
BLACKFEET RESERVATION

LOCATION

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

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

POPULATION

Enrolled Members living on or near the Blackfeet Reservation	8,485
Enrolled Members living off the Blackfeet Reservation	6,633
Total number of enrolled Tribal members	15,118

THE CREATION

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

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

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

Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. He said aloud, "You are a bad thing to make me stumble so." Then he raised up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on farther north, and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills.

Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it made all kinds of roots and berries to grow: camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, serviceberries, bull-berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Old Man took the first people over the prairies and through the forests, then the swamps to show them the different plants he had created. He told them what herbs were good for sicknesses, saying often, "The root

of this herb or the leaf of this herb, if gathered in a certain month of the year, is good for certain sickness." In that way the people learned the power of all herbs. Then he showed them how to make weapons with which to kill the animals for their food. First, he went out and cut some serviceberry shoots, brought them in, and peeled the bark off them. He took one of the larger shoots, flattened it, tied a string to it, and thus made a bow. Then he caught one of the birds he had made, took feathers from its wing, split them, and tied them to a shaft of wood.

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

When the people had learned to make bow and arrows, Old Man taught them how to shoot animals and birds. Because it is not healthful to eat animals' flesh raw, he showed the first people how to make fire. He gathered soft, dry rotten driftwood and made a punk of it. Then he found a piece of hardwood and drilled a hole in it with an arrow point. He gave the first man a pointed piece of hardwood and showed him how to roll it between his hands until sparks came out and the punk caught fire. Then he showed the people how to cook the meat of the animals they had killed and how to eat it.

He told them to get a certain kind of stone that was on the land, while he found a harder stone. With the hard stone he had them hollow out the softer one and so make a kettle. Thus, they made their dishes.

Old Man told the first people how to get spirit power: "Go away by yourself and go to sleep. Something will come to you in your dream that will help you. It may be some animal. Whatever this animal tells you in your sleep, you must do. Obey it. Be guided by it. If later you want help, if you are traveling alone and cry aloud for help, your prayer will be answered. It may be by an eagle, perhaps by a buffalo, perhaps by a bear. Whatever animal hears your prayer you must listen to it."

That was how the first people got along in the world, by the power given to them in their dreams.

After this, Old Man kept on traveling north. Many of the animals that he had created followed him. They understood when he spoke to them, and they were his servants. When he got to the north point of the Porcupine Mountains, he made some more mud images of people, blew his breath upon them, and they became people, men and women. They asked him, "What are we to eat?"

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

"But how can we kill them?" the people asked.

"I will show you," he answered.

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

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

"Go down and take the flesh of those animals," said Old Man.

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

After Old Man had taught the people all these things, he started off again, traveling north until he came to where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet. There he made some more people and taught them the same things. From there he went farther north. When he had gone almost to the Red Deer River, he was so tired that he lay down on a hill. The form of his body can be seen there yet, on the top of the hill where he rested.

When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled farther north until he came to a high hill. He climbed to the top of it and there he sat down to rest. As he gazed over the country, he was greatly pleased by it. Looking at the steep hill below him, he said to himself, "This is a fine place for sliding. I will have some fun." And he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all the Blackfeet tribes as "Old Mans Sliding Ground."

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

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

LAND STATUS

Total acres within the Reservation's Boundary	1,525,712 acres
Individually allotted lands	701,815.57 acres
Tribally owned lands	311,174.98 acres
Government lands	1,654.46 acres
Fee title or state lands	511,067.10 acres

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

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

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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

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

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

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

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

In 1865 and 1868, treaties were negotiated for their lands south of the Missouri, but were not ratified by Congress. In 1873 and 1874, the Blackfeet southern boundary was moved 200 miles north by Presidential orders and Congressional Acts. The land to the south was opened to settlement. During the winters of 1883 and 1884, the Blackfeet experienced unsuccessful buffalo hunts. After the disappearance of the buffalo, the Blackfeet faced starvation and were forced to accept reservation living and dependence upon rationing for survival.

In 1888, additional lands were ceded and separate boundaries established for the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Fort Peck Reservations. In 1896 an agreement was once again made between the United States government and the Blackfeet Tribe. This time the United States government was asking for the sale of the Rocky Mountains, which bordered the reservation to the west. It was believed that there were valuable minerals there. A commission was sent out to negotiate and heated disagreements ensued with tribal members over how much land and money this agreement would involve. The end result was a cession of land that now makes up Glacier National Park and the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Today this agreement is still in dispute over how much land and money was agreed upon. The Blackfeet Tribe still holds some rights in Glacier National Park and in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. As long as the people continue to appreciate what the Creator gave them, there will continue to be disagreement over stewardship of the land once occupied by this great nation.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Blackfeet Indian Tribe was organized in 1935 under the Indian Reorganization Act. It exists both as a political entity and a business corporation. All tribal members are shareholders in the corporation. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is made up of nine members, selected from four districts on the reservation: Browning, Seville, Heart Butte and Old Agency. The nine Blackfeet Tribal Business Council members conduct both the political and business affairs of the tribe and corporation. The councilmen are elected by secret ballot of eligible tribal members and serve staggered four and two-year terms. The four council members that win

by majority vote serve a four-year term, the other five councilmen serve a two-year term. The tribal council elects and appoints its own officers and hires its own staff. In the past, the Council has been granted broad political powers. Today the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council oversees 62 tribal programs and departments, and is one of the major employers on the reservation.

