

Lakota Narrative about Mato Tipila (Bear Lodge)

(also known as Devils Tower)

One day, several Lakota boys were out walking and stumbled upon the body of a dead woman. They were frightened and began running for home. Quickly they found their courage and returned to investigate. They recognized her as Red Cheek Woman, who had married a Star Man from the sky world. To their amazement, they also found a newborn baby alive next to Red Cheek Woman. The boys took the baby back to their village and the people gave him to an old woman to raise. She named him Fallen Star, since he was the child of a Star Man and had fallen to Earth with his Lakota mother.

Fallen Star helped the Lakotas in many ways. However, he was peculiar in that he aged far faster than his Lakota relatives. In just four years, he had become a teenager. Around that time he announced that he wished to leave the Earth and go to his father's land in the sky. But he promised to remember his Lakota relatives, and to help them in two ways. The first was with medicines. The second was in times of natural disasters. He then left his Lakota relatives and went to his star relatives in the sky.

A long time later, a group of Lakotas were returning to the Black Hills from the northwest. One afternoon when they were within sight of the Black Hills, they stopped for the day. The men went hunting, the women set up their lodges, and the children played. While playing, a group of seven girls moved farther and farther from the camp.

Suddenly the seven girls stopped. They were encircled by bears who were going to kill them! The girls screamed, but they were too far away from the camp to be saved. The bears started closing in on the girls, then stopped as a voice spoke from the sky: "Stand on the little mound of earth." That voice was Fallen Star's, and the girls quickly climbed atop the mound. Then he asked that mound of earth to rise up. As it did so the bears rushed in to claw the girls. But the mound of earth rose above their reach. The bears clawed at the earth, causing huge spires of rock to tumble down and crush the bears to death. Then Fallen Star asked each girl to tell him her favorite bird, and a flock of that bird came and carried her back to the camp.

In Lakota that landmark is called Mato Tipila, Lodge of the Bears. There is also a constellation in the sky with the same name. Today the landmark Mato Tipila is called Devils Tower, and the constellation Mato Tipila is called Gemini.

