe possessing either without the other was at a distinct disadvantage in opposition to an enemy owning both. British and French traders approaching the Plains from the north and east supplied guns to Indians. However, Spanish policy strictly prohibited the trading of firearms and ammunition to the natives. This placed those tribes in early contact with the British and French traders in an advantageous trading position. Having obtained firearms and ammunition directly from Europeans they were able to act as middlemen in bartering some of these highly desirable weapons with distant tribes that had as yet no direct contacts with white traders.

In the middle of the 18th century the village tribes of the Upper Missouri (Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa) were situated in a most admirable position for trading both to the northeast and the southwest. It was at those villages that the northeastward-moving frontier of the horse met the southwestward-moving frontier of the gun. Indians learned to equate guns and horses as standards of value, and a mutually profitable trade ensued by which the armed tribes of the Northeast secured mounts and the mounted tribes of the South and West secured firearms. Undoubtedly the demand for both firearms and horses far exceeded the supply. The need on the part of those Indians who received firearms for ammunition, which they could not make themselves, also helped to perpetuate this trade. At the beginning of the 19th century (as indicated by the data quoted from Tabeau) firearms still were the most desired articles sought in exchange for horses by those tribes which had access to considerable

numbers of the latter, although canny horse traders then insisted that ammunition and some other articles be thrown into the scale to seal the bargain.

So it was that during the 18th century a trade in Spanish horses for French and British firearms grew up alongside the earlier pattern of exchange of products between horticultural and nomadic hunting tribes of the region. The trade in horses, therefore, appears to have been an historic elaboration of a prehistoric trade pattern among the Plains Indians.

Another aspect of this trade is worthy of note as a factor determining the direction of flow in the diffusion of horses. All other factors being equal, the nomadic tribes preferred to trade with horticultural peoples with whom they were closely related linguistically, if not biologically as well. Thus Crow traded primarily with Hidatsa, Teton with other Dakota groups, and Comanche and Ute with the Northern Shoshoni. It may well have been the attraction of European firearms that caused the Comanche to divert their trade to the unrelated horticultural peoples of the Missouri several decades after they had begun supplying horses to the Shoshoni.

Recently Denhardt has made a further significant observation:

. . . that the natives obtained their original horses, and always by far the greatest number, from the Spaniards or neighboring tribes and not from the wild herds. The Indians had mounts by the time the wild herds dotted the plains, and always preferred domesticated animals to the mestenos. Mustangs were hard to catch, and once caught, harder to tame. [Denhardt, 1947, pp. 103-104.]

Certainly the lack of references to the capture of wild horses by the Indians of the northern Plains in the literature prior to 1800, serves to support this observation and to suggest that the wild herds furnished a negligible source of horses for those tribes prior to that time.

But what of theft as a factor in the northward spread of horses? Certainly a considerable number of the horses that reached the northern tribes prior to 1800 were animals stolen from Spanish, Pueblo, or Apache settlements by intermediary nomads. It is also true that intertribal theft of horses among the northern tribes occurred prior to that time. Nevertheless, and some native traditions to the contrary, it is hardly credible that any northern tribes obtained their *first* horses by stealing the mounts of neighboring tribes who had acquired horses at a somewhat earlier date. I believe peaceful contact was a necessary condition of initial horse diffusion, in order that some members of the pedestrian tribe might learn to overcome their initial fear of horses and learn to ride and manage those lively animals. The pre-existing pattern of trade furnished the most important medium of peaceful contacts and of initial diffusion of horses. The fact that such trade supplied inadequate numbers of horses to meet the needs

of Indians who had gained some knowledge of handling them and a realization of the superiority of their use over foot travel and transport of camp equipment, encouraged intertribal theft. Actually there need not have been any prolonged interval between a tribe's first acquisition of horses and its initiation of horse-raiding operations. Some tribes may have begun raiding for horses within a decade after they acquired their first animals by peaceful means.

ACQUISITION OF HORSES BY THE BLACKFOOT

With this background let us consider the acquisition of the horse by the Blackfoot tribes. I have omitted these tribes from the previous discussion in order to point out the unique factors involved in Blackfoot acquisition in greater detail.