The following is a list of **Blackfeet Tribal Programs and Departments**:

- Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
- Council Staff
- Finance Department
- Legal Department
- Human Resources/Personnel Department
- Self-Insurance Program
- Enrollment Department
- Tribal Security
- Documents Department
- Procurement Department
- Land Department
- Forestry Department
- Forest Development Department
- Margie Kennedy Center
- Survey
- Tribal Employment Rights Office-TERO
- Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program -LIHEAP
- Agriculture Department
- Veteran's Program
- Higher Education Program
- Community Services/Hardship Program
- Facility Management and Maintenance Department
- Glenn Heavy Runner Memorial Swimming Pool
- Blackfeet Youth Initiative Program - BYI
- Blackfeet Utilities Commission-BUC
- Nurturing Center
- Commodity Program
- WIC Program
- Health & Safety Program (AmeriCorps)
- Medicine Bear Shelter

- Heart Butte Senior Citizens Center
- Oil & Gas Department
- Southern Piegan Diabetes Program
- Pikuni Family Healing Center
- Indian Health Service Security
- EMS Program
- Tribal Health Program
- Community Health Representatives Program
- Chemical Dependency Program
- Mineral Management Program
- Water Resources Program
- Fish & Wildlife Program
- Transportation Program
- Home Improvement Program-HIP
- Johnson O'Malley Program-JOM
- Law Enforcement
- Juvenile Program
- Tribal Credit
- Tribal Court
- Geographic Information Systems Program-GIS
- Chief Mountain Hot Shots
- Welfare Reform Program
- Family Services Program
- Indian Child Welfare Act Program-ICWA
- Environment Program-EPA
- JTPA/Welfare to Work Program
- Eagle Shields Center
- Personal Care Attendant Program-PCA
- Planning and Economic Development
- Blackfeet Transit
- Head Start Program

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

Bureau Operated Programs:

- Executive Direction (Superintendent)
- Administrative Services
- Natural Resources

- Forestry
- Real Estate Services (Realty)
- Facility Management
- Social Services
- Roads Maintenance
- Irrigation

HOUSING

The Blackfeet Indian Housing Authority was created in the 1960s in order to address the need for affordable housing on the reservation. Currently the Blackfeet Housing Authority manages 1,395 units, with 32 under construction. The units are either rentals or home ownerships. Home ownership programs have made it possible for families to have decent, safe, and affordable housing. Due to the large unemployment rate on the reservation and the continuous population growth, affordable housing is an issue that the staff of the Blackfeet Housing continues to strive for.

The Blackfeet Tribe and Blackfeet Housing are committed to provide decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing.

EDUCATION

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

Elementary and high school students attend public schools located in Browning, Heart Butte, East Glacier, Babb and Croff Wren. In addition, the Blackfeet Boarding Dormitories are operated to provide homes during the school year for elementary children from isolated districts. Heart Butte has built a new high school with a gymnasium to serve the students located on the southern portion of the reservation. Another option for elementary students is the Nizipuhwahsin (Real Speak) schools created in 1994. They offer K-8 education taught in the Blackfoot Language. Approximately 60 students attend the school during the standard academic

year. The Piegan Institute operates the schools. The Piegan Institute is a private non-profit organization. The Ni zi puh wah sin schools are located in Browning.

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

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

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

In recent years all agencies on the Blackfeet Reservation have pulled together to address the unemployment issue. Most recently the Blackfeet Tribe formed an economic development corporation to establish enterprises that will create jobs and boost the economy. Currently Siyeh Development Corporation has started several enterprises which employs 20 people and is in the process of constructing a wind farm that will not only generate renewable power but will create many long term technical jobs. A 67-acre industrial park has been developed which houses a pencil factory and Pikuni Industries, a corporation owned by the Blackfeet Tribe. Pikuni Industries builds modular homes and produces steel frames for construction. This industry provides full-time employment for 40 employees. A new casino, "Glacier Peaks", recently opened in Browning.

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

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

The future of the Blackfeet Tribe is looking positive. The warriors are the young and old who feel it necessary to maintain our cultural integrity and identity.

According to Blackfeet Tribal Business Chairman Earl Old Person, the main issues facing the tribe today are “the high unemployment rate and water rights.” The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is looking at ways to create permanent employment opportunities rather than relying on government programs for employment. The Siyeh Development Corporation, and the industrial park and the new tribal casino were established to assist with creating employment opportunities. The issue of water rights has a long history with the Blackfeet Tribe. Due to the location of the Blackfeet Reservation they are in the unique situation of sitting at the crest of the continental divide which feeds three major bodies of water: Hudson Bay, Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. The headwaters supply many of the rivers and streams that flow through the state of Montana. The water is of great value to wildlife, agriculture, and municipalities of the state. The tribe must define water rights for all parties involved. This process will require a great deal of reason and thoughtful consideration. Chief Old Person advises students “to be a part of the change” that takes place in life. “There was a time we could sit on the side, it’s a must for our young to do what they can. They are our future. Truly the warriors of this time will be those who understand both the old ways and the new, keeping in mind, culture can strengthen.”

