

First Nations Weather

Prepared by Lua Young for the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the Western Development Museum, September 2003

Introduction:

The following work is the outcome of collaboration between the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the Western Development Museum. This paper is one of a series of pieces that have been written for the Western Development Museum's 100th year celebration, *Winning the Prairie Gamble*.

The following paper is an examination into how Aboriginal peoples have survived Saskatchewan's weather extremes. It is apparent that in the past, weather was an influencing factor on the lives of Saskatchewan residents. Weather extremes often dictated the lifestyle and lives of Aboriginal peoples and European settlers.

To begin the look into the impact of weather on Aboriginal peoples, traditional legends and stories about weather will be shared. The stories offer a glimpse into the Aboriginal perspective on the reasons for different weather occurrences. The stories also communicate to the reader an Aboriginal perspective of the land, and the interrelationship between the earth, animals, and humans.

There will be traditional stories about weather, and there will also be a section on the traditional ways of weather predicting. The section includes information on weather signs found in nature, and how weather can be predicted according the patterns of animals.

Following the section on the oral history of weather, there will a series of firsthand experiences of weather experiences in Saskatchewan. Aboriginal Elders have shared many stories of survival and the ways that weather influenced their lives. The

stories that will be included illustrate the hardship that was suffered and the value of survival.

Traditional Legends and Stories

The tradition of story telling is greatly valued by Aboriginal peoples. The oral tradition was the primary method of transmitting Aboriginal cultural tradition. The stories shared by Elders were used to teach children. Often the stories contained amusing anecdotes, and more importantly lessons about life. The storyteller was endowed with a sacred station. Storytellers were the knowledge-keepers. The role of transmitting the oral traditional was not taken lightly. A knowledge-keeper was trained for many years. It was necessary that the stories were memorized and unaltered.¹

The following section will share legends that have been shared for hundreds of years. Did you know that it was only during the winter nights that stories were told? During the summer, the air is filled with storytellers – listen to them on a warm night. You will hear the stories of frogs, birds, and any animal that feels like sharing. It is believed that if legends are told during the summer that the lizards will bother you!²

It is important to recognize that the transmission of traditional stories into English is a great bounty. Therefore, by respecting the role of the knowledge-keeper, the stories in this paper are unaltered from their original source. The stories are to be re-told by only the storyteller. The purpose of including the stories is to introduce the tales of weather that have been preserved for hundreds of years by Aboriginal peoples.³

¹ Ahenakew, Beth and Sam Hardlotte. Cree Legends – Volume I. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College and Federation of Saskatchewan Indians Curriculum Development Unit, 1973; Campbell, Maria. “Introduction” in achimoon. Indian Authors. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1985; Garr, Ben and Margaret Reynolds. Déné Legends. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1973; Wolfe, Alexander. Earth Elder Stories. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1988.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The first story that will be shared is a Déné story about the winter. Mr. J.B. Garr of Patuanak shared this story and others in the compilation entitled, Déné Legends. The legend is titled *Yatth Dene*, or The Snowman,

A long time ago the people of Northern Saskatchewan were starving and beginning to die because winter would not go away. For two years the moose, deer and caribou did not grow new horns as they always did in the spring and the ducks and geese did not return from the south. Ice on the lakes and rivers grew thicker and thicker. In their attempts to make holes from which to fish the people would heat rocks and throw them on the ice but it would still not melt. Something had to be done quickly or all of the people would die.

Finally, in desperation one man decided to go to Fond Du Lac to try and snare partridges which he heard were very numerous in that area. After dividing the meager food supplies with his family, he set out across the ice and snow. Several days later he met a very strange-looking man who was all frosty and white. Behind this person trailed a storm of snow. Immediately the hunter realized that this creature was Yatth Dene, the Snowman. No wonder winter wouldn't go away! Yatth Dene was staying in Saskatchewan all year round.

Thinking very quickly, the hunter decided that he must fool Yatth Dene into going back up north for the summer.

“What are you doing here?” he shouted to the Snowman. “Don't you realize that the people up north are killing your children while you spend your time here?”

Yatth Dene, remembering his children whom he had left in the north, immediately fled in that direction to see them again.

Since that time Yatth Dene only comes to Saskatchewan in October and leaves again in March to visit his children who stay north.

Every summer the moose, deer and caribou grow new horns, the birds return from the south, and the people are happy because they have plenty of food.⁴

The story of Yatth Dene seems to be a story about why there is winter. Did you find different meaning in the story? It is not always easy to understand what intended lesson

⁴ Garr and Reynolds 1973, pp. 27 – 29.

of a story is. The oral tradition served many purposes. One of the purposes that have been previously mentioned is education. Many people say that the knowledge-keepers and Elders are like books. They contain sacred knowledge that is vital to living in accordance with the Aboriginal way. Contained in many stories are explanations about life, how the world was created, how Aboriginal people were created, and many other answers to questions. The creation stories of Aboriginal culture usually begin with a great flood that requires that the world be rebuilt. Weather was often an element of stories.⁵

The next legend is called Our Four Seasons and talks about how the seasons came to be,

Long ago there was only one season. It was fall: no new leaves ever grew, no new grass. Everything just always stayed brown. All the people slowly got used to it.

One day, an old man came into the village. No one knew who he was, and no one really cared.

It happened to be a windy day and everyone went into their teepees, eager to escape the unpleasant weather.

Only the man was left outside.

He approached a new teepee. "These people have quite a bit of food and probably have lots extra and won't mind sharing a little with me," he thought.

So he went up to the teepee and asked to see the wife, since she took care of the food.

"Could I have a little food, something to drink and a place to rest for awhile?"

"No!" was the answer. "We have enough only for our family. Go away!"

He turned and walked away. By this time, he was getting quite cold, because all he wore was a worn-out pair of moccasins and some leather clothing.

He walked over to a fairly nice teepee. "Surely someone here will help me," he thought. "These people must have a little food and water to spare and a place to rest."

"Here, take this food. There is water in the creek and you can rest in the woods. Now go away!" said the lady.

"Well, I guess it's better than nothing."

So he ate that and walked to an old teepee. Here he asked only for a place to rest. In that teepee lived an old woman and her granddaughter.

⁵ For Déné and Cree creation stories see Appendix A and Appendix B.

They told him they didn't have much, but he was welcome to some food, water and he could rest there if he wanted to. He stayed there that night. Early the next morning he left.

Later the next day, when the sun was in the middle of the sky, a voice came from the heavens. Everyone stopped what they were doing and listened.

"I came into your village and tested you. People who hadn't much shared what they had. Some who had extra gave it grudgingly. Those who had most gave nothing.

Suddenly, something white started falling from the sky. Some were frightened.