Prior to the publication of "David Thompson's Narrative" in 1916, it was the practice for students to estimate the date of Blackfoot horse acquisition. These estimates ranged from Wissler's previously mentioned and impossibly early "1600" to Grinnell's impossibly late "about the year 1800" (Hodge, 1907, pt. 1, p. 570). Burpee split the difference in his estimate of "probably the earliest years of the eighteenth century" (Hendry, 1907, p. 318). This approximated another estimate by Wissler in 1910, of "about two hundred years ago" (Wissler, 1910, p. 19).

More recent estimates have been based upon interpretations of a most remarkable account of some important events in the history of the Blackfoot during the lifetime of an aged Cree Indian, Saukamaupée (Boy) by name, who had been living with the Piegan for many years before David Thompson, Hudson's Bay Company trader, spent the winter of 1787-88 in his lodge. Thompson (1916, pp. 328-334) reckoned the old man's age at that time at "at least 75 to 80 years." Using Thompson's conservative estimate, we may consider that Saukamaupée was born no later than between 1707 and 1712. In dating the first episode of his story the old man pointed to a "lad of about sixteen years" in the camp and said that he had been about that boy's age when he went with a small group of Cree to aid the Piegan in a battle with the Snakes in which neither of the opposing forces used either guns or horses. On the basis of the above computation this must have been no later than 1723-28. Saukamaupée returned to his own people, "grew to be a man, became a skillful and fortunate hunter, and . . . procured . . . a wife." Thompson noted that Piegan "young men seldom married before they are full grown, about the age of 22 years or more." If the Cree, more than half a century earlier, followed that same custom, we may estimate that Saukamaupée was married no later than 1729-34. Saukamaupée explained that during the interval between his assistance to the Piegan

and his marriage the Snakes had made use of a few horses in battle with the Piegan, "on which they dashed at the Peeagans, and with their stone Pukamoggin knocked them on the head." After his marriage he again went to the aid of the Piegan. Another battle was fought with the Snakes, but this time the enemy used no horses while the Piegan and their Cree and Assiniboin allies were armed with 10 guns. Terrified by the noise and deadly effect of this new secret weapon, the closely formed Snake battle line broke and its members fled in confusion.

Saukamaupsee said that after that battle:

We pitched away in large camps with the women and children on the frontier of the Snake Indian country, hunting bison and red deer which were numerous, and we were anxious to see a horse of which we had heard so much. At last, as the leaves were falling we heard that one was killed by an arrow shot into his belly, but the Snake Indian that rode him, got away; numbers of us went to see him, and we all admired him, he put us in mind of a stag that had lost his horns; and we did not know what name to give him. But as he was a slave to Man, like the dog, which carried our things, he was named the Big Dog. [Thompson, 1916, p. 334.]

In spite of the indefiniteness of the dating of the incidents of Saukamaupsee's recollections, I see no adequate reason to doubt the facts he cited. Fragments of this story have been preserved in the traditions of the Blackfoot tribes to the present time.² However, I do question the conclusions that have been drawn from this account by historians and ethnologists as to the date of acquisition of horses by the Blackfoot tribes.

Although Saukamaupsee's description of his first sight of a *dead* horse is clear enough, nowhere in his account does he tell of the first acquisition of *live* horses by the Blackfoot. Yet J. B. Tyrrell, editor of Thompson's "Narrative," draws from the dead horse episode the unwarranted conclusion that the Blackfoot obtained their first horses from the Snake Indians in 1730. Lewis (1942, pp. 11, 60) followed

² Wissler (1910, p. 17) reported the Blackfoot tradition that before white men dominated the region the Shoshoni occupied much of the later Blackfoot country as far north as Two Medicine River. My informants of the 1940's claimed that the area of the present Blackfeet Reservation in Montana was formerly occupied by Shoshoni. Wissler (1912 a, p. 286) recorded the Piegan tradition that they received their first guns from the Cree, who taught them how to use them, and that "while some Piegan were out on the warpath they were attacked by a large number of Snake Indians. The Piegan fired on them and as they had never before seen guns they retreated." Weasel Tail, who seems to have possessed a strong interest in the historical traditions of his people, told me he understood that the Blackfoot obtained their first guns from the Cree; that the Cree joined them in a war party against the Shoshoni and Crow (?) in which the noise of the Blackfoot guns frightened the enemy so that they fled southward from their location at that time, which was near present Calgary, Alberta.

