

## Chapter Fifteen

### ***WIND CAVE NATIONAL PARK IN COSMOLOGY AND HISTORY***

Whether or not one chooses to acknowledge the sacred meanings the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and other tribal nations attach to the Black Hills, it is impossible to ignore their cultural importance as metaphors and even representations of practical observations. One persistent theme stretching back to written accounts from the early half of the nineteenth century is the notion that the Black Hills was a place where tribal nations gathered from all directions to winter, to hunt, to procure plants, to collect minerals, to trade, and to conduct their religious observances. Another consistent theme is the Black Hills' landscape, their game animals, plant life, and mineral deposits had interchangeable and interconnected meanings. The complex web of metaphors that surround this region and Wind Cave National Park in particular, not only speak to some of the broader cosmological concepts described in earlier chapters, but they also relate to the lived experiences and history of the peoples who made this region their home.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the vast amount material that has been presented so far.<sup>1</sup> It attempts to show how the complex history of the area articulates with tribal cosmologies, and also how it relates to certain European American understandings about the area. Most importantly, it showcases Wind Cave National Park. It demonstrates how its environs, landforms, animal, plant, and mineral resources occupy a significant place in Lakota and Cheyenne cultural knowledge and practice, and it shows how these traditions are affiliated with their contemporary relationship to the park and its environs.

#### **I. THE MOVEMENTS OF ANIMALS, THE SUN, AND THE WINDS**

John Ant, William Bordeaux, Nicholas Black Elk, Henry Standing Bear, Jake Herman, John Stands In Timber, James LaPointe, Pete Catches, Rich Two Dogs, Arvol Looking Horse, Wesley Whiteman, and Sievert Young Bear are among many Lakotas and Cheyennes who have spoken or written about tribal understandings of the relationship between the Black Hills and the animals. Pete Catches (and Catches 1990:139), the much revered Oglala spiritual leader, spoke about the Black Hills very specifically in relation to the bison. As he put it:

You see, our people are nomadic, we traveled around the *Ka Sapa* (Black Hills). Being that the buffalo sacrifices his whole life to help his younger brother, the Lakota, the Lakota people stayed close to a buffalo herd. The number of buffalo was into millions and millions. You did not have to look for them. All you had to do was go over the hill and you could run into a bunch.

The metaphoric interchangeability of the bison and the Black Hills is obvious here. People stayed in reach of the Hills, just as they kept in close touch with a herd of bison. "The bison," according to Nicholas Black Elk (Brown 1992:23), "is the chief of all the animals and represents the earth,

---

<sup>1</sup> Since much of what is covered in this chapter has been presented elsewhere, references are only given for new bodies of information. The reader is advised to consult previous chapters for details and sources.

the totality of all that is.” Just as bison stood as a metaphor for the universe, so by extension did the Black Hills exist as a sacred manifestation of the cosmos. Indeed, Red Cloud (in Allison 1875:191) spoke about the Black Hills as the “Head Chief of the Land.”

Historically, the close relation of the Black Hills to the bison and other game animals was not simply a figurative imagining; it was also a matter of practical observation. The Lakotas euphemistically called the Black Hills their “meat pack,” *oiyhpeye talo* (Hassrick 1964:75, 165). They knew them as the location where certain bison herds overwintered before returning to the surrounding grasslands in the spring to graze with their newborn calves. They also knew the gateways the animals passed through to reach their wintering grounds, and the most famous of these was the Buffalo Gap, which is known as *Pte Ta Tiopa* [the Door of the Bison Cow], *Tatanka Ta Tiopa* [The Door of the Bison Bull], or *He Okiksahe* [the Ridge with a Gap] (Little Cloud in Stars, Iron Shell, and Buechel 1978:94-96; Lone Wolf in Stars, Iron Shell and Buechel 1978:242-245; Bad Heart Bull and Blish 1967:289; Black Elk, C. 1986a:210). Luther Standing Bear (1975:17) described this gateway as one of the most accessible for both animals and humans to enter and leave the Black Hills, and as a result, he indicated that this was a highly desirable camping location for the Lakotas. Henry Crow Dog (Kadlecek and Kadlecek 1981:96) also described it as a gateway where the buffalo left their winter home to reach their feeding grounds around Alliance, Nebraska. As Severt Young Bear (and Theisz 1994:29) said:

All around the Black Hills there is a barrier or rim the non-Indians call Hogback Ridge. There are certain gates around the Black Hills where the buffalo used to enter into the Hills. They would go into those canyons for shelter and remain in the Black Hills until the snow started melting and green grass started showing. Then they would migrate out of the Hills again.

The Lakotas and other tribal nations in the region were astute observers of animal behavior. They knew the habits and rhythms of the animals on whose meat they so heavily depended for their own health and livelihood, and they closely synchronized their year-round travels to follow these movements.

Lakota observations are supported by scores of naturalists who traveled in the Hills before many native species were extirpated and then reintroduced at places like Wind Cave National Park. While local tribespeople saw the movements of the animals as mysterious or *wakan*, European Americans simply interpreted it as a common practice for animals to take shelter during the winter months in areas with access to good forage. Many locations in the Hills, especially along the southern stretches of the Race Track, were ideal because they typically had less snowfall, storms were not as severe, and there were plenty of canyons, overhangs, dens, and caves for animals to find shelter during inclement weather. A common place for game animals to winter was the Race Track, a landform that occupies much of the eastern half of Wind Cave National Park, and this is true even today. In Lakota, the name *Wamaka Ki'inyanke Ocanku* translates as “The Running Path of the Animals” (Wawoslata in Stars, Iron Shell, and Buechel 1978:264; Bad Heart Bull and Blish 1967:289; Black Elk, C. 1992a:208). The area where the Race Track is approached from the Buffalo Gap is called *Tatanka makalhpaya* [the Stomping Grounds of the Bison Bull] (Little Cloud in Stars, Iron Shell, and Buechel 1978:94-96; Lone Wolf in Stars, Iron Shell and Buechel 1978:242-245).

Many Lakota stories about this region of the Black Hills take place during the late fall and winter months. They typically tell about villages facing hunger and sending their hunters to the area to find game, or they speak of culture heroes who bring game to humans who are experiencing privation. Most of the stories relating to this region refer to the uncertainties of

finding game during the winter months and the ambivalence that this potentially life-threatening condition evokes. Most of the stories single out the bison as the principal prey, or else bison appear in a spiritual guise as white buffalo, buffalo women, or crazy buffalo. Indeed, across the entire range of traditional narratives associated with this area, bison occupy the predominant thematic position.

The symbolic associations the Lakotas and Cheyennes drew between bison and winter reveal a sophisticated understanding of this animal. Ernest Thompson Seton (1929:3:677-680), among others, observed that blizzards, probably more than humans, were responsible for the disappearance of many bison herds during years with hard winters. Clearly the Lakotas and Cheyennes knew this too as a matter of practical observation, but they carried it further and connected it to a wider set of cosmological principles and processes. The causal connections the Lakotas made between *Waziya*, the Old Man, and his grandson, *Waziyata*, the North Wind, caves, and the movements and health of the bison are an apt illustration of this.

The winter, the time of the year when the North Wind, *Waziyata*, prevailed was associated with rest and the potential for renewal. It was the season when new life grew inside the womb of the bison and Mother Earth and when the spirits of the bison prepared for their materialized emergence from the cavernous sanctuaries underneath the Black Hills. It was the time of the year bison herds were easily located by their clouds of frozen breath, and, likewise, it was a season when certain caves became visible by the vapors that emanated from their depths.<sup>2</sup> Breath is visible precisely at the time of year when life is taking shape inside the womb of ungulate species, and by extension inside the Black Hills, which symbolized the site of their emergence. It is the place where the *nagi* [spirit] becomes attached to a material force, *ni* [breath], a process that takes place among all land animals but is especially associated in Lakota teachings with bison. Not surprisingly, the Lakotas connected the bison's beginnings and their own origins to caves. In the Black Hills, where hundreds of cave openings dot the landscape, this association would have been especially pronounced. Wind Cave represents the quintessential expression of this link, not only because of its unusual air movements but also because of its location near the Race Track and Hot Springs, locations where game animals frequently congregated in the winter. Thus, it became a central site for stories of human and animal emergence.

Yet, winter was also, paradoxically, a time of death, the season when bison often wasted away and died, when *Waziya*, widely known for his stinginess, kept the bison to himself until Falling Star or Blood Clot Boy killed him and forced his offspring into a cave, which was made visible by the emanations of their frosty breath. Bison were admired for their strength and endurance because they faced and stood up against this wind even during the most severe blizzards. As tough as they were, they still sometimes succumbed to its force, and even when they survived, the North Wind took its toll on their nutritional status.

In this context, it is appropriate to say something about the multiple metaphorical uses of the term *wasicun*. Although today it is commonly used as an ascription for white people, it appears to have had a complex set of metaphorical meanings in the past. In a group interview James Walker (1980:108-109) conducted with Thomas Tyon, William Garnett, Thunder Bear, and George Sword with James Walker, the following was recorded:

White is the favorite color of *Waziya*. The white people are like *Waziya*. They have no mercy on the red people.

---

<sup>2</sup> On cold subzero days in mid-winter, some of the early rangers at Wind Cave National Park looked for cave openings because this was the time when the condensation arising from their depths was visible (Bohi 1962:443).

*Wa* is the white of *Waziya* (the snow). *Wasicun* is the *tontonsni* of the snowstorm. White men are called *wasicun*.

There are several interesting connections here. First of all, *Waziya* has been mistaken by several different writers, from Edwin Denig (in Ewers 1961:6) to Helen Rezzatto (1989:18-20), to be a white person in a European American sense. While many Lakota stories describe him as white in appearance, they are not referring to someone of European American derivation but rather to their fabled and interconnected figures of winter, old age, and the North Wind. Like *Waziya*, Europeans embodied the *sicun* or spiritual potency of the snow and winter, which starved the bison and took other life-giving forces away. Linea Sundstrom (Personal Communication, July 12, 2002) also reminds us that the word *wasicu* is commonly translated today as “takes the fat,” which many Lakota and Dakota speakers interpret as referring to the avaricious nature of European Americans, who like *Waziya*, take and hoard the “fat” of animals, the land, and the people. As mentioned before, bison wasted away over the winter and lost so much of their fat content that their meat was no longer edible. By extension, the people suffered when the meat from the animal they so depended upon lost its nutritional value.

Equally dangerous to tribes were unseasonably mild winters. During these winters, bison often stayed on the grasslands, failing to return to their customary winter haunts where tribes typically established their homes during this season. In 1832-1833, Lakotas who still lived along the valley of the Missouri River faced starvation when the bison did not arrive and remained on the upland grasslands, days away from their villages (Clow 1995). Hard winters with enough cold and snow to force bison into their usual seasonal movements were favored because these winters made it easier to capture bison using driving techniques. Winter conditions such as these brought the bison, health, and life to the people, as Eagle Louse (1939) and Left Hand Bear (in Hot Springs Star 1938) clearly indicated after their summer encampments at Wind Cave National Park in 1937 and 1938.

In the early historic period, before the arrival of horses, the season between late fall and early winter was probably the time of the year when local tribes hunted bison using pound and jump techniques. The rolling terrain and sheltered recesses of Wind Cave National Park and its nearby surroundings would have been excellent locations to hunt bison in this manner during the winter-time. Theodore Binnema (2001:35) argues that early winter may have been the best season to hunt bison because, as he puts it:

Even the almost incessant winds helped hunters. Bison have a keen sense of smell and can be difficult to approach when the weather is calm or the winds very light and shifting. A consistent wind was particularly useful to communal hunters, who sometimes required several days to coax a bison herd to a kill site.

Bison are very sensitive to the movement and direction of the winds. They face the north winds and the blizzards of winter, and they move south towards warm Chinook winds to find snow free areas to graze during the winter. In the spring and summer, they appear impervious to the west winds' thunder, lightning, and hail (Lott 2002:84), and this gets expressed in some of the complicated ideas that associate summer storms and hail with bison in Lakota and Cheyenne cosmologies. The Lakotas' connection of bison to the Wind, *Tate*, but especially his sons, *Waziyata* and *Wiyohpeyata* makes sense given what is known about the behavior of bison in their natural state.

Winter and its wind, *Waziyata*, were fickle. In some years, *Waziyata* brought so much snow and ice to the open plains that bison were unable to uncover the grass and water below, and many died, although the losses never matched those of domesticated ungulates. Unlike cattle, bison have the ability to dig through moderate levels of snow and ice to retrieve their nourishment. They are even known to dig through dirt and sand to uncover hidden sources of water, an ability that some tribal stories link to their emergence from springs. Even in moderate winters, bison quickly use up the reserve fats they store over the summer from grazing on the rich grasses of the prairies, and by early spring, they lose most of the fat that makes their meat nutritious and palatable. This is probably why they were hardly hunted during the late winter and early spring months, and why local tribes preserved their meat with its fat in a dried form when it was still nourishing from the late summer to the early winter. In the end, Lakota notions of *Waziya* and parallel ideas among the Cheyennes about *Hoimaha* give evidence of the paradoxical associations between winter and the bison.