The voice spoke again. "Every year, there shall be a time when white water shall come from the sky. It shall gather and will stay on the ground for many moons. It will be hard to find food. You will have to break frozen water to get fresh water, and it will be very cold. This is for the selfishness in your hearts. This shall be called winter.

After many moons, this white water will melt and it will become warmer. New grass will grow and life will start all over in plants and animals. This will be called spring.

Then there shall be a time called summer. Water will be clean and clear. Food will be plentiful and it will be warm. This is for the kindness in your hearts.

After this has gone through it shall begin again. I will continue when your children's children are here and their children and forever."

So every year, the same thing happens, year after year, and it will always happen. When your children's children are here, their children and forever.⁶

Even though the legends may seem unrealistic, they offered a means of explaining how the world works. The old way of life for Aboriginal people was often dictated by the weather, especially the winter. Therefore, many of the traditional stories contain elements of winter. Weather occurrences influenced the lives of Aboriginal peoples in regards to gathering and storing food, and travelling. According to Aboriginal peoples, weather is also important spiritually.⁷

The weather, especially storms have a special significance in Aboriginal ceremonial traditions. Elder Ken Goodwill and Velma Goodfeather in an interview

⁶ Bird, Glenda. Our Four Seasons. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College and Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, 1979.

with Darlene Speidel share the power of weather and its relevance to spiritual elements of life in the following excerpt,

Elder Ken Goodwill:

[T]here's a story that I split a storm one time, when I was about 6 or 7 years old, I remember that time ... but yeah we could make like storms go around and it's still done today like for pow wows and sun dances...

[G]randpa [and] Auntie[,] in the evening they came to visit ... I'd listen to them talk, they used to talk about the lake and very scared, they used to talk about things in there, there's spirits in there that uh [you are] suppose to pray for and then they talked about a time when there was a shortage of water ah he'd [grandpa] give them rain, rain but he said remember ah grandpa Andy said he couldn't go out there and tell them "yeah I can make it rain" ... they had to ask him and nobody's done that he said [he] did for four nights, four days in a lake and he stood in a lake.⁸

Elder Velma Goodfeather:

[Y]ou see sometimes, big thunder storms[,] I used to see them clouds rolling and they break apart like things like that, they were very spiritual and they had a lot of respect for the indian ways they'd laugh with you and you know, they say things (laughing)[.] [S]o I think we had our own way of controlling weather in very spiritual way and ah you see now there's great weather changes coming along[,] [I]t's very scary[,] [A]ctually we don't know what's going to happen to the grandchildren[,] what's their future[?] [Y]ou know ah very afraid for them[,] [B]ut [anyway] that's things they have done like that for weather and they prayed to the spirit so it helps a lot like that.

It is clear that weather has a special significance to Aboriginal peoples. Weather systems such as storms are considered to possess a spiritual power. This element makes weather unpredictable. The weather was a natural element of the earth and could not be controlled by an individual unless that person possessed the spiritual capacity to change the weather.⁹

⁷ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

⁸ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dakota/Lakota/Nakota Elders Transcript.

⁹ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

Weather Predicting

There were many signs for predicting weather that Aboriginal peoples were aware of that will be discussed. The ability to predict weather; would there be an early winter, a late spring, or even a storm or drought was based on learning the warning signs of the land and the animals. If winter was early, a family would be at an advantage if they knew the warning signs of weather so that they could be better prepared. The next story is called, Môstos, The Buffalo and Sihkos, The Weasel, and it deals with one of the first ways of predicting weather in a story about Wîsakecâhk,

It was a very hot summer day, and Wîsakecâhk was hungry, as usual, and was trying to find something to eat. It was the time of the year when the spear grass was very sharp and the buffalo were very fat. As Wîsakecâhk sat singing songs to himself, he saw a big fat Môstos (buffalo) grazing on the bank of a marsh. He was planning a way to kill the buffalo. As he sat, Sihkos, the Weasel came hopping merrily along. Wîsakecâhk asked Sihkos if he had any idea on a way to kill Môstos. “*No, no, I don’t, and I’m not staying to have you play any tricks on me.*” Wîsakecâhk promised he would never play tricks on the Weasel, for he was one of Wîsakecâhk’s best friends among the animals. Wîsakecâhk had a plan. They gathered a nice juicy clump of grass and Sihkos hid it. When the buffalo started chewing the grass the Weasel jumped down his throat to his heart and bit it off. The buffalo died immediately and Sihkos darted out, leaving his paw marks all along the animal’s throat. Because Sihkos left his tiny paw marks along the throat of Môstos, they will be along the throats of all animals from now on; every time men kill the animals in the fall, they will be able to foretell by the paw marks whether the winter will be a cold or mild one. Man will be forever grateful to Sihkos, the Weasel. This is the gift Wîsakecâhk gave to his little brother, Sihkos. Sihkos was very happy as he left Wîsakecâhk.¹⁰

This story demonstrates to the listener how the earth and animals can show people what the weather is going to be like. The lessons about weather predicting like all knowledge of the Aboriginal peoples was retained in the oral tradition.

¹⁰ Cuthand, Stan, ed. Nêhiyaw Atayokêwina [Cree Legends] Stories of Wîsakecâhk. Revised Edition. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1988, pp 49 – 51.

The next story deals with understanding why it was important to learn the signs in nature that indicate when weather is going to change. It also contains an important lesson about helping out others. Instead of watching for weather change indicated by animals, Brave Bear watches the sun for a sign, in The Blizzard,

Wise men among the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota people often predicted winter by signs of nature. Brave Bear knew that an early winter was coming. All the signs pointed to it.

The wild geese and ducks were flying south. The leaves on the scrub oak had turned red and the golden aspens quaked in the wind. The squirrels were storing their nuts earlier than usual. All the animals had unusually heavy fur.

Then the last day of August, a circle appeared around the sun. Brave Bear knew that the circle around the sun meant snow.

The next morning, when Brave Bear awakened, the ground was covered with snow. The snow fell for five days.

Many of the animals were unprepared for such a blizzard. The deer, who could always find food, were hungry. The snow was so deep that the rabbits had not eaten for days. The bear had not found his place to sleep until spring. Many birds, who had not yet left for the south, found themselves trapped and unable to find food.

Brave Bear had expected the storm. He had prepared for it. He cleared a spot in front of his tipi. He scattered seeds and nuts for his helpless, hungry friends.

All the animals in the area hurried through the snow to the tipi of Brave Bear. There they found a feast for everyone.