Weasel Tail volunteered that his grandfather, Talks Around, had told him the Blackfoot called the first horses they saw "big dogs." Later, because horses were about the size of elk, they began to call them "elk dogs." The change in name must have taken place before 1790, as Umfreville (1790, p. 202) recorded "Pin-ne-cho-me-tar," as the name for the horse in the first published Blackfoot vocabulary. This was certainly an attempt to render "ponokomita" (elk dog), the name still given the horse by the Blackfoot tribes.

suit with the statement "the Blackfoot received their first horses from the Shoshone in 1730." Haines (1938 b, p. 435) interpreted the Saukamaupsee testimony as proof that the Blackfoot acquired their first horses between 1732 and 1737. His error in interpretation may be the more serious because he employed these Blackfoot dates as bases for backdating the prior acquisition of horses by Shoshoni and Flathead.

It seems to me that literal acceptance of Thompson's dating will justify only two proper conclusions from the Saukamaupsee story: (1) that ca. 1729-34 the Northern Shoshoni, who were in conflict with the Piegan on the Canadian Plains, possessed some horses; (2) that the Piegan had no horses at that time. If we choose to be more critical of Thompson's dating, probably the most we can conclude is that the Blackfoot possessed no horses in the first quarter of the 18th century.

Wissler (1914, pp. 3-4) attributed to Saint-Pierre (1751) the first historic mention of horses among the Blackfoot. The Saint-Pierre testimony is tantalizingly indefinite. He does mention horses received in trade from Europeans (whom he termed French, but who probably were Spanish) by Indians living on the Plains beyond the French posts on the lower Saskatchewan. He did not identify these Indians by tribe (Saint-Pierre, 1886, p. clxiii.) As Roe (1939, pp. 241-242) has pointed out, it is impossible to identify these horse Indians as Blackfoot on the basis of Saint-Pierre's confused statement.

In the fall of 1754, Anthony Hendry (or Henday) of the Hudson's Bay Company journeyed westward with Cree and Assiniboin guides to seek to open trade with Indians west of those tribes, known to the Cree as "Archithinue." On the Saskatchewan Plains in October of that year he visited a camp of 200 lodges of Archithinue, and again in spring met several small bands of these Indians during his return eastward. Hendry was impressed with the fact that these Indians possessed horses and employed them skillfully in hunting buffalo. Although he gave no estimate of the number of horses owned by the Archithinue, he left the definite impression that they were better supplied than his Cree and Assiniboin companions who used horses only as pack animals. Hendry did not identify the "Archithinue natives" whom he met by any other name (Hendry, 1907, pp. 307-354). However, Mathew Cocking, sent by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1772 to try again to open trade with the Archithinue was more specific. Although he met only one small band of 22 lodges at a buffalo pound west of the Eagle Hills in present Saskatchewan, he definitely identified that band as "Waterfall Indians" (the Gros Ventres), and he stated that the general term "Archithinue" also included the Blood, Piegan, and Blackfoot (the three Blackfoot tribes) as well as the Sarsi. Furthermore, he stated that these tribes were "all Equestrian

Indians" (Cocking, 1908, pp. 110-111). This is the earliest definite statement to the effect that the Blackfoot tribes possessed horses.

Who, then, were the Archithinue Indians met by Hendry 18 years earlier? Wissler (1936, p. 5) was reasonably certain that they also were Gros Ventres. I believe we may infer with reason that the Blackfoot tribes, allies of the Gros Ventres, also possessed some horses in 1754, although they may not have been as well supplied with them as were the Gros Ventres. On the basis of the information now available, the most definite conclusion that can be drawn in dating Blackfoot horse acquisition, places this event in the interval between Sauka-ma-pee's first sight of a dead horse and Hendry's contact with the Archithinue in 1754, or within the second quarter of the 18th century.