Along the Race Track, especially in the southern reaches of the Hills, the generally milder temperatures and lesser amounts of snow cover meant that bison had extended access to good forage, including rich stores of cool season grasses that have a second growth period in the early fall months. Ricegrasses also provide excellent forage for wildlife in the fall months, and one variety, the rough-leaf [*Oryzopsis asperifolia*], keeps its green leaves through the winter (Larson and Johnson 1999:418), a fact that may have had symbolic significance for some local tribes. Canada wildryes also mature late, but their nutritional value rapidly declines after flowering (Ibid:404). There were also dried stores of late sprouting warm season grasses, the nutritious blue and hairy grammas and the buffalograsses. Importantly, the rich grassland environment of the southern portions of the Race Track extended the period bison and other ungulates could be hunted, and its lighter snow cover and generally level surface probably created conditions that made animals easier to reach during the early months of winter as well.

Locations along the Race Track, including those in the area of Wind Cave National Park, were highly valued, not only because these were common winter haunts for bison, but also because other animals would be available for food if bison failed to return. The season from late fall to early spring was the primary time of the year to hunt elk and mule deer, which commonly inhabited the Race Track and the rocky recesses of the Hogback. Blacktail Creek and Elk Mountain were no doubt given their identities because these were areas frequented by the species after whom they were named. As mentioned several times before, most of the Lakota stories associated with the Wind Cave area take place during the winter months, which matches the time of year the *tate* hunted for elk and deer. Whether Lakota winter camps were in the park at places like Wind Cave Canyon, at nearby locations along Beaver Creek and the Fall River, or outside the Hills along the Cheyenne and White rivers and even as far away as the Platte, it is clear that this was an area to which small groups of hunters came during the late fall and early winter months to find game (see Chapters Seven and Ten). The lands that make up most of the park's properties were clearly understood as a game reserve. They were a favorite winter hunting ground for the Lakotas, an area that once held large numbers of bison. Even after this animal disappeared from the region, it was still rich in other sorts of large and small game, including several different species of birds commonly taken for food. The snowbird (*Junco hyemalis*), which appears in the Lakota origin story, is one of these and abundant in the area of Wind Cave National Park. In the early 1970s, a Lakota elder, Moses Circle Bear (1971:12,14), would echo these associations when he talked about the Black Hills as a safety net, a place the people could always count on to find food.

Also, the rich grasses found along the Race Track would have made this a good place to graze horses during the winter months. By the end of the eighteenth century, this became an im-

portant consideration as local tribes adopted these animals and amassed huge herds for their own use and trade. Edwin Denig (in Ewers 1961:6), however, commented about the lack of sufficient grass in the Black Hills to supply the herds of large camps for extended periods of time. While it is true that the Hills would not have been well suited to supporting the pastoralist adaptations of large populations year-round, there was sufficient forage to support smaller herds during the winter months when tribes broke up into their band groupings and stayed near the Hills. Locations along the Race Track and some of the Hills' lower elevation valleys offered prime winter grazing conditions for horses. In fact, many American observers in the 1870s made special note of the abundance of high quality grasses for grazing cattle and horses in this area. And in the 1880s, several large ranches in the area raised thoroughbred racehorses that grazed on lands, which eventually became part of Wind Cave National Park. Since there is no evidence that local tribes ever maintained large concentrated settlements inside the Hogback and along the Race Track during the winter months when they typically used the area, and since the only time of the year they did gather in large groups was in the summer during the season of communal bison hunting, which took place at locations outside the Black Hills, Denig's point is moot. It does, however, have some bearing on those populations who specialized in horse pastoralism and who eventually migrated to the southern Plains. But it has little merit for the groups, who remained in the vicinity of the Hills and whose economies were more oriented towards hunting for subsistence or trade rather than horse raising (see Chapter Seven).

Throughout the year, local tribes timed the movements of the animals and their own annual subsistence and ceremonial cycles to the position of the sun and other stars. When the star of the Buffalo Gap (Capella) began moving towards the Sun on Lakota star maps,<sup>3</sup> it signaled a time when the bison left their winter homes at the Race Track and moved to the open grasslands with their newborn calves. As mentioned before, this is one of only a few stars in the northern hemisphere that does not set and that moves towards the horizon in the months of spring and summer and returns towards the zenith in the fall. In the months after the vernal equinox, some Lakotas began to make preparations for a ceremonial pilgrimage into the Black Hills that led up to the performance of the Sun Dance near Bear Lodge Butte and other locations in and around the Black Hills. Other Lakotas entered the Hills during the late spring and early summer to cut lodgepoles, to collect food and medicinal plants, to fast and carry on other prayerful observances. Arvol Looking Horse (in Parlow 1983a:42) describes this journey as follows:

The Lakota originally had an archetypal annual sacred journey of the people following the buffalo around the plains. The buffalo are migrating north April-May and the people are coming from the winter camps. The buffalo lead them through Buffalo Gap up the lower section of the Black Hills and they get to Mount Harney. The buffalo, the principle representative of the sun in the animal world, and the incarnation of solar power and divine generosity, led the people on the archetypal sacred annual journey from place to place. Each place corresponding to constellations in which the sun has just entered... The constellations are visible scriptures of the people. The land forms are visible scriptures telling the same stories during the day. As the people followed the buffalo, they were literally on the sunpath. What the sun was doing was going through those different constellations which correspond to these earth forms. In terms of spiritual attunement, following the sunpath is living in harmony with the will of the Creator... The sun is going clockwise and the Lakota are being led by the buffalo counterclockwise, they are following the sunpath on the earth.

---

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Black Elk (1992b:50-51) states that the Buffalo Gap star is Capella, although it is located on the opposite side of the celestial race Trace Track where the star Rigel is placed on Lakota star maps. When the Sun rose in Rigel, bison left the Hills through the Buffalo Gap and the Lakotas entered the Hills' interiors to conduct their ceremonial observances.

In the month after the summer solstice, when the Sun arrived in the constellation *Mato tipila*, groups started to leave the interiors of the Hills to travel to the places where they gathered together in large encampments for the Sun Dance near Sundance Mountain, for meetings at Bear Butte where they deliberated on military strategies and engaged in trade, and for making preparations to commence the *wani-sapa*, the large communal hunts, which took place at the end of the summer on the grasslands beyond the Hills. These hunts were held over a period of a few months, after which time the bands went their separate ways, traveling to trading posts to secure their supplies and returning to the locations where they conventionally encamped over the winter months. November, when the Big Dipper and the Milky Way start to move closer together (Lone Wolf in Stars, Iron Shell, and Buechel 1978:135-136; in Buechel and Manhart 1998:231-233), was the month bands established their semi-permanent winter campsites at locations where they typically remained for the next four to five months. Many of these were situated at the base of the Hogback or along the Race Track, including locations near Wind Cave.

The careful observation of the sun's movements in relation to landforms and constellations fits Andrew Isenberg's characterization of Plains Indian bison hunting as a "solar economy." As he writes:

In the summer, the shortgrasses of the western plains transformed solar energy into carbohydrates, the bison transformed the grasses into protein...Because the nomads' economy ultimately relied on solar energy, it was renewable. But the nomadic economy was limited by the ability of shortgrasses to produce carbohydrates. Drought, for instance, interfered with the predictable operation of the nomads' solar economy (Isenberg 2002:68).

The Lakotas clearly understood that the migrations and habits of bison were also closely related to the movements of *Wi*, the Sun. They not only timed their own movements according to the sun's position, but they also incorporated this awareness into some of the symbolism associated with their Sun Dances.<sup>4</sup> The circle around the outer edge of the dance area was known as the "Sun Trail" or "Sunpath," and the sunflower [*Helianthus annuus*] was used in this ceremony because, like the bison, it followed the sun (see Chapter Twelve).

The Cheyennes also had a similar annual cycle that followed the movement of game in and around the Black Hills. The Northern Cheyennes, some of whom continued to camp in the vicinity of the southeastern Black Hills, used the area in and around Wind Cave National Park for hunting bison, elk, and deer in the winter as well. Like the Lakotas, they set up their winter campsites in the low elevation, sheltered valleys of the Black Hills, dispersed in the early spring, and then regrouped in the summer for ceremonies, communal bison and pronghorn hunting, and large-scale war parties to protect existing territories and/or establish new ones. The timing of some of these events was also coordinated with the position of the stars (Schlesier 1987:15, 25). Most of the details of this knowledge have been lost, but Karl Schlesier (Ibid:15, 25, 83-87, 104-105) has written about a fifty-six day ceremonial cycle that was coordinated with the risings of Aldebaran, Rigel, and Sirius, stars also important to the Lakotas in signaling the time for some of their summer ceremonies.

---

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the northern plains are the remains of stone cairns, wheels, and alignments that appear to have functioned in astronomical observances (Kehoe and Kehoe 1977; Hall 1985; Liebman 2002). Most of these stone formations were constructed in prehistoric times, but many historic tribes continued to use them as sites for fasting and vision seeking. Not coincidentally, 28 radiating stone lines make up the famous Medicine Wheel in Wyoming and 28 poles are used to construct the Cheyenne and Lakotas' Sun Dance lodges (Hall 1985:181-182). Twenty eight days also make up the lunar month for most tribes in the Plains.

Particular kinds of meteorological events, especially cloud formations and wind directions, also marked changes in the movements of animals and the annual living cycle of tribes (Young Bear in Parlow 1983a:26-27). For the Lakotas, as one example, the month of November was marked not only by the position of certain stars in the night sky, but also by the appearance of Stone Boy's clouds over the gateways to the Black Hills and the prevailing direction of the wind. When *Waziyata*, the North Wind, started to gain prominence, his dominating presence signaled the bison to take shelter inside the Buffalo Gap. It was here, just above the Race Track at Wind Cave, that the bison, returned to their underworld home, a cave that released breath and from which new life came into the world in the spring, probably after the time the sun started to rise over the Buffalo Gap, emerging from the underworld where it spent much of its time with its friends, *Tatanka* and the *Pte Oyate*, over the winter months.

The spring and fall equinoxes also coincided with the timing of the golden eagle's return to and departure from the Black Hills. Golden eagles (the chief of the wingeds), which are often symbolically equated with bison (the chief of the animals, four-leggeds), typically frequent the eastern side of the Black Hills (the chief of the land), arriving here in the spring and leaving in the fall, and this probably did not go unnoticed in determining the locations and seasons of tribal eagle trapping. The commencement of this trapping may have been coordinated with the position of the sun too, and this would make sense given the fact that the eagle is understood as a messenger of the Sun, *Wi*, and carries the *ton* of his rays in its tail feathers.<sup>5</sup> The arrival and departure of other avian species in the area were also harbingers of seasonal change and the movements of other animals. (Buechel 1970:423; Black Elk in DeMallie 1984:117, 277-278). Nighthawks, which are highly sacred to the Cheyennes and the Lakotas, were the last to arrive in the spring after the grasses started to green and the buffalo began to put on fat and the last to leave in the fall when, like the bison, they began to leave for their winter homes (Dorsey, J. 1894:500; Buechel 1970:444; Moore 1986:182-184).

Both tribes also saw tension between the Sun and the North Wind or Winter (see Chapters Nine and Ten). The Lakotas connected the two in very specific ways, and they did so especially in their understanding of the bison's movements and life cycle. Fire carried the *sicun* of the sun, and when the force of the sun came into contact with certain stones (i.e., flint), it released its energy in fire and heat. As in Lakota conceptions of the workings of the sweatlodge, the interactions between fire, water, and stone release *ni*, the breath of life. In a similar way, as the sun moved higher in the sky during the spring, it triggered birth by releasing new life from the interactions of its rays with stone and water. This solesstial shift around the time of the vernal equinox marked the season of birthing, the actual material emergence of bison and other animals. It also meant the reign of *Waziyata* had ended and the warm southerly winds of *Itokagata* were about to return.

The Sun remained much of the winter with the bison, his companions, in their stone home under the earth. When the Sun filled the sky during the daytime, or when he rose higher in the sky after the vernal equinox, the bison left their sheltered retreats and followed him in their migrations to the open grasslands. As part of this seasonal movement, the Lakotas clearly connected the Buffalo Gap and Wind Cave to each other and attached a shared meaning to both. They specifically associated the Sun's arrival at the Buffalo Gap with the bison's emergence from their underground winter homes in the Black Hills and their return to the grasslands (Looking Horse in Parlow 1983a:42-43; Black Elk, C. 1992; Goodman 1992). They believed that the bison

---

<sup>5</sup> Another associate of the Sun, the porcupine, may have been systematically hunted at this time of the year. Curiously, the quills of the porcupine, like the tail feathers of the eagle, hold the ton of the sun's rays. In Cheyenne and Lakota traditions, this animal is also connected to the Wind Cave/Buffalo Gap area.

followed the movements of their companion the Sun, leaving their cave homes as their friend moved farther north after the vernal equinox. As the Sun rises higher in the sky, and by analogy when a fire is lit, it drives *Waziya* away and back to his underworld abode (Black Elk in Brown 1971:314; Walker 1980:245; Goodman 1992:7).