As wise men before him, Brave Bear knew that his people depended on nature to survive and he would always protect the animals in their time of need.¹¹

Aboriginal peoples lived closely with nature. The closeness of the relationship is what taught people to look for other signs in the land, animals, sun and moon. The following weather predicting signs are from the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota tradition. All of the

¹¹ Speidel, Darlene. “*The Blizzard*” in Practicing the Law of Circular Interaction – First Nations Environmental and Conservation Principles. Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, Principle III, Lesson 1.

weather signs are from the publication, Practicing the Law of Circular Interaction – First Nations Environmental and Conservation Principles.¹²

The first weather signs that will be shared indicate what kind of spring can be expected. After a winter of cold and snow, as we all know, the first signs of spring get a person through the difficulty of the last few days of winter. Aboriginal peoples predicted an early spring by watching for birds. If smaller birds were spotted in the last months of winter, February, and March, it was a sign that spring was right around the corner. When the crow was spotted in February, it was a sure sign that winter was nearly over. Perhaps these signs are too easy! Most know that birds are migratory, and travel when the seasons change, making them a good marker for the coming or going of a season.¹³

In the spring and summer months the weather worries of Saskatchewan residents shifts from snow to rain, or lack of. Life is dependent on water. Plants, animals, and humans need water to survive and grow. Therefore, Aboriginal peoples were aware of the importance of knowing when there is going to be a rainfall. If rain could be predicted, this information was important for growing crops or seeking shelter.¹⁴

There were a few ways that rain was predicted. First, when there is moisture in the air, the leaves of some plants react. Not all plants but in particular Ash trees are sensitive to moisture and the leaves will move upwards. Second, if you hear a squirrel loudly conversing or chattering, it is more than likely going to rain. Why? It seems that squirrels are most talkative when gathering food or when eating. Prior to rainstorms the

¹² Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. Practicing the Law of Circular Interaction – First Nations Environmental and Conservation Principles. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Principle III, Lesson 1.

¹³ Ibid.

squirrel will prepare for the storm by – gathering food or eating. Therefore, people began to predict the rain by the preparedness of the squirrel. Finally, rain can be predicted by watching the moon. For many years, people have known that the moon has an affect on the earth. Aboriginal peoples were aware of the affect that the moon had on weather. It was believed that the moon was symbolically pouring rain on the land if a quarter moon was slanted towards the earth. In the same way the moon was also used to predict if there was going to be dry weather. When the quarter moon faced upwards, you could expect that there would be no rain.

Now it is time to look at the weather changes for fall and how they were predicted. One sign of the fall season is storms. It was important to watch for coming storms so that people could seek shelter and safety. The summer was been spent preparing for the winter, and it would be devastating if all of the preparations were destroyed in a storm. Therefore, Aboriginal peoples learned the signs of a storm. One way of storm watching was by looking for a rainbow ring around the sun. By the fall it is beginning to cool off. If there is a going to be rain or snow, a halo is created around the sun from ice crystals in the atmosphere due to the cold.

It is also useful to watch the cranes in the early fall. A crane will try and get ahead of the storm and travel south before the storm. The migratory patterns of birds were also used to predict the length of fall. If the birds seem to be staying longer than normal, you can bet that so will fall.¹⁵

Animals are particularly useful in predicting weather in the fall and winter. Some animals hibernate or migrate during the cold seasons, and indicate when the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

weather is going to get colder or warmer. For instance, the snake is used to predict the length of the fall. Like the birds, if the snakes are hibernating later, the fall will be longer than normal. Animals' coats can also be used to indicate weather change. The rabbit turns white in the winter. Therefore if you watch for the rabbit's fur to change color, you can guess when winter is coming.¹⁶

Perhaps, it is time to look at the signs for winter. Aboriginal peoples paid close attention to the muskrat for an indication of the coming winter. The reason being was that the muskrat lived in water year round. Therefore, the location of the muskrat's house could indicate the length and severity of winter. If the muskrat was closer to the edge of the lake, it was less likely that the water was going to freeze up, and the winter would be mild. But, if the muskrat's house is located in the centre of the lake, watch out for a long winter. The muskrat's house is built where the water does not freeze.¹⁷

The question is, do these signs actually work? The remainder of this section will examine the stories and experiences of weather predicting told by Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Elders. Elders will agree and that some of the methods used to predict weather were consistent, and there are times weather signs could not have been more wrong.

Mary Alma Chaboyer shares her experience of her grandfather using weather signs. The following quote addresses an important issue that Aboriginal communities are presently facing. The issue is the transmission of traditional knowledge to future generations. Elder Mary Alma Chaboyer expresses her regret of not learning the ways that her grandfather predicted weather,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

[M]y grandpa use to say, oh it going to turn warm tomorrow or it's going to be windy tomorrow, looking, when he ... was looking at [skies], they'd be standing outside, and be looking at they sky and the clouds and they'd know what was going, how it was going to be tomorrow. But I never did, I never did try and watch the, what they were watching.... Or asked them anything what they were talking about. But I know they use to go outside and look at the [skies] and they'd say it was going to be warm tomorrow.... Or it's going to be windy tomorrow.¹⁸

Rosa Longneck and Alpha Lafond speak about weather predicting in an excerpt from an interview with Freda Ahenakew,

Rosa: Even the coyotes, if they howled in the midst of a storm, then it was Going to be warm; now you can't even rely on them, as to how it's going to turn out, it turns out differently. Like when we drove here ... when we drove here from Hafford, the last time we went to play there, as we were driving along, they [... the northern lights] were really dancing, but it was windy and cold. "Ah, it's going to be warm," and how it snowed! *[laughter]* You can't rely on it now but that's how they used to do it you know...

Freda: Even the coyotes are lost *[laughter]*

Alpha: They, too, are lost now, yes, ya. When the robin sings, the robin, my grandmother use to say, "It's going to rain," yes; that's the robin, the robin, yes.

Rosa: I used to marvel at the old man when he was busy outside in the summer; he used to come in and say, "I must have a little sleep, Old Lady, it's going to rain." Sure enough, it would come pouring down, a big shower, I really used to be surprised by him.¹⁹

Weather predicting was a valued skill to have when Aboriginal peoples lived the traditional lifestyle. If the techniques of weather predicting are not passed on, the methods will be lost. It may be that changes in nature and the environment are causing a greater inconsistency of weather signs. It appears that the weather signs are no longer successful predictors. Therefore, the weather signs are no longer being taught. Presently,

¹⁸ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Swampy Cree/Michif Elders Transcript.

¹⁹ Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart. *kôhkominawak otâcimowiniwâwa – Our Grandmothers' Lives As Told In Their Own Words*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1998, p 343.

with the technology of weather forecasting, the old ways of predicting rain or snow seem to be less needed where there is access to the local weather forecast. Hopefully, weather predicting will be able to remain part of Aboriginal peoples cultural tradition by way of story telling.