So it would appear that horses were acquired by the Blackfoot of the northwestern Plains at about the same time these animals reached the Mandan villages on the Missouri or very shortly thereafter. Consequently it was possible for horses to have been diffused from the Blackfoot and Gros Ventres to the Assiniboin and Plains Cree during the latter half of the 18th century. Certainly the nomadic Apache, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Ute, Comanche, Shoshoni, and Flathead received horses before they reached the Blackfoot. Probably the Arikara and all of the horticultural Plains Indians south of them possessed horses before the Blackfoot obtained them. It seems most probable that the Crow, Cheyenne, and Teton Dakota obtained their first horses after the Blackfoot began to acquire them. We know so little of the early history of the Arapaho that it is impossible to estimate the period of their acquisition of horses other than to suggest that since their kinsmen the Gros Ventres possessed horses before 1754, it is most probable the Arapaho did also.

Since Blackfoot horse acquisition preceded first white contacts with these three tribes, we must rely rather heavily upon an evaluation of traditional data in determining the source of their horses. Wissler (1910, p. 19) heard Blackfoot traditions to the effect that their first horses were received from the Shoshoni and Flathead. One tradition told me stated that a Blackfoot, Shaved Head by name, went west and obtained the first horses known to his people from the Nez Percé, who told him they had taken them out of the water. Another tradition told of Sits-in-the-Night, who lived a generation later, having led a war party southward to about the location of the present Blackfeet Reservation, Mont., where they stole a number of horses from a Shoshoni or Crow camp. When the warriors mounted these horses and the animals began to walk, the riders became frightened and jumped off. They led the horses home. The people surrounded the new animals and gazed at them in wonder. If the horses began to jump about, they became frightened. After a time a woman said,

"Let's put a travois on one of these big dogs just like we do on our small dogs." They made a large travois and attached it to one of the horses. The horse did not jump or kick as it was led around camp. It seemed gentle. Later a woman mounted the horse and rode it with travois attached. According to this tradition the Blackfoot did not employ horses for riding, to hunt buffalo, or to war until after they were adapted to transport use with the travois.*

Interesting as this second story may be, I doubt its historicity. As previously stated, I doubt that any Plains Indian tribe learned to ride and care for horses without the advantage of the example and instruction of other Indians who had some knowledge of horses. It is improbable that the Blackfoot obtained their first horses from the Shoshoni, with whom they were at war. It is more probable that they received these animals as gifts from or in trade with the Flathead, Kutenai, Nez Percé, or Gros Ventres. Teit has reported Flathead traditions of early, peaceful trade with the Blackfoot (Teit, 1930, p. 358).

However, we can be certain that by the late years of the 18th century, theft, not trade, was the primary medium of horse acquisition exploited by the Blackfoot. Contemporary accounts of the Blackfoot during that period indicate that they were at war with their neighbors to the south and west. David Thompson observed that the Blackfoot tribes raided the Shoshoni, Flathead, and Kutenai for horses in 1787 (Thompson, 1916, p. 367). Umfreville briefly characterized the Blackfoot tribes in 1790, as "the most numerous and powerful nation we are acquainted with. War is more familiar to them than to other nations . . . In their inroads into the enemies country, they frequently bring off a number of horses, which is their principal inducement in going to war" (Umfreville, 1790, p. 200).

Thus, during the 18th century the Blackfoot developed the pattern of acquisition through capture which remained their primary method of obtaining horses from neighboring tribes throughout the first 86 years of the 19th century and until the buffalo were exterminated from their country.

*The majority of my aged Blackfoot informants when questioned regarding Blackfoot acquisition of the horse either frankly admitted they were not informed on the subject or offered a legendary explanation in reply. These mythological interpretations of a historic event which must have taken place little more than 200 years ago are given on pages 291-298.