Other tribal councilmen feel major issue facing the tribe, are water rights, due to the recent drought, and the “disputed strip.” The recent drought has resurrected the age-old question of who has ownership of the water and how much should they be entitled to. Eventually, the Blackfeet Tribe will have to decide this or face the possibility of other governmental agencies doing so for them. The other issue facing the Blackfeet people is the land in question along the Rocky Mountains, the Backbone of the World, according to Blackfeet. In 1896, the United States sent out commissioners to the Blackfeet to negotiate once again for land. This time it would be for the rocks or mountains that served as the eastern boundary for the Blackfeet for centuries. The Agreement states the land was ceded to the United States with the Blackfeet Tribe

entitled to three reserved rights: the right to enter, the right to hunt and fish, and the right to gather timber. From the beginning there has been the question raised by some members of the tribe whether this was a lease or an actual sale. The dispute is further complicated when the northern portion became a national park (Glacier National Park) and the southern part became a national forest (Lewis & Clark National Forest) changing the status of the land. Again questions were raised, this time in regard to the boundary line between the “disputed strip” and the reservation. The agreement reads from summit to summit, but this does not seem to be the case as one looks at a topographical map. These discrepancies, raised by members of the tribe in the past, have surfaced again as we recently passed the 100-year anniversary of this agreement.

As the new millennium begins, we must be ready for the changes as Mr. Old Person states, whether it is teaching our people about academics or our tribal traditions, which set us apart from others but can enrich our lives. A holistic approach can be accomplished by having a firm understanding of the Blackfeet

language, traditions, and stories as well as having strong reading and writing skills. The warriors of today must work hard to make certain they are prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.



RECREATION

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

The town of Browning is the center of activity on the Blackfeet Reservation. The major businesses are located in Browning: Blackfeet Tribal Business

Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, Blackfeet Housing Authority, Browning Public Schools, and Blackfeet Community College along with the industrial park located adjacent to Browning.

A principal attraction on the Blackfeet Reservation is the Museum of the Plains Indians operated under the direction of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Since opening in 1941, thousands of visitors have stopped at the museum. The museum features Native American artists and their work throughout the year.

A camping facility called Chewing Blackbones is located on the eastern shore of Lower St. Mary's Lake, which was opened in 1978. It is situated near the entrance to Glacier National Park on U.S. Highway 89 near St. Mary's and four miles south of Babb. Facilities include camping grounds with hook-ups for RV motor homes and a general store. Visitors are welcome to camp at any of the lakes located on the Blackfeet Reservation; however, most are without facilities for RV trailers.

Things To Do:

- Fishing
- Horseback Riding/Trail Rides
- Guided Tours
- Rodeos
- Hiking and Camping
- Cross Country Skiing
- Boating
- Pow Wows

ANNUAL FESTIVITIES

Throughout the year there are many celebrations and other activities taking place on the Blackfeet Reservation. These are events that allow communities to come together and celebrate, visit, and enjoy. The largest of the celebrations takes place the second week of July, the North American Indian Days Celebration. The Indian Days celebration includes a parade in Browning and other activities such as dancing, singing, drumming, special dance contests, feasts, stick games, give-a-ways, and a rodeo. This has always been a time for family and friends to get together and have some fun. Following is a list of annual events that take place on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Community Sponsored Events

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| • Baker Massacre Memorial | January 23 |
| • Blackfeet Community College Pow Wow | June |
| • Blackfeet Days | May |
| • Christmas Pow Wow | December |
| • Head Start Mini Pow Wow | Fall |
| • Heart Butte Indian Days | August |
| • Hell's Half Acre Memorial Rodeo | May |
| • North American Indian Days | July |
| • Thanksgiving Pow Wow | November |
| • The Flood of 1964 Memorial | June |

School Sponsored Events

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Native American Heritage Week | September |
| • Eagle Claw Society Inductions | September/
October |
| • Homecoming parade/dance | September/
October |
| • Red Ribbon Week | October |
| • Prom Dance | Spring |
| • Graduation Commencement | May/June |

RESOURCES ABOUT THE BLACKFEET TRIBE FOR STUDENTS/EDUCATORS

Books

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Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfeet, Dempsey, Hugh Aylmer, 1924, University of Oklahoma Press.

The Old North Trail; Life, Legends, and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians, McClintock, Walter, 1870, University of Nebraska Press.

A Dictionary of Blackfoot, Frantz, Donald and Norma Jean Russell, 1989, University of Toronto Press.

Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians, Wissler, Clark and D.C. Duvall, 1870-1947, University of Nebraska Press.

The Sun Came Down, BullChild, Percy, 1985, Harper & Row Publishers.

The Ways of My Grandmothers, Hungry Wolf, Beverly, 1980, Quill, New York, NY.

Web sites

Blackfeet Nation
<http://www.blackfeetnation.com>

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

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