Survival of the Seasons

The remainder of this paper will be spent sharing actual tales of weather survival in Saskatchewan. This section will cycle through the four seasons, and illustrate the ways that weather impacted the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

Presently in Saskatchewan, it is often difficult to understand how residents can survive the winter without insulated homes and cars that provide heat, or the summer without air conditioning. Even more mind boggling is imagining what the winter would be like Saskatchewan when people lived in log houses, and relied on a wood burning stoves for warmth. Aboriginal Elders have many stories of weather survival prior to modern conveniences. When you had no other choice, it was not a matter of comfort but survival. For many Elders, learning the skills of survival was character building.

Each season required that a different job be fulfilled. If a family wanted to survive in the winter, the preparation began in the spring. Aboriginal peoples lived systematically and life was dictated by the changing seasons. Joe Fox of Onion Lake further illustrates importance of living by the seasons,

Our lives were run according to the seasons. In the spring-time, we moved across the land hunting and trapping. In fall, we threshed for a living, and in winter, we hunted and cut poles for fencing. We had to keep on the move in order to survive. We had to haul enough wood to last through the winter and we sawed it all for our own use.²⁰

For hundreds of years, Aboriginal peoples withstood the elements. In the following four sections, an examination of what surviving the seasons required will be addressed.

²⁰ Philips, Donna, Robert Troff and Harvery Whitecalf, eds. Saskatchewan Indian Elders – Kataayuk. Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1976, Joe Fox, Onion Lake Reserve.

Spring

Spring is a much-appreciated season in Saskatchewan. The first signs of snow melt and budding leaves could not be more welcomed after a season of cold, and snow. 100 years ago, the coming of spring meant something different to Aboriginal peoples than it does today. It was a sign that the preparation for a summer of hunting and travel needed to begin.

In order to survive the elements of spring, it was important for people to have clothing that could withstand the melting snow. The shoes were the most important aspect of clothing at this time of the year. Food levels had become depleted through the winter, and people looked forward to a change of diet. Therefore, if a hunter or trapper were to travel in order to find fresh game, water-resistant shoes were a necessity for trekking through the bush. The Plains Cree made shoes from the hides of buffalo. The buffalo was the mainstay of their diet and provided materials for many supplies. The Aboriginal peoples of northern Saskatchewan used deer and moose to create shoes, for the hide was pliable. Shoes or moccasins were typically a flat shoe that was cut to the shape of the foot. The hairs from the buffalo or the moose, depending on what hide was used, lined the moccasin and served to insulate the shoe. Although the shoes worn were not waterproof, the leather was good to wear on ice and snow.²¹

The spring season was spent for many families travelling back to summer camps. The time had come to begin preparations for a summer of travelling and hunting. It is clear that the winters in Saskatchewan 100 years ago were difficult to survive. People had to cope with scarcity of food, isolation, and worst of all, the cold. By the end of winter, when people begin to anticipate the warmth of Saskatchewan summers, families

were ready to begin the hunting season. The spring was a time for beginning the next cycle of the seasons.

During the spring the first game that was largely available was fish. When lakes and rivers began to experience break-up, different kinds of fish could be found in great abundance. In the spring, large amounts of fish did not go to waste. The fresh fish was a welcomed addition to the winter diet, and the fish that could not be eaten was dried and smoked to supplement Aboriginal peoples diet until different game could be hunted.²²

²¹ Dion, Joseph F. My Tribe The Crees. Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1979.

²² Ibid.

Summer

Springtime allowed for families to emerge from their winter camps and a season of restricted activity due to the cold. Unfortunately, it was not long after Yatth Dene²³ had returned north, that the demands of the next winter were already nagging at Saskatchewan residents. It was time to get back to work. The summer was spent accumulating food and material supplies for the next winter. In order to gather enough materials, especially food, Aboriginal peoples spent the summer hunting large game such as the buffalo, and caribou. Elder Flora Gladue speaks of her experience growing up in Saskatchewan and living according to the seasons,

We travelled a lot in the summer time, as my grandfather was hunting wild animals for food and my grandmother would do the berry picking. Also she would take care of the wild meat that my grandfather would bring from his hunting trips. Together, they would both skin the animals, dry the meat and tan the hide. Our means of travel was the horse and wagon. We would pitch up the tent and live in the woods for days and weeks. This was to restore the food for the upcoming winter months.²⁴

For many people traditional Aboriginal life appears to be a pleasant way of living. There does not seem to be a better way of spending the summer than by camping and travelling across Saskatchewan. However, Saskatchewan residents were faced with many difficulties such as severe storms, floods, drought and fire in the past 100 years.

Many people enjoy camping, until the storm hits. In Saskatchewan, Aboriginal peoples had to cope with severe rainstorms while living in a tent or teepee. Eliza

²³ Garr and Reynolds 1973.

²⁴ Groenen, Wilma, Neil Pasqua, and Harvey Whitecalf, eds. All Nations of Saskatchewan Indian Elders. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1989, Flora Gladue – Flying Dust Reserve.

Swimmer in the following excerpt from Stories From Kohkom²⁵, speaks of summer life when she was a child and coping with the elements,

I have many good memories of camping during the summer. Back in those days there were no fences, so we could camp wherever we wanted. My parents packed up the wagon with tents, camping gear, seven kids, and the dogs. The only food we took was flour and lard for making bannock and potatoes. My dad hunted and fished for the rest of our food. We lived on rabbits, ducks, and other wildlife. We had a feast out there.

Once we got caught in a great thunderstorm. We tried to find a place to camp, but it was raining too hard. Finally my dad stopped the wagon, untied the tent, and threw it over us in the wagon. We had to wait out the rain before we could move on.²⁶

Waiting out a thunderstorm would not be an easy or exciting task. The real danger that arose in the summer was when rainstorms caused floods. Glecta Bear, in an interview with Freda Ahenakew, tells a story of a storm so great that her family's home could not withstand the mud and water,

And then there was a storm, hey, hey, it rained hard, there was rain and lightning for three days, hey, hey, it was a bad storm; when first it rained hard, hey, the sod and the mud which made up the roof above us, all of that mud simply washed into the house, it rained so much, and then, when we were going to go to bed, "How will we sleep now?" I said to my husband. The table, a home-made table, we put on top of the bed, and most of the water ran off the table cloth; but then we sat there huddled all along, underneath the table.... Well, and everywhere on the sides the mud simply came washing down so that you could look outside, and there was so much lightning!