As discussed before, the Lakotas understood the universe to be in a constant state of motion, revolving around the axis of a horizontal elliptical plane and a vertical one. The intersections of the planes, the points where they cross or connect are powerful positions charged with energy and movement. When the days and seasons change, the planes come together, bringing celestial and subterranean spaces into contact with each other. In the process, powerful forces are released. One of these junctures takes place sometime around the vernal equinox, a time when the sun may have risen through and been aligned with the v-shaped land formation known as the Buffalo Gap. If so, this would have marked a wondrous and joyous event to the people who lived within its reaches, something that could have been readily observed from locations at Wind Cave National Park, atop Elk Mountain, where Wind Cave is situated, or farther north along Rankin Ridge at what is now Lookout Point.<sup>6</sup> Again, it is important to note that the Lakotas marked this event, and still do so, with a special pipe ceremony around the 21st of March. The dates and years when alignments might have taken place here need to be determined, but the fact remains that the Lakotas saw a relationship between the higher movement of the sun in the spring and the migrations of bison to the grasslands through the Buffalo Gap from their home at Wind Cave. According to Arvol Looking Horse (quoted above), the Lakotas traveled through the Buffalo Gap on their sacred journey to Harney Peak, following a path that very likely took some of them across the lands of Wind Cave National Park.<sup>7</sup>

The Cheyennes may have done so as well, but there is nothing in the literature that speaks to this directly. One might hypothesize, however, that the Buffalo Gap<sup>8</sup> area may have been associated with one of their four sacred pillars or mountains, the place where the Southeast Wind, *Hesenota* or (*Esseneta'he*) lived, a *Maheyeno* who symbolized the coming of spring and whose primary messenger was the Sun and his associates the golden eagle and the porcupine. As revealed earlier (Chapters Nine and Ten), this might be the location for the origin of the *Me e no'ist st*, the quill-workers guild among the Cheyennes. Both the Cheyennes and the Lakotas equate porcupine quills and the tail feathers of the eagle with the Sun, the special friend of the bison. By extension, both connect porcupine quills, eagle plumes, and bison hair with the breath of life. The yellow hair of young calves is especially equated with the sun. Here again is another example of the complex synergistic relationships between natural forces, topography, and animals. Also, as discussed earlier (Chapters Nine and Twelve), each of the Cheyennes' sacred winds is associated with a distinct mountain where the spirits of different sets of animals have their homes, which in Cheyenne traditions are also identified with caves.

When the Thunderbirds reawakened later in the spring, many Lakotas traveled towards the home of these sacred birds in the high elevation interiors of the Hills to conduct ceremonial observances and cut lodgepoles as well as gather a host of different plants for medicine and food. In doing so, they followed well-established trails to reach the higher elevations. These included routes that followed Stockade-Beaver Creek on the western side of the Hills, Spearfish Creek in

---

<sup>6</sup> This needs to be tested, of course, and calculations made for the dates when the sun is aligned with the Buffalo Gap and how this has changed over time. Even if there is not an exact alignment today between the timing of the vernal equinox and the date the sun rises through this gap, such a correspondence may very well have existed in the past.

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Black Elk (1992a) writes about the Lakotas following another passageway into the Hills to perform ceremonies at Harney Peak. Given the fact that Lakota camps encircled the Hills, it is likely that local groups entered the Hills at the any one of the gateways closest to their winter camps.

<sup>8</sup> Linea Sundstrom (2002, Personal Communication) needs to be acknowledged for suggesting this possible connection.

the north, and Rapid and French creeks on the east. In the south, there were two common routes: the Red Canyon and Pleasant Valley or Shirttail Canyon trails and another by way of the Buffalo Gap and Beaver Creek, a route that would have taken them across park properties. Some Lakotas continued to follow and camp along the routes across Wind Cave National Park after 1877, when they returned to the Hills each summer to cut their lodgepoles and attend celebrations in local white communities (McAdam 1973; Smith 1973). These were also the routes that some European Americans traveled when they entered the central Hills during the Gold Rush years.

Some local bands also probably traveled to the interior regions along these trails in the fall and winter months to hunt animals whose peltries and hides were at their prime during this time of the year. This would have been particularly true for the Lakotas and Cheyennes whose immediate families were linked by marriage to European American traders and trappers. As revealed earlier, Walter Jenney and Henry Newton described how blazes were set in the Hills' interiors to mark trails when these were covered by snow. Again, the familiar route that crosses Wind Cave National Park along Beaver Creek and its tributaries may have been used for this purpose.

In the late summer, when the bison were well established on their summer grazing grounds outside the Hills, so were the Lakotas and Cheyennes.<sup>9</sup> Until the 1850s, they were able to follow the herds that left the Buffalo Gap to migrate to their grassland feeding grounds east and south of the Hills towards the upper reaches of the White and Niobrara Rivers. When bison began to disappear from these locations, some Lakotas continued to winter in the area of the Buffalo Gap and Wind Cave because abundant supplies of winter game, notably elk and deer, remained there, but now they had to travel to locations west and north of the Hills, or even as far south as Kansas and Colorado, to hunt bison over the summer months. Even after bison were extirpated from the Buffalo Gap-Wind Cave area, the Lakotas still associated the region with their spiritual presence. The bison were still here but no longer in their materialized form. Their spirits, including *Tatanka*, the immortal leader of the animals, continued to reside here, however.

It is worthwhile to reiterate here that over time *Tatanka* and *Wi* appear to have become more significant than *Waziyata* and *Waziya*, as guardians of bison movements. Although the latter two figures never disappeared from Lakota stories and liturgical texts, their relative positioning in Lakota cosmologies seems to have changed (Dorsey, J 1894:468; Walker 1917:91; Herman, n.d.: Wind Cave National Park). This is particularly apparent in relation to Wind Cave where some of the earliest traditions make explicit connections between the subterranean recesses of the Black Hills and a white, giant figure, while many later stories tell of a white bison bull, which is often the symbol for *Tatanka*. In fact, this cosmological shift may have followed the historical change in the seasons bison were typically hunted. Prior to the widespread adoption of horses and the commercial marketing of their robes, bison were usually hunted in the late fall and early winter through driving techniques at locations with natural enclosures or precipices. In fact, just south of the park is the Sanson Buffalo Jump, where bison were hunted in this manner during

---

<sup>9</sup> As discussed in Chapter Seven, the Black Hills fit into the annual cycles of tribes in a number of different ways. When the Lakotas and Cheyennes wintered along the Missouri River, they approached the Hills during the seasons of communal bison hunting from late summer to late fall. Since bison hunts took place on the grasslands surrounding the Hills, tribal parties would have entered them only for special kinds of procurement, such as lodgepole collection and bear hunting. Similarly, in later years, when bands wintered at agencies located on the White or Platte rivers, they generally entered the Hills for specialized purposes from the late spring to the late fall. Those whose summer bison hunting grounds were located in the Powder-Tongue River country often stayed at locations in and around the Hills when they traveled back and forth from their winter settlements at the agencies. These travels generally took place in the spring and the fall. The groups, however, who wintered in and around the Hills left their reaches in the summer months to hunt on the open plains.

prehistoric times. By the early nineteenth century, the customary time of the year to hunt bison was the late summer and early fall when the herds congregated on the open plains at locations outside the Black Hills. After 1850, bison were no longer even present in sizable numbers on the eastern side of the Black Hills and in the vicinity of Wind Cave.

When bison were nearly extinguished on the northern plains, Lakotas and Cheyennes believed that they had not died out but had simply returned to their underground cavern homes from which they would reemerge someday to repopulate the earth's surface. From a Lakota perspective, this followed a perfectly natural part of the bison's short-term and long-range cycles, in which their numbers and locations fluctuated with climatic changes in the region -- a fact attested to in the archaeological and historical record of the Great Plains (Clow 1995:259-262; Isenberg 2002:27). Again, when bison were reintroduced in the Black Hills at Wind Cave National Park in 1913, this event probably did not go unnoticed, nor would it have been unexpected. After all, Wind Cave was a major portal to and from their underworld home, and so logically, this would be the place they would first reappear. This event was certainly consistent with tribal beliefs, and it may have even reaffirmed the conviction that Wind Cave was the origin home of the bison. Nor is it fortuitous that some Lakotas would link the story of their own emergence to this particular cave since they saw their own identity and origin as closely tied to the *Pte Oyate*, the Buffalo Nation. Like their bison progenitors, many Lakotas returned every winter to the sheltered recesses of the Hills. Winter was the season when tribes were the most sedentary and when the earth was at rest, covered with a blanket of snow and ice that took on appearances similar to the crystalline formations inside caves, the home of the first immortal buffalo man, *Waziya*, and his grandson, *Waziyata*, the North Wind, who directed the movements of the bison and their close human relatives (See Chapters Ten and Fourteen).

Besides bison, many other animals are associated with the lands that now make up Wind Cave National Park. Indeed, one could argue that all of the animals have a connection to this region, insofar as they gathered here for the Great Race whose outcome determined the nature of animal and human relations. However, as pointed out in the last chapter and also in Chapter Ten, the animals of greatest significance in this story are those who sided with humans, notably the magpie and crow. Both of these birds are closely linked to bison in Lakota and Cheyenne traditions because they were able to tell humans the whereabouts of the large herds.<sup>10</sup> The coyote and wolf were also allied with humans in the Great Race, and both of these carnivores are also linked with bison. In Lakota cosmologies, all four of these species share with the bison a special connection to the north wind. These animals were closely associated with *Waziya*, probably because their own movements were dictated by the migrations of the bison on whose meat they also depended. The wolf plays an important role in the Lakotas' emergence story as an accomplice of *Iktomi* who enticed *Tokahe* and other humans to leave their underground home at Wind Cave. In Cheyenne traditions, wolves and coyotes occupy highly revered positions because they are seen as the sacred messengers of the *Maiyun* (see Chapter Ten). In the early twentieth century, wolves were extirpated from their homes in the area of Wind Cave National Park through a systematic policy of extermination by local ranchers and federal agencies, and no attempts have been made to reintroduce them to the area where they were once very plentiful.

In the early half of the nineteenth century, Wind Cave National Park and its surrounding environs, including the Buffalo Gap and Hot Springs, remained ideal locations for winter settlement because of their easy access to game, notably, bison, elk, deer, and pronghorn. The

---

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, there are a host of birds that have special associations with bison in Lakota traditions, and some of them are named after the bison, such as *Pte gopeca* [Northern Harrier], *Ptehin 'ciccila* [Killdeer], *Pteya' hpa* [Cowbird], and *Pte'gaglouca* [grasshopper sparrow].

region offered other necessary amenities, including access to good shelter, wood, fresh water, and even forage for small herds of horses. Even in later years, when bison were extirpated from the Black Hills, this area remained rich in game until European Americans reduced local game populations in their sport, subsistence, and commercial hunting. After 1874, when European Americans began to settle this region, they soon came to recognize the advantages of the area's milder winter climate, fine grasses, and potable waters. They homesteaded along the nearby Fall River and along Beaver and Highland creeks, and they ran their cattle and horses on the open range that covered park properties until this use was prohibited. They also gathered timber and plant foods in the area and hunted here, and it is probably not a coincidence that most of their stories about Wind Cave and its discovery involve hunters and hunting too. Indeed, European American ranchers who settled here tended to fare better at this location during the years of severe blizzards than some of their comrades who settled in the grasslands outside the Hogback (see Chapters Six and Seven).

## **II. THE SEASONS OF PLANT AND MINERAL LIFE**

While the Black Hills were unquestionably associated with the movement of local animal populations, they were also distinguished by their plant life, which included many species that never died over the winter months. The year-round greenery of the Hills' abundant and concentrated stands of lodgepole pines, ponderosas, cedars, sages, spruces, and kinnikinick must have underscored the idea that this region had powers to perpetually renew and regenerate life. Kinnikinick or bearberry, the gift of a spirit wolf, comes from the same direction as the North Wind and the bison, and it was a vital ingredient in the tobacco mixtures that local tribes used when smoking the pipe to carry their messages to the spirits and *Wakan Tanka* or *Ma'heo*. Trees in the pine family are also identified with the Winter Man, and as indicated before, the name *Waziya* can be translated to mean "toward the pine,"<sup>11</sup> an association that no doubt underscored this spiritual figure's immortality. The notion that the Hills embodied immortal forces and spirits is a long-standing one that, at least in terms of the written record, extends back to the mid-nineteenth century. This association no doubt imbued the Black Hills with their reputation for providing tribal people the animal, plant, and mineral resources necessary to maintain and regenerate their own health, and it is probably the principal reason why the Hills remain a preferred site for the collection of many plants used in tribal healing today.

Like animals, plants follow seasonal cycles. The ripening of plants, according to specific seasons, also influenced when and where local tribes moved their locations in any given year. The time around the summer solstice, for example, marked a short window of opportunity for identifying and gathering the wild turnips that grew in abundance at various locations along the Race Track and in the Foothills, including areas of Wind Cave National Park. The early part of summer, from June to July, was the season for harvesting different varieties of fruit, including strawberries, chokecherries, serviceberries, and golden currants. A large number of medicinal plants reach their potency at this time of the year too, and many of these were only found in the Hills. The Wood lily (*Cilium philadelphicum*), which grows at Wind Cave National Park and is not found on the surrounding grasslands, is one of the medicinal plants used by the Lakotas.

