

Imagining Head-Smashed-In

Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains

Jack W. Brink



AU PRESS

© 2008 Jack W. Brink



Published by AU Press, Athabasca University
1200, 10011 – 109 Street

AU PRESS Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Brink, Jack

Imagining Head-Smashed-In : aboriginal buffalo hunting on the
northern plains / Jack W. Brink.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-897425-04-6 (pbk.)–ISBN 978-1-897425-00-8 (bound)

ISBN 978-1-897425-09-1 (electronic)

1. American bison hunting–History. 2. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo
Jump National Historic Site (Alta.). 3. Indians of North America–
Hunting–Great Plains. 4. Buffalo jump–Alberta. I. Title.

E78.G73B682 2008

639'.1164308997

C2008-900089-7

Printed and bound in Canada by AGMV Marquis

Cover design by Rod Michalchuk

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the
Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences,
through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds
provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
of Canada. Also, this project was funded in part by the Alberta
Historical Resources Foundation.



Canadian Federation for the
Humanities and Social Sciences
**Fédération canadienne
des sciences humaines**



Contents

x	Foreword
xii	Preface
xvi	Acknowledgements
1	CHAPTER 1: THE BUFFALO JUMP
8	Communal Buffalo Hunting
12	Not Just Any Cliff
14	The Site
16	The Cliff
18	How Long Have Buffalo Jumped?
24	Blood on the Rocks: The Story of Head Smashed-In
27	CHAPTER 2: THE BUFFALO
32	Is it Bison or Buffalo?
33	In Numbers, Numberless
37	Tricks of the Trade
39	The Fats of Life
43	CHAPTER 3: A YEAR IN THE LIFE
44	Calves
45	Mothers
49	Fathers
52	The Big Picture
54	Science and the Historic Record
60	The Seasonal Round
65	The Season of Buffalo Jumping
71	CHAPTER 4: THE KILLING FIELD
73	Finding Bison
75	Drive Lanes
81	Points in Time
85	Ancient Knowledge
91	Back to the Drive Lanes
97	Deadmen
101	In Small Things Forgotten

103	CHAPTER 5: ROUNDING UP
105	The Spirit Sings
114	The Nose of the Buffalo
117	Fire this Time
121	Luring the Buffalo
124	Buffalo Runners
129	Lost Calves
134	Billy's Stories
137	The End of the Drive
141	Of Illusions, Pickup Trucks, and Curves in the Road
147	CHAPTER 6: THE GREAT KILL
149	Leap of Faith
155	Overkill?
161	Drop of Death
164	Bones on Fire
168	Let the Butchering Begin
171	Bison Hide as Insulator
175	Back to the Assembly Line
179	CHAPTER 7: COOKING UP THE SPOILS
180	The Processing Site
182	Day Fades to Night
185	Dried Goods
188	Grease is the Word
191	High Plains Cooking
195	Hazel Gets Slimed
198	Buffalo Chips
200	Hot Rocks
206	Time for a Roast
211	Where Are the Skulls?
216	Packing Up, Among the Bears
221	CHAPTER 8: GOING HOME
224	Buffalo Hides
229	Pemmican
235	Snow Falling on Cottonwoods

237	CHAPTER 9: THE END OF THE BUFFALO HUNT
238	The Skin of the Animal
246	The Last of the Buffalo Jumps
251	Rivers of Bones
253	Final Abandonment of Head-Smashed-In
259	CHAPTER 10: THE PAST BECOMES THE PRESENT
260	Beginnings
261	A Beer-soaked Bar Napkin
263	Cranes on the Cliff
266	A Rubber Cliff
269	And a Rubber Dig
272	The Blackfoot Get Involved
274	Meeting with the Piikani
276	Joe Crowshoe
278	A Painted Skull
282	Where Are the Blood?
284	Hollywood North
287	Opening and Aftermath
289	Of Time and Tradition
293	EPILOGUE: JUST A SIMPLE STONE
293	Last Summer
295	A Thousand Years Ago
298	Three Months Later
301	Three Days Later
305	Sources to Notes
326	References Cited
335	Index