Well, after some time my husband said, "We have to get away from here," he said. In the old days there used to be a ration house; it had been nailed shut, and he went there and opened up the old house, but that old house was roofed with shingles. There we now went, barefoot, we did not have any rubbers. There we now headed, with me carrying the baby girl along there. I used that tablecloth as my cover and went there. It was nice there,

²⁵ Vicq, Sylvia, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson, eds. Stories from Kohkom. 2nd ed. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2000.

²⁶ Swimmer, Eliza. "The Simple Life" in Stories from Kohkom. Eds. Sylvia Vicq, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson. 2nd ed. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2002. pp 123 – 124.

it did not rain through there, there we stayed, but we did not have anything to eat there.²⁷

Storms made life in Saskatchewan very difficult at times. Although summer storms could take their toll on the homes, camps, and people, the alternative weather extreme to the storms, drought and dry weather, has caused far more grief for Saskatchewan residents in the past and present.

Dry weather has caused serious problems for Saskatchewan residents and continues to do so to this day. First, when weather became extremely dry, the risk of fire was imminent. Aboriginal peoples began as early as the first signs of melting snow to guard against fire by burning the dry grass spots. Joseph F. Dion in his book, My Tribe the Crees²⁸, includes Theresa Desjarlais' story of surviving a devastating fire in northern Saskatchewan that occurred in May of 1919,

We stayed where we were for quite some time for where could we go? The awful fire subsided almost as quickly as it had come and the air turned cool; the wind had changed and was no blowing from the lake. We kept looking longingly in the direction where our tents had stood a short time ago and wondered if we were to freeze now after our roasting?²⁹

Despite the early efforts of families in the north to burn fireguards, the fire quickly passed through the area of Lac la Biche.³⁰

The second impact that dry weather had on Aboriginal peoples occurred when Aboriginal peoples began to adopt farming practices. The Dirty Thirties and the drought that occurred in Saskatchewan caused many Aboriginal farmers who were just starting out to quickly learn about the negative aspects of agriculture. The Dirty Thirties caused an economic depression due to the inability of farmers to grow their crops. The dry

²⁷ Ahenakew and Wolfart 1988, 215 – 217.

²⁸ Dion 1979.

²⁹ Dion 1979, p. 153.

weather caused a lot of difficulties for farmers. When the weather became extremely dry, crops had difficulty surviving without water. If dry crops were not bad enough, the grasshoppers that attacked the crops caused even more trouble.

In the late summer and the fall, it was time to complete the final winter preparations. Food was being prepared for storage, and the last minute touches were being made on winter clothes, and lodgings.

³⁰ Dion 1979.

Fall

For some families, the fall was spent moving to camps where each year birch bark canoes were made for the journey to winter camps in northern Saskatchewan. It was logical for families to travel into the bush and to their traplines for the winter. If the family stayed close to winter game, if food was ever low or a winter cache was broken into by animals there would be a supply of meat. It was logical for families to spend the winter camped near their trapline.

The whitefish's spawning season began in the fall. The fish would spawn near the shores of lakes in the late fall or before winter freeze-up. If a fish was damaged it would be dried or eaten right away. The fish that were completely intact would be stored in a cache that was covered by heavy logs. A willow stick would be run through the fish's tail and would by keeping the fish's head down, the fish would not go bad.³¹

In the late fall and early stages of winter, families would place food in caches. It was not unusual for a family to make several caches to safeguard against animals or other people. The cache may save a family from starving in the winter if they are lucky enough to find one. However, hungry animals such as wolverines would most likely eat the food kept in a cache in the winter. By having several caches in different locations, a family would be able to access at least one of the caches during the winter. This was very important when food supplies were low and there was scarcity of winter game.³²

The fall became a difficult season when the traditional life was replaced by farming. Farmers faced the difficult task of pursuing a livelihood that was dependent on the weather co-operating. If frost came early in the fall, it could mean serious crop

³¹ Ibid.

damage. If a fall storm brought hail, the crops again faced damage. Elder Jimmy Myo recalls his father's farming experience in the 1930's,

I can't really speak for a lot of Indian farmers. But what I do know when my dad was farming the weather was good we ... never did get hailed out.... [A] lot of times farmers would have frost in the field but us we never did get that only once I remember that we had a little bit of touch of frost in one corner but I don't know how many acres two or three acres. The rest of the time we always had nice weather.... So the weather was very nice to the ... Indian farmers I don't think that there was ... frost or hail. So that is all I can say about that.³³

Even when other crops were suffering due to dry weather and early frosts, there were farmers who were fortunate to have successful crops during the Dirty Thirties. For some Aboriginal peoples, the impact of weather on crops was very discouraging. The Dakota in southern Saskatchewan believed that the crop failure resulting from grasshoppers, drought, hail, and frost were signs that the Creator did not support their farming efforts.³⁴

For the most part, fall was the time for bringing together all of the spring and summer preparations for winter. For when the cold and snow arrived in Saskatchewan, it was necessary to have large supplies of food, warm clothes, and warm lodgings.

³² Ahenakew, Edward. Voices of the Plains Cree. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1995.

³³ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Plains Cree "Y" Dialect Elders Transcript.

³⁴ Lavolette, Gontran. The Dakota Sioux In Canada. Winnipeg: DLM Publications, 1991.

Winter

Finally, winter has returned. All of the preparations and hard work that is carried out in the spring, summer, and fall begin to pay off. Families are able to spend their time keeping warm in their winter camps. More importantly, it is time for school to begin for the children. The time for story telling has arrived. The long wait is over and the legends and stories that have been shared around the winter fire since time immemorial could be re-told.³⁵

Winter was not spent entirely inside. There was trapping and fishing activities carried out all winter. The winter was the ideal time for storing fish because it was easily frozen. Veronica Ziegler shares a story called, Growing Up In Green Lake, the following is an excerpt about her experience winter fishing,

In the winter I went trapping. I hitched my little dog to a sled and off we went to my little cabin in the bush. I was about thirteen, and I'd stay there for weeks by myself – just me and my little dog.... I also went ice fishing in the winter. I remember once when I was almost finished making the hole in the ice, Old Indian Rediron came along and said, "That's my hole." He was carrying a stick and I thought he was going to hit me, so I said, "Okay." I had shovelled off most of the snow, so I finished it up for him. Then I made myself another hole. He got mad at me again because I was catching all the fish. I had lots of jackfish, so I split the fish with him. "Well, I'll give you a treat," he said, and he shared his food with me. I carried my fish home in a little bag slung over my shoulder.³⁶

Many families continued to hunt and fish throughout the entire winter season. It was necessary especially if in the summer months food was scarce. It was not always possible to accumulate a supply of food that would last throughout the entire winter.

³⁵ Ahenakew and Hardlotte 1973; Campbell 1985; Garr and Reynolds 1973; Wolfe 1988.