The early months of summer were also the time of the year the Lakotas traveled long distances to reach the interiors of the Hills to secure their lodgepoles, an activity widely

---

<sup>11</sup> In the western plains of South Dakota, the only dense stands of pine were located on the precipices of high elevation formations like the Black Hills, Slim Buttes, and the Cave Hills. Some of these areas are also associated with stories of the old man of winter, *Waziya*.

acknowledged and reported in historic sources. While most reports document this activity at locations farther north along Spring and Rapid creeks or near the Central Prairies, some of the higher elevation locations at Wind Cave National Park may have been used for this purpose as well. In fact, Luther Standing Bear (1975:16-17) wrote about the processing of ponderosa pine for lodgepoles in the vicinity of the Buffalo Gap. Whether or not lodgepoles were procured regularly on park properties, two major trails, one along the Race Track and the other along Beaver Creek, led tribal parties to locations where lodgepoles were taken in the interiors and where other kinds of plant procurement and ceremonial activity took place in the late spring and early summer.

Other plants, including wild plums, do not ripen until the late summer when most tribal groups were camping in the grasslands near the large herds of bison. Yet, some berries and species of nuts are not ready for picking until the fall, the time when some bands began to return to the Hills for specialized procurement activities and/or to establish their winter campsites in and around the Hills, including areas near Wind Cave National Park. In fact, the Lakotas harvest re-dosier dogwood only in the fall and winter months after its stems turn red.

Many of the most important food and medicinal plants for the Lakotas and Cheyennes grow in the neighborhood of Wind Cave National Park (see Chapter Eleven; Appendix B). Even though the vast majority are found in other locations, it can be suggested that those located near Wind Cave, along the Race Track, and on the *Tatanka makalpeya*, “the Stomping Grounds of the Bison,” are imbued with special potencies and symbolic significance. Again, the Lakotas believe that bison, which are the patrons of healing and herbal medicine, eat plants that are especially healthy and beneficial. The Lakotas and Cheyennes carefully observed the browsing and grazing habits of local animals. They not only connected specific species of plants to the animals who typically consumed them or took shelter in the areas they commonly grew, but they also believed that the plants held the *ton* or spiritual potency of the animals who were associated with them. The fetid marigold, common around the prairie dog towns of Wind Cave National Park, is associated with the powers of the animal on whose lands it grows, and it is considered a potent herbal remedy. Also located in Wind Cave National Park is the groundplum milkvetch [*Astragalous crassicaarpus*] or *pteta tawote* [buffalo food], which begins to blossom at the time of the spring equinox in March and it is a highly valued food plant that is associated with the nutritious properties of the bison who ate it.

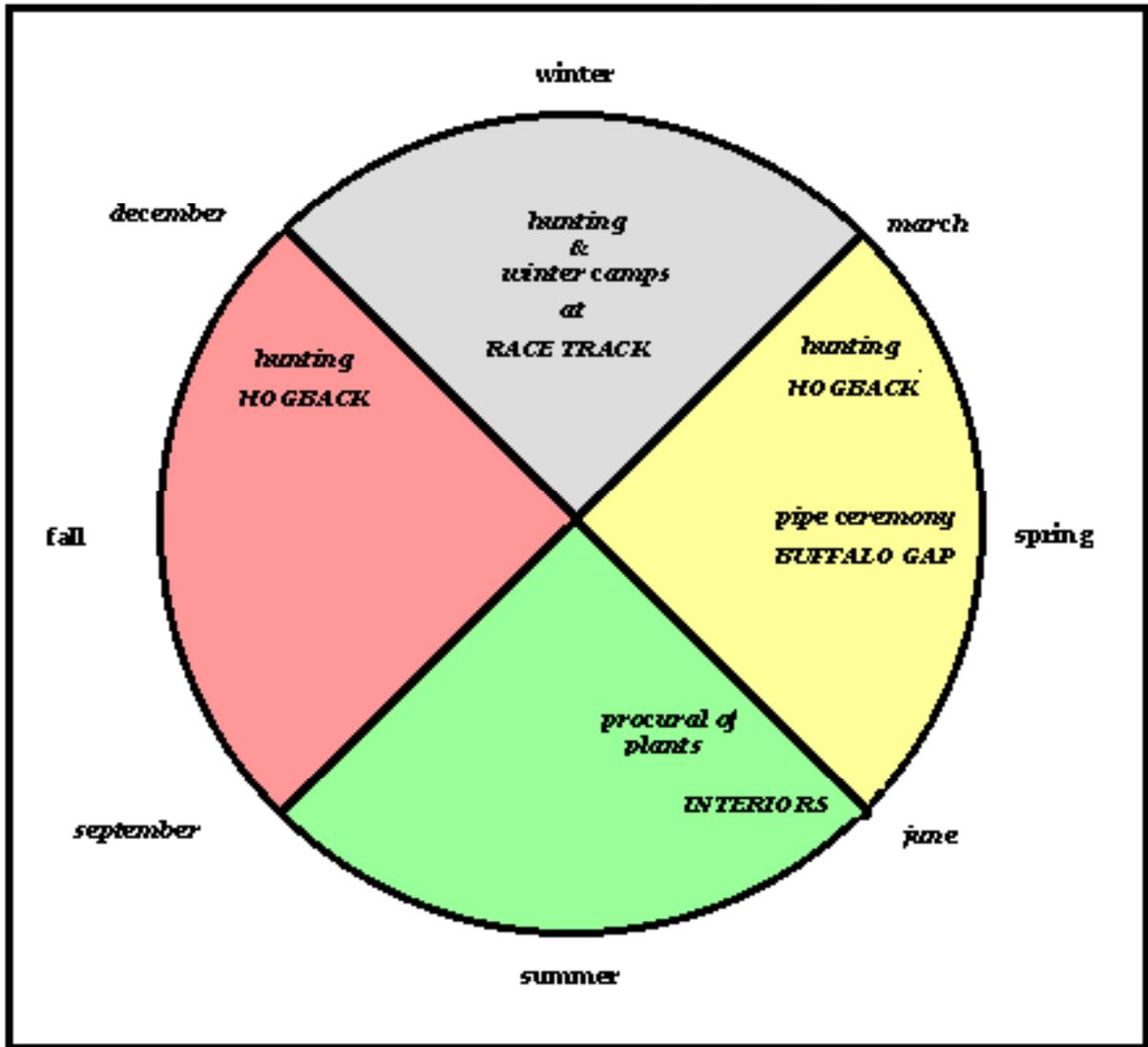
It can also be suggested that the Wind Cave area and other locations in and around the Hills were singled out for plant collection because of the great variety of species located here. Many of the plants the Lakotas and Cheyennes depended upon were widely scattered on the surrounding plains, rarely appearing in the same concentrations as found in the Hills. The Black Hills, as Joseph Black Elk (in Kadlecek and Kadlecek 1981:81) once remarked, were indeed a vast supermarket where just about everything the Lakotas and Cheyennes required to provision, shelter, heal, and enhance themselves could be found. It is little wonder that after the Hills were seized by the U.S. government in 1877, the Lakotas and Cheyennes continued to return here to collect valued plants and minerals used in their medicines and ceremonies, even traveling to the area from locations as far away as present day Oklahoma.

The times when plants blossomed or bore fruit were also associated with the developmental cycles of animals and other plants, often signaling to tribes when they needed to move and shift their productive activities. The pasqueflower was an important medicine that bloomed at the time of the spring equinox, and its rebirth, which coincided with the season when newborn calves arrived, was celebrated in song and ritual among many of the tribal nations who lived in and around the Black Hills. Its appearance also marked the time tribes started to break up their winter

camps and move to other locations in and outside the Hills as they began to carry out the productive activities of the new season. Bearberry was another plant whose leaves were picked for tobacco at the time of the vernal equinox and the birthing of bison calves.

No matter what season groups were in the Hills, they clearly sought out local springs in the area either for drinking water or for healing. The thermal waters just south of Wind Cave National Park at Hot Springs were widely used by the Cheyennes and the Lakotas. There is abundant archaeological evidence of campsites in the vicinity of these springs, and this is one area where Lakotas and Cheyennes were reported to return on a continuing and recurring basis

**FIGURE 30. Seasonal Cycle of Use  
at Wind Cave National Park and Neighboring Locations**



after 1877. While their reverence for and use of these thermal waters is the best-documented, other springs have cultural significance too. Springs that emerge out of bluffs and rock outcroppings are commonly associated with the spiritual homes of Little People in Lakota and Cheyenne

traditions and also with the Double-Woman of the Lakotas, who is an important figure associated with excellence in quillwork. Any site of this order is bound to have spiritual significance and use, and, again, it would not be surprising to learn of such places inside the boundaries of Wind Cave National Park.

While Lakotas and Cheyennes were in the area to draw on the healing properties of the thermal waters at Hot Springs, some no doubt used it as an occasion to travel to nearby areas, including the lands of Wind Cave National Park, to hunt, gather plants and collect mineral resources. Indeed, prior to the acquisition of trade metal and European-made tools, such as axes and awls, the Black Hills would have been a prime location to acquire rock and mineral suitable for manufacturing and ceremonial use. Two locations near Wind Cave National Park, Battle Mountain and Flint Hill, were important areas to quarry flint used in the making of arrow points, and several archaeological sites on park properties also reveal quarrying activity.

The gypsum and red clay deposits found along the Red Valley are explained in Cheyenne and Lakota traditions as originating in the Great Race between the animals and humans, and both play a significant role in their ceremonial observances, including the Sun Dance (see chapters Eleven, Fourteen, Appendix C). Gypsum is also the “Sun Arrow” that gave birth to Stone Boy in Cheyenne traditions. This mineral is particularly intriguing because the Lakotas and Cheyennes appear to have understood its appearance and connection to caves in ways that mirror modern-day interpretations in the field of geology. Given their names for it, the Lakotas and Cheyennes clearly had knowledge of gypsum’s properties, especially its ability to absorb and release moisture and its transformative properties under fire and the sun. In the geological history of Wind Cave, for example, gypsum played a critical role both above and below ground, creating and filling fractures in the surrounding limestones that set the stage for the cave’s evolution and its unusual boxwork formations (Pisarowicz 2001o:2). The Lakotas seem to have connected the calcite crystals found in gypsum to what appeared inside caves and to ice, while the Cheyennes connected them to frost and hailstones. The Lakotas believed that these crystals were the material out of which the Creator molded the first buffalo *qua* humans.<sup>12</sup> Crystalline stones gathered by Lakotas were known to have healing properties and were capable of holding the *sicun*, the immaterial potentialities of spirits. In fact, there is one report of Lakotas making requests for these stones at Wind Cave in the early part of the twentieth century. Most translucent crystalline stones, including the ones ants bring to the earth’s surface, are believed to have special powers. The Cheyennes imagined the white streaks of gypsum along the Red Valley as the remains of the froth issuing from the lead buffalo’s mouth as she careened around the Hills during the Great Race. At many places along the Race Track, gypsum dissolves into sink holes and crevices, connecting the earth’s surface with the underworld. Quite possibly, Cheyennes and Lakotas may have seen the ribbon-like gypsum formations along the Race Track as sun trails the bison followed when they returned to and emerged from their cavern homes underneath the Black Hills. The Lakotas, however, took this one step further and associated the crystalline structures with the spiritual figures who embodied the sacred potency of winter,<sup>13</sup> its winds, snow, and ice, notably,

---

<sup>12</sup> Intriguingly, a number of speleologists have advanced theories in recent years that trace the origins of life to caves. Researchers are now finding that caves have complex microbial formations, and some are starting to link these formations with the possibility of life on other planets (Harrington 2002:69-75). Obviously, the Lakotas and Cheyennes had some understanding of this possible connection when they envisioned the birth of Stone Boy from a stone made of selenite or when they proposed that the first humans were formed from the crystalline formations in caves.

<sup>13</sup> This is also consistent with their ideas about water being a fundamental medium by which medicines are transported. In its frozen form, water is saved and stored until it is released by heat, transforming itself into its liquid form or steam. Gypsum has some of these properties too, when heated it liquefies and could have been seen as an especially suitable medium for preserving spiritual essences.

*Waziya* and *Waziyata* whose home was located, in some Lakota traditions, at Wind Cave.

Soils brought up to the earth's surface by badgers, prairie dogs, and voles, especially at locations linked to bison, have considerable cultural significance. These soils are believed to hold the purifying properties of the deep earth, and they are closely associated with ideas of regeneration and renewal, notably the emergence of corn, bison, and people from the underworld. Lakotas and Cheyennes view the prairie dogs as cultivators, animals whose actions set the stage for the growth of plants that humans and bison depend upon (Anderson, R. 1958; Moore, J. 1974:164; Standing Bear 1988:158-159). Instead of seeing the areas these animals inhabit as having a negative impact on the environment, a common perception among European Americans who historically made every effort to destroy the tunnels these animals created and the animals themselves, they are looked at positively as having properties necessary for regenerating the soil and producing grasses and plants with nutritive and therapeutic properties. In fact, some recent scientific research has revealed that prairie dog towns actually aerate the earth and create ecological conditions conducive to the growing of certain native grasses and plants. Again, the Lakotas and the Cheyennes clearly recognized and respected these relationships, even though they understood and explained them in different terms (see Chapter Eleven).