³⁶ Ziegler, Veronica. "Growing Up In Green Lake" in Stories from Kohkom. Eds. Sylvia Vicq, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson. 2nd ed. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2002. p. 57.

It was important for people to adapt to the weather conditions of Saskatchewan. There were times when survival skills could save your life. Skills such as trapping, fishing, and problem solving could save one's life. In the case of Otchakisi, it did save his life,

Otchakisi ... while hiking from one camp to another on a cold wintry night was met head on by a sudden blinding snowstorm. The stretch of open flat prairie he was crossing had nothing to offer in the way of shelter and, realizing his immediate danger, he decided to go no further. As luck would have it he encountered a dip in the ground, a buffalo wallow. So, kicking the snow away from its bottom as quickly as possible, he pulled his blanket well over his head, sat down with his back to the wind and let the snowstorm pile over him. The wind howled overhead but he spent a fairly comfortable night.

Daylight eventually came, the wind had died down, and our friend was very much alive. Getting up and taking his bearings carefully, he walked away to safety from the hollow in the snow like a coyote or prairie chicken.³⁷

The ability to survive a snowstorm was important but for some people a snowstorm could be a stroke of luck. Elder Ken Goodwill speaks of the advantage that a snowfall could have, "*When there was a winter blizzard, snow blizzard, snowstorm, that's when people used to hoop up their sleighs and go outside the reserve and steal wood, so they couldn't see their tracks* (laughing)."³⁸

It took a lot of skills to survive the entire winter, especially when cold and hunger caused many difficulties. The following excerpt is from the book, Voices of the Plains Cree³⁹. It tells the story of a winter when Chief Thunderchild and his people suffered greatly,

The winter was ending. Our women seemed to be stronger than the men. Though they were not eating, they kept moving, if it was only to make

³⁷ Dion 1979, pp. 5-6.

³⁸ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota Elders Transcript.

³⁹ Ahenakew 1995.

fires to keep us warm. The three little children with us were only skin and bones, and their mothers cried over them. We found it hard even to breathe.

One night I dreamed that someone came to me and said, “You can save yourself. Look to the south!” And looking south, I saw that the country was green, but to the north there was only darkness. I tried to flee to the south. The dream was vivid, and when I awoke it was almost morning. I lay thinking about the dream, and then I told it to my father, “Maybe it is only hunger that made me dream,” I said. But my father told me, “Dreams count, my son. Try to go south, all of you; and if I cannot follow, leave me. I will do my best.”...

We camped at the old Sun Dance place, where there was plenty of wood. The women found a buffalo head and neck in the snow, and they made a fire to boil it. I climbed the bank of the river, and as I sat there I saw something that moved and disappeared again with the wind. I went to find out what it was, and I came to a big snowdrift with a pole at the top, from which a bit of cloth blew in the wind. It marked a cache.

I took off my coat and began to dig through the hard crust of snow. Down inside the drift I found hides that covered the meat of two buffalo, cut in pieces. I had to sit down then, for I remembered my dream and was overcome with feeling and with thankfulness to the spirits who had guided us.⁴⁰

Winter could be a time of sitting around a fire, listening to the Elders’ stories, but it could also be a time of hunger, and suffering. A Saskatchewan winter was not an easy task to overcome when a family did not have access to the same amenities that are available today. For many people, you took what you could get. There could not be a better example of taking what you could to stay warm than in the following story told by Shirley Bear,

When I was in a residential school in the 1940’s and early 50’s we were warmly dressed. That was about the only good thing about residential school. Just before the first snow would fall, we would be taken one by one to the storeroom and be outfitted for winter clothes – warm clothes. We wore whatever would hang on our shoulders, some weeks we had mini-skirts, other weeks our dresses were down to our ankles.

⁴⁰ Ahenakew 1995, pp. 15 – 16.

The girls were fitted with long underwear – boy’s underwear with the trap door in the back. We got purple bloomers to wear over the underwear and black stockings – woolen ones to cover the underwear legs. We used to tuck the underwear legs as best as we could and then pull the stockings on. No matter what we tried, we always had lumpy legs.

Sometimes we would roll the underwear legs up and then we would have nice smooth legs – but as soon as any of the staff noticed, we were made to pull our underwear down and once more we had lumpy legs.

The boys would laugh at our lumpy legs. To this day when I meet somebody with whom I went to school those many years ago, I still think they are looking to see if my legs are lumpy.⁴¹

Many people have stories of growing up in Saskatchewan. It is the hope that the stories that have been shared in this section have offered a look into some of the experiences of Aboriginal peoples.

⁴¹ Bear, Shirley. “*Lumpy Legs*” in “...And They Told Us Their Stories” *A Book Of Indian Stories*. Eds Jack Funk and Gordon Lobe. Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991. p. 56.

Conclusion

The information covered in this paper was intended to offer a cultural perspective of coping with weather in Saskatchewan. It is not often that the impact of weather on our daily lives is considered. Weather is a factor that has greatly shaped the ability of Aboriginal peoples to adapt to their surroundings.

The center of traditional life was survival. The seasons dictated the work that Aboriginal peoples did. In the spring and summer, it was time to hunt large game, in the fall food and supplies were prepared for winter, and winter was a real test of surviving the cold and snow.

In conclusion, the weather and the seasons have played an important role in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. There are many traditional stories that include information about weather and survival. In Saskatchewan, the weather can be severe and unpredictable. Fortunately, the different weather in Saskatchewan is character building, and has taught people to be hard-workers. Elder Nancy Bitternose reiterates how different life in Saskatchewan was throughout the past 100 years in this final quote,

I will tell how we used to live in the 20's and 30's. Well we lived in what they call mud shacks, we built hoses with logs and plastered them with mud, of course they had roofs on them. Then we had oil lamps for light. We would burn wood in the winter time; summer time we had what you call cook stoves. We also had a wood heater for the winters, that helped [warm] the house up. Our husband's in those years use to chop pickets to sell to make a living. We didn't have jobs like now.

We also made hay during the summer time with horses and we would cut the hay with a mower and a rake, we'd coil it up and stack it. Our horses would hall it in what you would call hay racks, we would load up that and make big hay stacks for the winter for the animals and if they had any extra we would sell it. That was our living in those years. ...

We didn't have ... power, no electricity or anything like that, we really had to work!

For our children we use to get some print clothing, maybe rip them up and make clothing or buy yard goods and make clothing by hand, we didn't have a sewing machine, we sewed by hand and I did a lot of that for my girls when they were small.

In the wintertime we would melt snow or ice to do our washing. We did all our washing by hand in a tub with a washboard and hang them outside summer or winter

We use to travel by horse and wagon in the summertime, bobsleigh in wintertime. And if you didn't have anything to use; you just walked.⁴²

⁴² Bitternose, Nancy, Gordons First Nation. Updated: 2003. July 31, 2003. <<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/cgi-bin/sicc/epage.pl?169>>

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Appendix A:

Garr, Ben and Margaret Reynolds. Déné Legends. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1973. pp. 1 – 13.

The Flood:

Long ago there were only animals on the earth. The water began to rise slowly and flood the earth. All living things would soon drown.

“Let’s save ourselves on the highest mountain!” cried some, “Or we shall die here in the water.”

Many animals would not listen. They did not believe the water could cover the earth. Others who believed it went to live on the highest mountain. The water rose higher and higher until everything was under water except for the highest mountain. It looked as if all the animals would soon die. All of a sudden, a big island floated up to the surface of the water. It came as if to save the unhappy ones. A male and female of all animals, birds, and other living things went to live on the island. They waited for the water to drop.

A number of diving birds tried to find the earth beneath the water. The loon, the kingfisher and the grebe tried and failed. Now it was the pintail duck’s turn. He dived and was down for a long time. Everyone waited anxiously. At last he came back very wet and out of breath. He climbed onto the island and lay gathering strength. No one spoke to him. They could see he had reached the bottom as his feet were covered with soil. The pintail dived once more for a shorter time and returned with soil on his feet again. The third time all the diving birds followed the pintail duck into the water. The animals noticed that the island had stopped moving and that it seemed firmer. Gradually land appeared all around them. The diving birds had found the earth and brought it back again. Everyone was saved and could live on land again.

All the animals and birds were living happily but one day the squirrel and the bear started to argue. It was a silly quarrel about where the rocks should be. Should they be on top of the water or lying on the bottom? Should the birch trees be on the top or the bottom? The bear said one thing and the squirrel another. During the argument most of the animals agreed with the squirrel. After all, rocks should be on the bottom. What use were they? And birch trees, well, of course they must be above water. The argument continued.

The bear became quite angry and cried, “Very well! You won’t listen to what is right so I will turn the earth to darkness. How would you like it if there was no more sun?”
“You’re stupid,” said the squirrel, “You will be the first to suffer. How will you ever find your food?”

“Oh, I’ll manage fine. I can feel my way with my paws. I’ll be able to find my food.”

“I’m sure you will. And you’ll also tear your paws on the thorny bushes!”

“Well, I can sniff with my nose. It will find my food.”

“Sure, if you want to rub the shine off of it.”

“Then I can crawl on my belly and feel about for food.”

“And tear your belly on old tree stumps I imagine,” said the squirrel.

The bear said nothing. The squirrel had won the argument and was praised by the other animals for his brilliant replies. At his moment, all the rocks slid into the water and sank to the bottom. This was the final defeat for the bear. Even Nature seemed to agree with the squirrel.

The bear became very angry and cried, “As soon as I get to the end of the lake, you will see what I will do!”

He raced towards it, but the squirrel was faster as he jumped from tree branch to tree branch. When the bear reached the lake’s end, the squirrel was waiting. He scolded the bear for his bad temper and the bear shouted and stamped his feet. In his anger the bear went away to live by himself in some other place.

Many days passed. The bear never came back. It began to get very cold and snow covered the land. The birds and animals gathered together and built a huge fire to keep warm.

The squirrel fell asleep a little too close to the fire. The other animals saw his coat getting scorched by the flames and pulled him away.

Since that time the squirrel’s back has had a scorched color to it.

The squirrel awoke and said, “My friend, I have seen the bear in a dream. It is the bear who has stolen the warmth. He is hiding it from us. I know where it is so let’s go there.” The squirrel led the animals westward. They walked a long way and came to another land. There were many caribou here and so was the bear’s hiding place! They agreed on what had to be done.

“You, lynx, must call the caribou. Perhaps we can lure the bear here with their scent. He always likes to hunt them. And you, little mouse, you know so well how to get into everything without anyone knowing it. Go down to the lakeshore and gnaw the bear’s paddle just where the blade begins. The it will break at the least strain!”

The lynx and the mouse did as they were told.

The caribou began to arrive. They were swimming in from across the lake. The bear caught their scent and soon was after them in his canoe. The paddle did not break!

“Oh mouse! You did not do as you were told! The paddle has not broken!” cried the squirrel.

The poor mouse was so afraid that he would be punished that his eyes almost popped out of his head. That is why to this day the mouse has such large frightened eyes. Closer and closer came the bear. He was almost upon the caribou. He paddled harder. Crack! The paddle broke and the canoe overturned. Plop! Into the water went the bear.

During the excitement, some of the animals were searching for the bear's den. The bear had probably hidden the warmth there. When they found the den, they saw a strange ball lying in a corner. What was it? Two bear cubs gave the secret away. "It is the he—". They didn't dare say the whole word.

The other animals understood. It was the heat! The animals took the ball and left. They passed it from hand to hand. When it was the pike's turn to carry the ball, its sharp teeth made a hole in it. Heat began pouring out of the ball. The animals approached the lake. The bear had already reached shore and was waiting for them.

He shouted to them, "From now to the end of time, there will be warm and cold weather." As we know, there is summer and winter. In the winter the bear sleeps and when he rises the spring comes quickly.

The animals left and returned to their own country. The heat from the torn ball had melted the snow.

One day a great bird that does not live today came and drank up all the water. The animals needed some water but he had drunk it all. They began to get very thirsty. The great bird lay quietly while the animals begged it for some water to drink. They talked nicely to it and caressed it but the great bird said nothing.

The animals gathered to see what they could do.

"Listen, lynx," said one of the animals, "Your claws are very sharp and strong. Go and tear the great bird's belly. You need the water as much as we do."

The lynx crept towards the bird. He patted the bird's stomach.

"Oh, what soft hands my little cousin has," said the great bird with delight.

The bird had scarcely spoken when the water flowed out in streams. The lynx had opened the bird's belly.

This time the water did not flood the earth. It formed rivers and lakes that are still here today.

Appendix B:

Cuthand, Stan, ed. Nêhiyaw Atayokêwina [Cree Legends] Stories of Wîsakecâhk.
Revised Edition. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1988, pp 13 – 23.

The Creation Story - Part II Wîsakecâhk and His Brother: By Ida McLeod

Now that they were safe at last, Wîsakecâhk spent his entire time looking after his brother.

One day, when he was entertaining him by throwing pebbles into the sea, someone in a canoe suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The man sat in his canoe and watched them as they played. One of the pebbles accidentally landed in the canoe. As pebbles were favorite toys of his younger brother, Wîsakecâhk asked the man to throw the pebble back to them.