If we take the word "science" to mean, as it does in its original and broadest sense, a systematic body of knowledge, then we must acknowledge that the Lakotas and Cheyennes had a specific kind of scientific understanding of their environment and the Black Hills in particular. This understanding was based on careful observation, an awareness of recurring associations between different phenomena, and a tacit recognition of the forces and processes underlying the life forms -- animal, plant, and mineral -- that made up the Black Hills. Different from European American approaches, where science typically separates and isolates the region's life forms into distinct and differentiated phenomena, such that bison, caves, and winds are discussed in largely independent discourses (i.e., zoology, geology, and meteorology), the Lakotas and Cheyennes recognize these elements as interconnected in processes where beginnings and endings are an inherent part of a singular, cyclical, and circular unity. Whereas European American forms of science reduce these phenomena to their material elements and forces, denying the existence of any spiritualized dimension, the Lakotas and Cheyennes see the materialized appearances of phenomena as manifestations of their spiritualized potentialities. From their perspectives, the Black Hills are not made up of inanimate rocks and minerals or depersonalized plants and animals. Instead, their elements, winds, animal nations, plant communities, and mineral formations have agency; they are intertwined in one another's existence in such a way that each has the capacity to stand for the other, speak on behalf of the other, and indeed become the other because of their shared spiritual potentialities. Bison, juncos, wolves, gypsum, dogwood, bearberry, winter, snow, the North Wind, and the area of Wind Cave National Park embody common potentialities that differentiate them from the potentialities embodied in blacktail deer, slate, dragonflies, swallows, hawks, thunder, the West Wind, and the Harney Peak region.

The incredible diversity of the Black Hills' various life forms made them a culturally significant and sacred place to the tribal nations who lived within their reaches. The Hills contained examples of most of the natural resources known to these tribes, representing not only all seven tiers of the Cheyennes' universe but also the seven universal elements of the Lakotas'. They also embodied the Four Directions, Winds, or Pillars (Mountains) of the Cheyenne and Lakota worlds. The area of Wind Cave was especially connected to the North Wind, the bison, and the breath of life in Lakota traditions, while the Buffalo Gap may have been linked to the Southeast Wind, the Sun, and fire in Cheyenne cosmologies. In sum, the Hills contain the whole and "heart of everything that is;" they are a sentient and conscious presence, a living entity that quintessentially reveals and expresses the principles of cosmic singularity.

### **III. LANDSCAPES AND CEREMONIAL CYCLES**

Many tribal nations in the northern plains kept star maps that were coordinated with significant landforms in the areas they lived and traveled (Chamberlain 1982; Goodman 1992; McCleary 1997). Not surprisingly, for those Lakotas and Cheyennes who remained among the Black Hills, it was distinctive landforms like the Buffalo Gap, Bear Butte, Inyan Kara Mountain, Harney Peak, and Bear Lodge Butte that were coordinated to the position of the sun and the movement of the stars, helping to mark the seasons in their annual rounds and determine where people should stay and travel at particular points in time (Schlesier 1987:15, 25, 83-87, 104-105; Goodman 1992:12-13). Springs and openings to caves set inside or in proximity to mountains were especially significant because they revealed locations where the nadir of the earth in the north and the zenith of the sky in the south come together. The points where earth and sky meet are highly regarded and considered especially sacred because they concentrate and channel the forces and powers of the universe. These portals exist throughout the plains, but one of the largest concentrations is associated with the Black Hills. The area of Wind Cave/Buffalo Gap represents one of the landscapes where this earth/sky juncture takes place.

Springs and caves were significant because these were places that revealed the interactions between stone and water that were understood to produce *ni*, the breath of life. Like the bison, stone stands for the universe. As Wallace Black Elk (and Lyon 1990:51) writes in reference to the stone bowl of a pipe, "The buffalo gave his life so we could wear his robe. His blood sifted into the ground and became stone. The stone represents the universe. It represents the woman." It is not hard to envision how, by extension, this fundamental understanding was applied to the Black Hills as a whole. In Lakota and Cheyenne traditions, the stone mass of the Black Hills constitutes a hierophany of subtle yet immense proportions. The highest regions and central granitic core of the Hills are typically associated with stories of sky figures, thunderbirds, and owls. The central area is enclosed by a series of distinct, concentric geologic formations with the Race Track standing out as the most prominent circle. This depression separates the interiors from the Hogback and the surrounding grasslands along the Cheyenne River. Reading tribal stories associated with the topography of the Hills proper, it can be argued that they represent different stages in the life cycle. The innermost circle is the place where the sky and earth come together, mediated by the fertility of the thunders whose actions bring about the conception of new life that is incubated in the vast cavern formations underneath the Black Hills. Here, life emerges from its spiritual form at the openings of caves and springs to take on its physical shape. The Race Track and the adjoining Hogback can be seen as transitional zones, the liminal, betwixt and between spaces where the process of materialization undergoes its completion. It is here that the merger of spirituality and materiality is finalized in the birthing and nursing of newborn bison calves. The outlying grassland and river areas represent the places where life undergoes its maturation and growth. Once completed, it returns to its source or origin in the underworld and sky. The interiors of the Hills, associated with owl figures, symbolize death, but these same areas also signify beginnings with the arrival of the thunderbirds. Together, they signify the cosmic singularity, the inter-connectedness of life and death<sup>14</sup>.

In this schemata, the outlier formations, such as Bear Butte, Bear Lodge Butte, and Inyan Kara Mountain, stand apart from the reproductive structure that symbolizes the formation of the Black Hills proper. For the Lakotas, these symbolically constitute the head of a bison as opposed to its body. The first two landforms are connected to stories of bears and events focused

---

<sup>14</sup> Linea Sundstrom (1990) alludes to this life cycle model in her exhaustive work on rock art in the southern Hills, but she does not fully develop its metaphorical implications.

predominantly on healing and spiritual renewal. Just as the bear stands outside Lakota classifications of most other animals, so do the two sites symbolically associated with them. In Cheyenne ceremonial traditions, Bear Butte, as represented in the Lone Tipi, stands apart from the Black Hills represented by the circular dance enclosure of the Animal Dance and the Sun Dance. For the Cheyennes, Bear Butte is the original creation site which guards and stewards regenerative processes in the Black Hills and the surrounding plains.

In another tradition, which the Cheyenne and Lakota share, a human man marries a Buffalo Woman whose people live underneath the earth and consume human flesh. Ultimately, the Buffalo People have a race against each other in their human and bison forms at the Race Track to determine which of them will be the hunter and the prey. It is through the death and blood of the bison that human life is born and perpetuated, as in Little Cloud's story of a mysterious event that took place at the Buffalo Gap. The place and the event are one. The bison are not only born out of the Black Hills, but they are the Hills. Quoting Nicholas Black Elk (from Brown 1992: 13), this land, "the heart of everything that is," is synergistically united with the bison, the "totality of all that is." Both the Black Hills (the "Head Chief of the Land" in Red Cloud's words) and the bison (the "Chief of the Animals" according to Black Elk) are situated within a circle that is mirrored in the sky in a constellation known by the Lakota as the Race Track, *Ki inyanka ocanku*, or the Sacred Hoop, *Cangleska wakan*. Inside this celestial circle is another constellation, *Tayamni*, a figure that represents an animal with stars forming the outline of its ribs, backbone, and tail (see Chapter Fifteen).

In yet another Lakota narrative, the winds, *Tate*, and his sons, the direct descendants of *Taku Skanskan*, bring movement and order to life-giving processes within the sacred circle that one of the earth's first born creatures, *Waziya*, creates. His grandson, the North Wind, *Waziyata*, governs the movements that bring "breath" and the continuing rebirth of the *Pte Oyate*, the Buffalo people, from their subterranean home at Wind Cave. Also, in the story cycle of *Wicalhpi Hinhpaya* [Falling Star], told by Nicholas Black Elk, different parts of the Black Hills are united through the hero's travels, which transverse locations from the Race Track where *Waziya*'s offspring survives in a cave to the high interiors where the Thunderbirds breed their young. This is also true in the Cheyenne versions of the Falling Star. In a number of Lakota stories and liturgical texts, Wind Cave, the cave of *Waziya*, represents the nadir of the Hills (or universe) and the region around Harney Peak, the home of the Thunders, is the zenith (see Chapter Fifteen).

The synergistic unity of the Black Hills with its animals, plants, minerals, landforms, and stars is also recreated in the Sun Dance, which in Cheyenne traditions is seen by some as a dramatization of the Race Track Story.<sup>15</sup> Many aspects of the Cheyenne Sun Dance symbolically represent the physical environment of the Black Hills, and this may apply to the Lakota Sun Dance too. In reference to the Lakota Sun Dance, Arthur Amiotte (1987:78) writes: "Perhaps in their minds they are returning to that mythical time at the beginning of the world, to the sacred lodge of the *Pte Oyate* (Buffalo People, the ancestors of the Lakotas) that existed originally underneath the world, to a recreation of that sacred spot through which the Buffalo People came into this world, and the other beings with them." For many Lakota people, today, that sacred spot is the region of the Buffalo Gap, the Race Track, and Wind Cave (see Chapters Twelve and Fifteen).

Like the bison's progenitor, the Black Hills, the Sun Dance generates its power by recreating an *axis mundi* that brings together the forces of the sky, earth, and the four directions. Through

---

<sup>15</sup> Remember that the Lone Tipi in the Cheyenne Sun Dance, which represents Bear Butte, stands outside the lodge circle where the regeneration actually takes place.

its performance, the Sun Dance generates renewal and simultaneously *wakan* as an ultimate state of goodness and well-being. Indeed, the association of the Hills' high elevation interiors with the thunders recalls John Moore's apt description (1996:225-226) of the Cheyenne Sun Dance as the recreation of an "enormous fertility structure" that makes up a spring thunderstorm on the plains. In the performance of Sun Dances by Lakotas and Cheyennes, the sacred tree holds the nest of the thunderbird in its fork, possibly mimicking the nest believed to exist in the Black Hills near Harney Peak. The base of the tree is placed in a ritually prepared hole that is fed with buffalo fat and other offerings, representing the underworld and caves. The tree, as an *axis mundi*, ties the two together in a manner not too dissimilar to the way these tribes understand the relationship between the high reaches and underground worlds of the Black Hills (see Chapters Twelve and Fifteen). Although the first Sun Dances performed by the Lakotas and Cheyennes are widely believed to have taken place near Sundance Mountain on the northwestern side of the Hills, both tribes have stories which associate the origin of the dance among the bison with either the Buffalo Gap or a cave, which can be easily read as Wind Cave. The area of Sundance Mountain and the Buffalo Gap share certain geological similarities. At both locations, seams of gypsum dissolve into sink holes and crevices (one of the building blocks in cave formation) that might be conceptualized as openings to the underworld, places where the spirits of bison returned and emerged, following the trails of gypsum around the Race Track.

The Race Track is another landform with powerful synergistic imagery that embraces the animals, the corrals in which they were traditionally hunted, and the Sun Dance. Linea Sundstrom (2001) has written about the symbolism of the Race Track in relation to another Cheyenne ceremony, the Animal Dance or the *Massaum*. She convincingly shows how this geological depression, with the Buffalo Gap as its eastern opening, could have easily conjured up the image of a hunting corral with its chute facing east, and she also provides evidence for the use of this and nearby areas, notably Cache Butte, for impounding antelope, bison, and other ungulates. In the older ceremonies for bison hunting, which employed the use of a corral, there were special rituals in which a spiritually gifted leader, known commonly as a Buffalo Caller, enticed the bison to the spot where they would be driven into a natural or human-made enclosure. Among the Lakotas, bison callers used special stones to attract the bison that were no doubt intended to remind them of their place of origin in the rocks and the mountains. These were probably gypsum or another crystalline mineral found in or near caves. Among both tribes, the large wing feathers of eagles were often used in summoning bison and other animals -- an association that probably linked the eagle with the bison's special friend, the Sun (see Chapters Nine, Ten, Fifteen). The Race Track is explicitly linked in Cheyenne beliefs to the Sun Dance, and it is present, at least implicitly, in Lakota traditions and practices too.

The origin of certain sweatlodge ceremonies is also associated in Lakota and Cheyenne traditions to a cave in the southern Hills, and in stories associated with various tribal culture heroes including *Tokahe*, *Motseyoef*, Falling Star, Stone Boy, and Blood Clot Boy. Caves and sweatlodges are integrally connected to each other as representing the womb of mother earth, places where life is regenerated. For both tribes, there were close associations between bison, breath, healing, and renewal, and there were specialized sweatlodges run by people who had spiritual partnerships with bison. Indeed, sweatlodge ceremonies are understood to replicate the life generating processes that are known to be associated with certain caves in the Black Hills, and some of these have been held at locations above the cave in recent times (Albers and Kittelson 2002).