“Come and get it,” said the man, holding his paddle for Wîsakecâhk to step on so that he could reach the pebble. The man’s name was Wam-so-so. The minute Wîsakecâhk set his foot on the paddle, the man flipped him over into the canoe.

The man then struck the canoe with his paddle and away it sped into the blue of the ocean. Poor Wîsakecâhk had been kidnapped and was taken to an island. There he was tied to a tree to be fattened. He was being prepared as a human sacrifice to the dream-spirit of his captor.

From across the water, Wîsakecâhk could hear his brother crying in the evenings.

“Come back to me, my brother,” the boy would cry. *“If you do not return soon, I shall change into a wolf.”* Wîsakecâhk felt as if his heart would break. After a while, instead of his brother’s cry, he heard the lonely call of a wolf. Then the wolf calls were less frequent. At last, he heard them no longer. He knew that his brother had given up waiting for him and had gone away.

When Wîsakecâhk became a young man, he managed to escape from the island. He searched everywhere for his brother, asking each creature, *“Have you seen my brother?”* One day, he came to a wolf trail and decided to make a pit trap under it. Inside the pit, he would sit concealed from view, and watch the wolves as they went by. He would know his brother, for a woodpecker had promised to help Wîsakecâhk find him. Finally, they saw his brother and Wîsakecâhk changed him back into human form. His brother was an excellent hunter, for he retained the cunning and speed of the wolf in tracking and chasing game.

Wîsakecâhk warned his brother that he must never jump over a creek, no matter how narrow it might be. For a long time, the brother remembered this and was always careful. A great scarcity of food occurred. For many days, the brothers hunted without success.

Finally, they sighted a moose and chased it. The brother was on the verge of shooting it, when without warning, it jumped over a narrow creek. The boy, who was right at its heels, jumped too. But down he plunged into the depths of the stream. He disappeared and for days Wîsakecâhk looked for him. If only he could find a hair, he would be able to bring him back to life. On his way home, he often noticed an eagle perched on a branch of a tree near the ocean.

“My grandfather Eagle, how are you?” he greeted him, *“Why do you sit here every evening?”*

“Oh, my son,” replied the eagle, *“have you not heard of the Cêmisikwâna who dance and frolic on this beach every night? They slew Wîsakecâhk’s wolf brother. As a matter of fact, it’s his fur they toss back and forth in the dance. They usually dance until they fall exhausted on the beach. There they sleep until the sun comes up.”*

Wîsakecâhk could hardly conceal his interest in this bit of news. That very night he watched the dance of the Cêmisikwâna. His heart ached and he vowed vengeance when he saw the fur of his brother being tossed so irreverently in the game.

Just as the eagle said, towards morning, the creatures fell asleep exhausted.

He crept up to them and grabbed his brother’s fur. Then he shot an arrow through the chest of each of the creatures.

Wîsakecâhk brought his brother back to life and they were reunited.

One evening as he was walking home, he heard the chant of a medicine man and the beat of his rattle.

On investigation he discovered a giant bull-frog with a medicine bundle on his back and a medicine man’s rattle in his hand, hopping along toward the sea.

A medicine man must never be angered or displeased lest he use his powers against you. Knowing this, Wîsakecâhk greeted the frog.

“Wise grandfather!” he said, *“May I escort you to your destination and carry your bundle for you?”*

“My good son,” said the man, *“It seems to me you have not heard what one called Wîsakecâhk has done. He critically wounded the Cêmisikwâna. I alone am permitted to enter their tipi which is in the depths of sea. I must save them, for if they die the whole world will be flooded. We are all in grave danger. Be off with you! I have no time to talk to you.”*

On hearing this news, Wîsakecâhk and his brother began at once to build a large raft. Provisions of pemmican and dried berries were placed on it.

As soon as the raft was completed, Wîsakecâhk slew the medicine bull-frog. He skinned it carefully and put the skin on himself. He was soon on his way to care for the sick Cêmisikwâna when he reached the edge of the great sea, the water parted, making an opening for him. At the end of the path, he entered a tipi called sa-pa-tawan. Inside lay the creatures, gravely ill, still bearing the arrows he shot into them.

Slowly Wîsakecâhk began to chant to the beat of his rattle. When he had worked himself into a frenzy, he went quickly from one Cêmisikwâna to another, burying the arrows deeper and twisting them as he did so. He killed every single one of them.

Suddenly he heard the roar of rushing water. Before he realized it, it was almost upon him. Wîsakecâhk ran for his life.

He reached the raft just in the nick of time. Animals of all kinds jumped aboard.

At last everyone was safely on the raft.
Suddenly there was a cry of dismay from Wîsakecâhk.

“Ah, Nisîmitik!” (my brothers and sisters) he exclaimed, *“There is one thing we have forgotten to bring with us - a piece of earth!”*

They looked in vain on the hooves, claws and fur of everyone for even the smallest speck of earth.

At last, the beaver volunteered to dive down below the water to find some earth. After a long while, he floated to the surface, unconscious. The water was too deep for him. Others, such as the loon and the otter, tried and failed. A great fear fell on everyone, for unless Wîsakecâhk could get some earth from which he could create land, everyone would perish.

“Let me try,” said a little muskrat at last, *“I am strong and I am used to digging under the water for my food.”*

Down went the muskrat; moments later he came up gasping for air – but with no earth. Again he went down. Everyone began looking about anxiously as he was staying down much too long. When he finally surfaced, he was dead!

“Do not weep. I will soon bring him back to life,” Wîsakecâhk assured the other animals. He blew on him and brought him back to life. He scraped tiny pieces of earth from the claws and teeth of the muskrat. The muskrat went down another time and was able to bring Wîsakecâhk more earth.

Wîsakecâhk rolled it into a tiny ball and began to blow on it. It swelled bigger and bigger. He kept blowing until at last everyone was able to walk on it. As he continued to blow, forests and lakes began to appear. *“My wolf brother,”* said Wîsakecâhk, *“go and see if the world is big enough.”*

So away went the brother and came back within one day.

Wîsakecâhk saw that the world was not big enough yet, so again and again he blew on the earth.

For the second time, he sent his brother to see how big the world was. In exactly three days the brother returned. Again Wîsakecâhk was not satisfied. He blew and blew on the earth with his breath and again he sent his brother to see if the world was big enough.

“When the moon is round,” said the brother, *“and I have not returned, then you will know that the world is big enough.”*

Wîsakecâhk waited and waited. After many moons, there was no sign and so Wîsakecâhk decided to search for him. It is during this search for his brother that we hear of other adventures of Wîsakecâhk. No one knows for sure whether he ever found him or not.