Among the Lakotas, there is also special pipe ceremony, which takes place at the Race Track celebrating the arrival of the newborn buffalo calves and initiating a ritual pilgrimage into the Black Hills every seven years. Importantly, the origin of many religious observances among the

Cheyennes and Lakotas are connected to stories that are set in geographic locations that are implicitly or explicitly tied to the Race Track and the Buffalo Gap/Wind Cave area, as well as a host of other sacred landscapes in and around the Black Hills. It is not surprising that so much of their religious life has its foundations in this region since this is a place where diverse life forms come together in a distinct geological setting -- a location that reveals and teaches people the complex workings of the universe (see Chapter Nine and Twelve). When the Black Hills are understood as an immense reproductive structure, nurturing new life forms in their shadows and feeding the surrounding grasslands with their waters and minerals, it is easy to appreciate the meaning of Red Cloud's allusion to the Hills as the "Head Chief of the Land."

#### **IV. TRIBAL ALLIANCES AND MOVEMENTS**

There is genre of stories in Lakota and Cheyenne traditions about encounters between a human man and a buffalo woman that is associated very specifically with the Black Hills and Wind Cave National Park. These stories take on many different narrative forms, and they are found among many other tribes in the region as well. Most of the "Buffalo Woman" stories, as they are commonly called, share fundamental motifs, but they also exhibit important variations. In other words, they appear to be part of a pan-regional storytelling tradition in which certain characters and plots speak to a common stock of symbols that have been retrofitted in various ways to specific tribal histories and landscapes. The stories can be read on a number of different levels too.

On one level, and as told in Cheyenne and Lakota traditions, these stories reveal important truths about social relationships (Moore 1974:197, 198; Rice 1994). Not only do they refer to some of the tensions inherent in the relations between a man's consanguinal and affinal kinspeople, but they also speak to some of the contradictions implicit in relations between people of different nations, associations that are not only fraught with strife and hostility but also embody opportunities for peaceful exchange and enduring partnerships. They tell how people gain entry into nations and territories other than their own through conflict as well as cooperation. Some of the Cheyenne versions of the story are explicitly connected to the story of the Great Race and the Buffalo Gap, and also to the origins of the Sun Dance and their quillworkers' guild. Several Lakota renditions of the story are linked to Wind Cave, and at least one Lakota version of the story is associated with the Sun Dance (see Chapters Twelve and Fifteen).

Most of the stories told by the Lakotas and Cheyennes are about relationships that come about through travel and movement into the lands of another nation.<sup>16</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, the famous Lakota storyteller, Left Heron, related several detailed versions of the story. In the rendition told to Ella Deloria (1978:86-89; also in Rice 1994:67-126), the hero, a young man, is the son of *Waziya* (the Old Man) and *Wakanka* (the Old Woman), who also appear as the original *Pte Oyate* in George Sword's stories of *Tate* and his five sons and the emergence of *Tokahe* from a cave. The young man first marries a yellow-haired corn wife from the east and then takes a black-haired buffalo woman from the west as a spouse. The buffalo wife leaves him with their son, and the hero follows them to their cavern home in the mountains where he eventually remains among the Buffalo People, who can be seen to signify the nations near the Black Hills. The corn wife is abandoned when the hero takes up his new life, and she can be seen to symbolize the associations of the Lakotas with the Arikara villages and their

---

<sup>16</sup> As revealed previously, some of the stories found in Cheyenne and Arapaho traditions involve an elk wife and a bison wife. Others, as among the Lakota, include a corn wife and a buffalo wife. And in still more versions, the story speaks only about a buffalo wife.

dependence on them for a trade in corn.<sup>17</sup> This feature of the story mirrors the dilemma the Lakotas would have faced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when deciding whether to live along the Missouri among the neighboring Arikaras and follow a life that included horticulture or one that was given over to the hunting of bison among the Arapahos and other populations farther west. This theme is implicit in many of the Buffalo Wife stories that come from tribal nations who at one time or another practiced horticulture along the Missouri River, and it reflects a basic division in their annual subsistence pursuits between a way of life organized around semisedentary villages and the cultivation of corn and another that entailed the pursuit of bison and other game at some distance away from the villages and their corn fields.

When the hero arrives at the buffalo wife's home, he confronts hostile in-laws who try to deceive and kill him. Ultimately, he slays the Crazy Buffalo, his father-in-law and his domineering mother-in-law, both of whom take humans hostage and consume their flesh. After he slays the killer bison, who could easily signify the hostile Kiowas and Crows the Lakotas confronted when they first ventured into the Black Hills, he is welcomed into the midst of the other peaceable Buffalo People, the friendly Cheyennes and Arapahos, perhaps. Ultimately, he remains in the mountains among the Buffalo Nation, having abandoned his ties to his corn wife and his home in the east. He continues, however, to bring meat, the gift of the Buffalo, to his community of origin.

In the version that Left Heron shared with Ella Deloria (1978:86-89), there are specific clues about the geographic route the hero's movements take. When the young man chases after his buffalo wife and son, he follows a trail that takes him over a desolate country (much like Badlands), after which he crosses a river (possibly the Cheyenne) and rests at a large oak tree (maybe the Council Oak near Hermosa) before coming to the land of the Buffalo People behind a ridge of hills (very likely the Hogback of the Black Hills). In the version shared with James Walker (1917:183-190, 1983:109-117), he is very explicit about the buffalo's home being located in the mountains inside a cave, and in another rendition relating to the origin of the Sun Dance (Walker 1917:212-215), the home of the buffalo people is also in a cave far to the west. Although specific place names are never given, the landscape of his travels mirrors the geography between the Missouri River and the Black Hills, and his descriptions of the cave suggest its location in the buffalo's mountain home, a place later generations of Lakota would identify as Wind Cave.

In the wider scheme of things, it probably does not matter that we give an exact genealogical reckoning of the kinship between the peoples who historically lived in the Hills or reproduce the actual landscape over which the hero traveled.<sup>18</sup> What is significant about the story is that it expresses some of the decisions the Lakotas and other tribal nations faced in making different kinds of adaptations to their neighbors and the landscapes they lived in, especially prior to 1830 when various tribes moved West, temporarily or permanently abandoning their locations along

---

<sup>17</sup> This could refer metaphorically not only to the bison proper but also to a tribe who specialized in bison hunting. One of these was the Arapaho who were known as *Makpiya To* [Blue Cloud] people in Lakota, but coincidentally, they were also known in French sources as the *Gens de Vash* [Buffalo People] (Fowler 2001:860). The Arapaho also have a buffalo woman/wife story, but in their story the other wife is an elk woman, revealing a tension not between the river valleys and the high elevation prairies but rather the grasslands and the mountains (Dorsey and Kroeber 1903:388-403). Unlike the Cheyennes and Lakotas, there is no evidence that the Arapahos ever practiced horticulture or spent any length of time on the Missouri River.

<sup>18</sup> I believe this might be an example of what Raymond Fogelson (1989:133-134) identifies as the kind of history where peoples' movements are not traced through chronologically ordered events but embedded in other kinds of narrative structures or what he calls "non-events."

the bottomlands of the Missouri River to take up a life focused primarily on bison hunting in the region of the domal uplift known as the Black Hills.

At least one thousand years ago, people who practiced horticulture began to settle in the valley of the Missouri River. Within a span of approximately three hundred years, 1000-1300 A.D., the valley was occupied by peoples ancestral to the modern-day Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras. Two to three hundred years later, the Siouan-speaking Poncas and Omahas established settlements on this river as well. In early historic times, all of these populations divided their year between crop raising at the villages along the Missouri and the hunting of bison at upstream locations on this river's various western tributaries. From the early accounts of European Americans and tribal oral traditions, we can deduce that at various points in the prehistories and protohistories of these tribes, some attempted to establish a permanent presence on the upper reaches of waterways fed by the drainage system of the Black Hills. Few of those who continued to practice horticulture remained permanently in the area, unless like the Crows, they abandoned their farming pursuits. No matter how long some of these populations stayed within easy reach of the Hills on a year-round basis, it is clear that all of them traveled to the area for extended periods of time to hunt bison, since ceramic remains associated with various village traditions are found in the region only a short distance from Wind Cave National Park (see Chapter Two).

**TABLE 11. Periods of Tribal Access to the Wind Cave Area**



In the protohistoric era, from 1730 to 1780, two of the horticultural populations from the Missouri, the Poncas and the Arikaras, appear to have been the ones with the strongest links to the southeastern Hills. These two populations intermarried and hunted together during this period, and they were reported at locations on the upper reaches of the Missouri's western tributaries from the Niobrara to the Cheyenne. In their own oral traditions, the Ponca recall hunting and establishing villages on the upper reaches of the White River between 1730 and 1750. They also remember hunting in the Black Hills and knowing of Wind Cave. The Arikaras also have early remembrances and stories of the Black Hills and some of their landforms, including Bear Lodge Butte and Harney Peak, but nothing, at least in the published record, can be specifically tied to the area of the Buffalo Gap or Wind Cave (see Chapter Three).

Two other semihorticultural groups from the valley of the Missouri River, the Mandans and Hidatsas, also had knowledge of the Black Hills preserved in some of their oral traditions, but most of it refers to landscapes in the northern reaches of the Hills. When these tribal nations traveled to the Hills, they usually followed a route by way of the Little Missouri River. There is no historical evidence that they occupied or even hunted in areas south of the main branch of the Cheyenne River. The Crows, an offshoot of the Hidatsas, however, were reported at locations in the southern Hills in later years, but mostly in small groups associated with either the Kiowas or the Arapahos. Or, they were reported in war parties making raids on their Lakota and Cheyenne enemies. Their primary territorial associations with the Black Hills during this period refer to areas on the northern side of the Hills and along the Little Missouri River (see Chapter Three).

In their various travels to the Hills, the semihorticultural populations of the upper Missouri encountered peoples who lived in the region on a year-round basis and whose subsistence economies were focused on the procurement of bison. One thousand years ago and earlier, peoples associated with many different tool assemblages variously known as Besant, Pelican Lake, and Avonlea occupied sites along the major river valleys surrounding the Hills, and most of them spent time inside the Hogback as well. Artifacts associated with these complexes are found at sites scattered throughout the Black Hills, and the knappable material that went into tool-making comes from quarries inside the Black Hills, including those in the neighborhood of Wind Cave National Park, at Battle Mountain, and Flint Hill. Although some scholars have speculated about the ethnic identities of the peoples associated with these tool complexes, there is no evidence that indisputably links any historic tribal inhabitants of the area with its prehistoric residents (see Chapter Two).

Not until the protohistoric era, which began approximately three hundred years ago, is it possible to assign ethnic identities to the peoples of the Black Hills with any degree of certainty. In the southeastern Hills, where Wind Cave National Park is located, there is an impressive body of evidence that links this region to Apache-speaking populations commonly referred to in the historic literature as the Padoucas, and in the archaeological record, as the Dismal River peoples. Some of these people were specialized bison hunters, but many appear to have followed a broader spectrum of foraging strategies and even casual forms of horticulture. All of them used the bow and arrow, and according to some scholars, may very well be descended from peoples associated with the Avonlea complex. In the eighteenth century, they occupied settlements along the South Fork of the Cheyenne River and the upper reaches of the White and Niobrara rivers, and they may have had settlements as far north as the forks of the Cheyenne River just west of the Arikaras on the Missouri. Lithic material from Battle Mountain was uncovered at Dismal River sites now inundated by the Angostura Reservoir. These Apaches were probably among the first to bring horses to the Black Hills at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but fifty years later, Numic-speaking peoples, notably Comanches, Utes, and Shoshones, started to occupy a major role in the region's horse traffic, and in time, some of the Comanches covered areas within easy reach of the

southeastern Hills inhabited by the Padoucas whose name eventually became associated with them (see Chapter Three).

The historical record is unclear about how the territory in the southern Hills, once associated with the Padouca Apaches, came to be linked with the Comanches, but one thing is certain: by the end of the eighteenth century most of the Padoucas had disappeared from the region as a distinct ethnic body. Some appear to have remained, however, as small remnant groups within the ranks of larger tribal nations such as the Comanches and possibly the Arapahos. When Poncas acquired horses sometime around 1740, their oral traditions indicate that they received them from the Padoucas, but it is hard to determine whether they were applying this name to the Apaches or the Comanches. When the Cheyennes moved to the area around 1760, their oral traditions tell of them learning how to tan hides from the Comanches and how to use a specific horse medicine from the Plains Apaches, also known in the historic record as the Gattakas or Kiowa Apaches. In early historic times, these Apaches were reported primarily on the northern and western side of the Hills. They were distinct from the Padoucas, some of whom may have joined forces with them in later years (see Chapter Three).

The years between 1730 and 1760 brought many other populations to the region of the Black Hills, which was rapidly becoming a rendezvous location for northern and eastern tribes to acquire horses from the Apaches and Comanches with active ties to the Spanish Southwest. Whatever their reasons for coming to and staying in the area, we know that three major populations arrived here from Montana during this period, the Kiowas, the Crows, and the Arapahos. In the 1740s, the Kiowas were clearly among the largely unidentified populations that the La Verendrye brothers encountered on the northern side of the Hills. Their own oral traditions confirm this, but they also indicate that by 1760, the tribe was abandoning its territories in the northern reaches of the Hills to take up residence along the South Fork of the Cheyenne River where they remained for the next thirty years (see Chapter Three).

The Arapahos seem to have arrived in the region of the Black Hills about the same time as the Kiowas. Cheyenne traditions reveal that when they first started moving to the northern side of the Black Hills, circa 1750-60, they encountered Arapahos, Kiowas, Apaches, Crows, and Comanches there. Where exactly the Arapahos resided in this region is unclear until the 1790s, when early historic accounts record their presence simultaneously on the headwaters of the Little Missouri River and also along the South Fork of the Cheyenne River. As the Kiowas, Crows, and Arapahos, moved into areas of Apache and Comanche occupation, they appear to have established a presence on all sides of the Hills, following the course of the north and south branches of the Cheyenne River. In time, the newcomers replaced the Apache and Comanche populations as major horse suppliers and trade partners with tribes on the Missouri River. The Crows appear to have become the major trading partner of their relatives, the Hidatsas, while the Kiowas traded primarily with the Arikaras but occasionally with the Mandans. The Arapahos probably divided their trade between various village tribes depending on where they located their winter settlements. Thus, the Arapahos who camped along the Belle Fourche River most likely traded with the Mandans, while the South Fork bands were the probable trade partners of the Arikaras (see Chapter Three).

During the same period, the Cheyennes and possibly a small number of allied Lakotas were arriving in this region from locations in the east. When the Cheyennes began to break away from their villages on the Missouri River and establish permanent settlements on the upper reaches of the Cheyenne River, probably around 1750, they followed the well-established pattern of movement and adaptation associated with other horticultural populations in the region. They planted corn and established villages near the Missouri River and traveled to the upper reaches of

its western tributaries to hunt bison. Over a period of eighty years, 1750 to 1830, the Cheyennes gradually abandoned their ties to the Missouri and permanently occupied areas along the margins of the Black Hills where game, but most especially bison, were plentiful.

By the 1790s, the largest cluster of Cheyennes established their villages at the Forks of the Cheyenne River where most of them remained until the 1820s. Other Cheyennes took up settlements along the South Fork of the Cheyenne River, camping near French Creek and even at locations farther south amidst some of their Kiowa and Arapaho allies. The Cheyennes who lived closest to Wind Cave National Park at this time were probably members of the Wotapio division who were closely aligned with the Kiowas. The Suhtaio and Omisis divisions appear to have pushed some of their settlements south as well, but the vast majority established winter camping locations around the northern edge of the Hills in alliance with the Arapahos and Apaches who lived there. By the time of Lewis and Clark, Cheyenne settlements encircled the Black Hills and were interspersed with those of other tribes who remained or arrived in the region. It was the Cheyennes among whom some of the early French traders lived when they wintered at the Forks of the Cheyenne River and also in the vicinity of French Creek (see Chapter Three).

From the descriptions of early European American observers, it is clear that the Black Hills, including the area of Wind Cave National Park, was an ethnically mixed region in which a variety of different tribes lived together peaceably and shared access to common territorial ranges. Hostilities were evident too. In the south, battles erupted between the Kiowas and the Poncas, and in the north, they engulfed the Crows and the Cheyennes/Arikaras. In 1781, when smallpox swept through the villages on the Missouri River, the locations and trading alliances of local tribes were considerably altered. Many Poncas lost their lives in this epidemic and those who lived no longer had the defensive capacity to maintain their access to hunting grounds in the southeastern Hills against the pressures of the incoming Kiowas and their allies, nor were they able to hold their powerful trading position with the Comanches who began to remain in areas south of the Platte River, abandoning territories within easy reach of the Black Hills. The Arikaras were also devastated by the epidemic, but they were able to retain their access to hunting grounds on the upper reaches of the Cheyenne River for a short period of time through their long-standing ties of friendship and intermarriage with the Kiowas and the Cheyennes (see Chapter Three).

After the 1760s, the Lakotas started to enter this ethnically complex situation in ever-growing numbers. Small groups of Lakotas probably reached the Black Hills as early as the 1760s in association with friends and relatives among the Cheyennes, Arikaras, and Poncas, but it is clear that the greater portion of the Lakota population didn't establish themselves west of the Missouri until after 1781, when the Arikaras and Poncas, weakened by contagious disease epidemics, were no longer able to thwart their movements to the Missouri River and beyond. When Lakota/Dakota people started to settle on the Missouri, some of them took up farming and lived among and intermarried with the village tribes, especially the Cheyennes, Arikaras, and the Poncas. Following an adaptive pattern well-established in the area, the Lakotas situated their winter settlements along the bottomlands of the Missouri River but traveled to the upper reaches of its western tributaries to hunt bison in the summer and fall. Along the Cheyenne, Moreau, and Grand rivers, their movement seems to have met with little resistance. Indeed, the Lakotas appear to have formed close relationships with the northern branches of the Cheyennes and Arapahos, who lived and traveled in this area, aligning with these two tribes and the Arikaras in their wars against the Crows. The northern Lakotas or Soanes, including the Hunkpapas, Sisasapas, Minneconjous, and Itazipcos probably acquired some of their first horses from the northern branches of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Farther south, along the Bad and White Rivers, the Lakotas' movements met with fierce resistance. The southern Lakotas, including the Sicangus

and the Oglalas, reached the Black Hills by way of the Bad and White rivers. Indeed, one story in their oral traditions indicates that the Oglalas acquired their first horses from Cheyennes who lived along the White River and in the vicinity of the southern Hills. These were probably the Wotapio Cheyennes, who had had a long history of intermarriage with the Lakotas/Dakotas and were considered “part Sioux.” It was along the southern front of their movements towards the Black Hills that the Lakotas entered into a major war with the Kiowas that eventually engulfed some of their allies among the Wotapio division of the Cheyennes.<sup>19</sup> This warfare, which is recorded in the oral traditions of the Kiowas and also in the local historical lore of European Americans living in the region of Hot Springs, led to the demise of a major division of the Kiowas and some of their Cheyenne allies, and it brought about the eventual departure of the Kiowas from areas in and around the southern Black Hills. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Kiowas had moved their winter camps and hunting areas to the Platte River, where in later years they were joined by some of the Cheyennes and Arapahos who continued to be aligned with them (see Chapter Three).

As the Kiowas abandoned the southern Hills, many of the Arapahos and some Cheyenne divisions became the dominant populations in this area, and they remained so through the early decades of the nineteenth century when their Lakota allies began to arrive in larger numbers. By the 1820s, most of the Arapahos and some Cheyennes were on the western side of the Hills hunting bison in the country of the Platte River and establishing trade connections with the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches who were now located in areas well south of the Platte River. The 1820s was the decade when the main body of Cheyennes started to leave the forks of the river that bears their name to take up residence on the Platte River. While their movement away from the eastern edge of the Black Hills was influenced by the growing presence of Lakotas in the region, it is also clear that Cheyennes and Arapahos migrated south and west to find better grazing conditions for their expanding horse herds (see Chapter Three). The growing importance of horses in the economies of Plains tribes probably played as much of a role in the migrations of tribes away from the Hills as warfare. Without question, the adoption of the horse greatly expanded the geographic reach of local tribes, allowing them to cover much larger territorial ranges and more diverse habitats in their annual subsistence cycles. It is also clear that horses introduced new mitigating conditions, including the need to find adequate pasturage, and according to tribal oral histories, many bands found better grazing conditions for their horses on lands south of the Platte River. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, there is no question that the Kiowas and the southernmost branches of the Cheyennes and Arapahos had become pastoralists whose lives centered as much around the maintenance of their growing horse herds as it did the hunting of bison. It is also apparent, at least among the Cheyennes, that some bands traveled long distances every year for trade, and in the process, they covered large stretches of territory extending from the Mandan-Hidatsa villages on the upper Missouri River to Spanish settlements in Texas and New Mexico. The long-distance travel associated with the horse traffic continued a pattern that stretched back to the early eighteenth century and that is associated in early historic documents with mixed Apache-Ute-Comanche groups like the Ietans (see Chapters Three, Four, and Seven).

After 1820, there is evidence not only of growing economic diversification and geographic dispersal, but also increasing sociopolitical separations within the ranks of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Most the Arapahos who remained in the north gradually moved their territories to

---

<sup>19</sup> Again, there are many stories in the local histories of Hot Springs that tell of a major battle between the Lakotas and Cheyennes at Battle Mountain southeast of Wind Cave National Park. Although Battle Mountain was a quarrying site not a battleground, there is no question that battles took place between the Lakotas and combined forces of Kiowas and Cheyennes (probably from the Wotapio division) in and around the southern Black Hills in the late eighteenth century.

areas west of the Black Hills along the Platte River and even the country of the Powder River. A few bands of Arapahos, who were intermarried with the Lakotas, remained in reach of the Hills, including one under a leader named Black Bear who wintered mostly on the western side of the Hills in the vicinity of Stockade-Beaver Creek. In the same period, many Cheyennes joined the Arapahos in their westerly movements. Nevertheless, a sizable group of northern Cheyennes remained in the vicinity of the Black Hills until 1877. Most Cheyennes continued to winter along the northern edge of the Black Hills and in the vicinity of Bear Butte. Some of them, including a division known as the *Mazikota*, remained in the southeastern Hills and along the upper reaches of the White River and the south branch of the Cheyenne. They were closely intermarried with the Lakotas. This is probably the group that Francis Parkman placed in the southern Black Hills on his 1849 map, an area that includes Wind Cave National Park (see Chapter Four).

Meanwhile, the southern divisions of the Lakotas, and some of the northern divisions too, were establishing their winter camps at the base of the Black Hills. By the 1820s, most of the Lakotas had abandoned their settlements on the Missouri River and were living on the upper reaches of its western tributaries from the White River in the south to the Grand River in the north. When the Lakotas began to settle amidst the Cheyennes and Arapahos in the country of the Black Hills, they did so at a time when bison were still plentiful in the area. Until the 1840s, some of the Lakotas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes were able to follow the herds of bison that moved between the Race Track and the upper reaches of the White and Niobrara rivers, entering and leaving the Hills by way of the Buffalo Gap. As other tribal nations had done before them, these populations wintered at sites along the Race Track, in some of the Hills' lower elevation valleys, and at various locations along of the upper reaches of the White River and the South Fork of the Cheyenne. Whether they wintered inside or outside the Hogback, many of them were within easy reach of the lands at Wind Cave National Park, a location favorable to the hunting of elk, deer, and other ungulates during the months of winter. These groups no doubt used the trails along Beaver Creek and its tributaries in the late spring and early summer months to reach locations in the interiors where they cut their lodgepoles, gathered plants, and conducted ceremonial observances. They also clearly came to the area to bathe in the thermal waters at Hot Springs, and they may have also collected knappable stone in the area for manufacturing and ceremonial purposes. As reported earlier, much of the area inside the Buffalo Gap was an ideal site for winter camping. It contained good supplies of water and timber, abundant game, and diverse plant and mineral resources. Its sheltered topography, warmer climate, and rich grasses made it an advantageous place to graze small herds of horses too. Not surprisingly, these same conditions made it attractive to European Americans when they started to occupy the region in large numbers after 1878 (see Chapters Four and Seven).

Among the Oglalas and Sicangus, two bands were closely associated with the Wind Cave region of the Hills in the historic record of the 1830s. The *Oyuxpe* [Unloads] were a band of Oglalas and the *Wazazi* [Fringed] comprised a band of mixed Ponca-Sicangu origins that became aligned with the Oglalas in later decades. These were the bands whose winter settlements were located in this area, although Sicangu and Oglala bands that wintered elsewhere accessed the area on a regular basis in the fall, winter, and spring seasons. Even bands that stayed along the Platte River after the 1840s, such as the *Wagluke* [Loafers], a group descended from marriages between the Sicangu and local European American traders, were reported to come to the Hills to hunt elk and gather their lodgepoles.

During the years between 1820 and 1850, the *Mazikota* Cheyennes as well as the *Oyuxpe* and *Wazazi* Lakotas were the band groupings with the closest reported associations to the area where Wind Cave National Park is now located. Some Minneconjous were also reported in this area, especially after 1850. At this point in history, other Lakotas and Cheyennes maintained their

winter camps at a wide variety of locations elsewhere in the vicinity of the Hills, but some were beginning to establish their hunting territories and winter settlements at locations far removed from the area. The second major movement of people away from the Hills in the historic period probably started in the 1840s with the gradual decline of bison herds from the grasslands to the east. Many groups migrated to the Platte River, where some of the area's newly established trading posts were built. It must be noted again that other large game remained abundant in and around the Black Hills until the gold rush era, and these certainly would have been sufficient to provide an adequate subsistence for the bands that remained in their reaches. The region was no longer an optimal location for the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho bands whose livelihoods became more dependent on a traffic in bison hides; these were the groups who were now establishing their locations in regions far beyond the Hills (see Chapters Four and Seven).

By the 1840s, the vast majority of Cheyennes and Arapahos, along with many Lakotas, had left the Black Hills for the countries of the Platte and Powder rivers and remained in these areas throughout much of the year. Some of the Lakotas and Cheyennes who hunted in areas south of the Platte River had little occasion to return to the Black Hills, but some of those who hunted north of the Platte still encamped in the Hills over the winter months. Many of the Cheyennes and Oglala Lakotas, who had moved farther west and north, also continued to make use of the Hills, entering them in the spring and fall as they made their way to and from their trading posts on the Platte and White rivers. Whether or not the Lakotas and Cheyennes still wintered at the base of the Hills at locations between the Race Track and the Cheyenne River, many of them returned to the Hills in the summer from distant locations to cut lodgepoles, to collect medicinal and food plants, and to find mineral materials used in manufacturing and for ceremony. They also came back to the Hills to hold political meetings and to conduct their religious observances, many of which originated at and were identified with various sites in the Black Hills including the regions of the Buffalo Gap, Bear Butte, and Bear Lodge Butte (see Chapters Four, Five, and Seven).

Even after the 1850s, when bison began to disappear from the Platte River region, forcing more Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos to move farther south and north to find them, many bands continued to return to the Black Hills especially during the early summer months. Between 1851 and 1867, there are numerous accounts of bands gathering in the Hills and taking sanctuary there, especially during times of hostile encounters with the U.S. military. Indeed, the diversity and size of the populations who used this area appears to have increased during this period. Notwithstanding the declining presence of bison in the region, the supplies of other game and also plant resources remained adequate to support fairly large concentrations of people in the area during different seasons of the year (see Chapter Five).

After the signing of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which set aside a large tract of territory that included the Black Hills for the exclusive occupancy of the Lakotas and for the Cheyennes and Arapahos who lived among them, the adaptive patterns of many local bands began to change once again. Under the terms of this treaty, the federal government was required to distribute food, clothing, and other supplies to these tribes. These distributions took place at the sites where federal agencies were established along the Platte, Missouri, and White rivers. Over time, growing numbers of Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos began to winter at these locations, leaving them in the spring to carry out various subsistence activities at distant locations. As described in Chapter Five, Nicholas Black Elk's people sometimes wintered near the Red Cloud Agency at Fort Robinson on the upper reaches of the White river, and in the late spring, they moved to their bison hunting grounds in the Powder-Tongue River countries, camping at various locations in the Black Hills, including the Buffalo Gap, along their route of travel. Other Lakotas, however, continued to winter at locations away from the agencies. Luther Standing Bear's

Sicangu band, for example, established their winter camps at the Buffalo Gap during these years. In the 1870s, the Buffalo Gap and the lands of Wind Cave National Park were less than fifty miles away from Spotted Tail's Agency and about seventy-five miles from the Red Cloud Agency. Importantly, both of these agencies were within easy reach of the southeastern Hills. It would have taken only a few days travel for small hunting parties to reach them during the fall and winter from their agency settlements and not much more time for larger camps to arrive there at other seasons for subsistence and ceremonial activity. In 1874, when the government realized it needed to move these agencies north of the Nebraska territorial line, the Sicangu leader Spotted Tail selected the Buffalo Gap as the site for a new agency. He no doubt recommended this location because of its proximity to good hunting grounds, water supplies, and timber stands. Samuel Hinman, who led the commission to determine suitable locations for a new agency, however, did not concur on the grounds that the area was not suitable for the kinds of farming endeavors the government wanted the Lakotas to pursue. His assessment contradicted the opinions of other Americans, including his superior E. L. Smith, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who described this region and the Black Hills more generally as well suited to various kinds of farming and stock-raising (see Chapters Five and Seven).

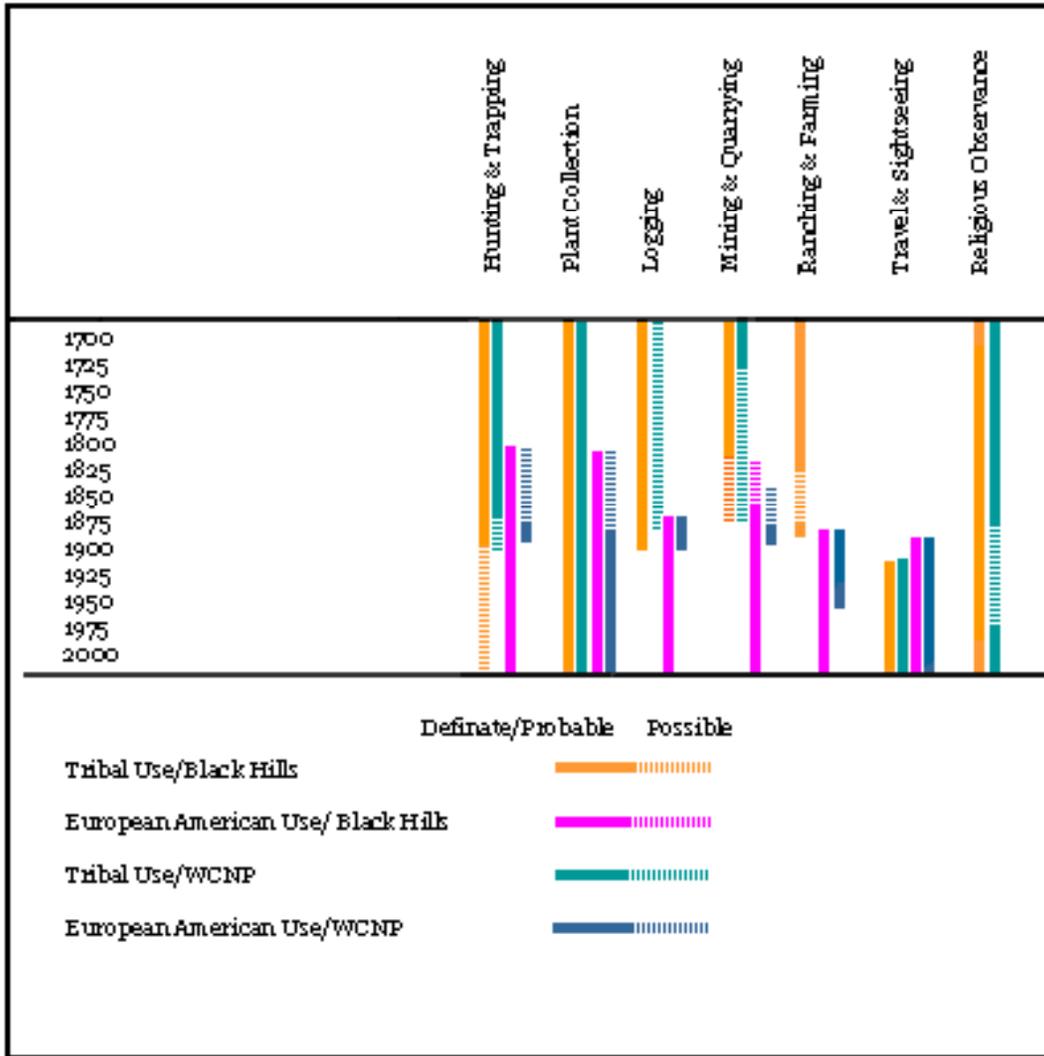
In the summers of 1874 and 1875, when large exploratory expeditions entered the Black Hills under the command of U.S. military forces, few Lakotas, Cheyennes, or Arapahos were present in the Hills. Many of the observers who traveled with these expeditions concluded that local tribes did not occupy or use the Hills, even though E.S. Howard (29 Sept 1875:254), the agent at Spotted Tail, wrote in his annual report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that tribes were staying away from the area because of the large military presence there. For many different reasons, the conclusions these observers reached about tribal relationships to the Black Hills were misleading. They were heavily biased by their own desire to have the U.S. government seize the Hills for American use and occupation. Nonetheless, their writings set into motion a train of thought that would continue to cloud our understanding of tribal occupancy and use of the Hills and even to deny that tribes had any significant and meaningful cultural attachments to them before European Americans took control over the area (see Chapter Five).

## **V. COMPETING CLAIMS AND CONTESTED STORIES**

From the time prospectors set foot in the Hills in 1874 to the present day, the Black Hills have been a site of contestation between European Americans and the three tribes who still claim legal title to them under the terms of the 1868 Fort Laramie treaties, namely the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos. The struggle over the Hills has been waged on the battlefield, in the courts, in Congress, and on the protest line, but it has also been fought in the popular media, in the writings of scholars, and in the written and oral discourse of local storytellers, Indian and white alike. The political and cultural arms of this struggle have worked in tandem, and therefore, they must be understood in relationship to each other.

On one side, many European Americans claim the Black Hills as the spoils of military conquest. They advance their claims on the grounds that Congress has the ultimate authority to abrogate or alter treaties with or without the consent of the tribes with whom they were made. Some even assert that the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos never had aboriginal property rights to the Hills since they never established permanent settlements in their interiors. Many more reason that these tribes had no right to the Hills because they did not use the resources to their best advantage, that is, for the commercial purposes European Americans deemed important.

**TABLE 12 . Types of Utilization in Black Hills and WCNP**



Others presume that tribes feared the Hills on superstitious grounds, and therefore, never entered them. More recently, a few writers have argued that contemporary tribal religious attachments to the Hills are bogus, callously invented to claim a region that was never sacred to them in the first place (see Chapters Five and Fourteen).

On the other side, the Lakotas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes claim that the Black Hills were stolen from them, that they were illegally occupied and seized under the terms of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty [15 Stat. 635], and that subsequent congressional action under the 1877 Agreement circumvented the United States' own treaty law. The Lakotas further maintain that the United States recognized them as the aboriginal occupants of this region under an earlier treaty at Fort Laramie in 1851, and that even without this treaty, there is ample evidence in the historic record and tribal oral traditions to demonstrate their aboriginal title to the area. The Cheyennes and Arapahos also assert their rights to the area, not only in terms of aboriginal

entitlement but also under the provisions of another 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty [15 Stat. 655] that permitted these tribes to locate themselves on what was then known as the Great Sioux Reservation. Moreover, all of these tribes claim the Hills as a homeland, a place that nourished and provisioned their peoples for many generations. The three tribes also believe the Hills are sacred, holding some of the primary sites of their spiritual origin and renewal (see Chapters Five and Fourteen).

Although the Lakota and Cheyennes' (and probably Arapahos') sacred attachments to the Black Hills encompass the entire area, there are specific locales and landscapes that are especially important. These include, among others, Inyan Kara Mountain, Bear Lodge Butte, Bear Butte, Reynolds, Slate, and Gillette prairies, Castle Rock, Harney Peak, Red and Craven canyons, the Hot Springs, the Buffalo Gap, the Race Track, and Wind Cave. The last two sit on park properties, and as pointed out in the last chapter, they are tied to important stories which tell of the origin of humankind, the nature of human relationships to the animals, and the gift of their most sacred ceremony, the Sun Dance. The stories connected with Wind Cave National Park and its environs are not new. Many of the motifs they contain can be traced back to Denig's writings which refer to Lakota beliefs about the Black Hills in 1833, and which certainly resonate with some of the Lakota ideas that European Americans wrote about in the 1870s. It was not until the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries that aspects of Cheyenne and Lakota cosmological understandings of the Black Hills would be recorded in ethnographic sources. From then until the 1960s, more writings based on tribal oral traditions would tie some of these stories in very explicit ways to sites in the Hills. When the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota peoples experienced a spiritual and cultural renaissance in the 1970s, they turned to the stories that had been part of their cultural heritage for centuries. While there is no question that many of these were used, and are still being used, for political ends to regain what the Lakotas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes perceive as their rightful ownership of the Hills, none of them are completely new. They all rest on ideas consistent with traditions that can be traced back to the nineteenth century (see Chapter Fourteen).

The lands on which Wind Cave National Park now sits have long played a role in the political and cultural struggles over the Black Hills. Beginning in 1874, the trail that entered the Hills at the Buffalo Gap, following Beaver Creek to its headwaters between present day Pringle and Custer, South Dakota, crossed park properties. This trail, which followed a well-trodden tribal pathway into the Hills' interiors, was the site of many armed struggles between European American prospectors and the allied Lakotas and Cheyennes. It was also a trail that European American expeditionary and military forces followed during their travels through the Hills in 1875. From 1874 to 1877, the Hills were a battleground, a place where tribal warriors raided the roads and settlement areas taken over by whites. This was not a place to camp with children and the elderly, except perhaps during the winter months when the Lakotas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes traditionally settled there or in isolated locations removed from the settlements and heavily used roads of European Americans (see Chapter Six).

After 1877, when Congress authorized the illegal taking of the Black Hills, whites began to expand their settlements beyond the gold rush towns of Custer and Deadwood, moving into areas of the southeastern Hills where Wind Cave National Park is now located. Americans of many different origins and from many walks of life came to the southeastern Hills to make a new life for themselves, establishing farms and ranches along many of the region's continuously flowing waterways, including the Fall River as well as Beaver, Highland, and Lame Johnny creeks. Until 1903, when Wind Cave National Park was established, European American settlers and teamsters still used the trails along Beaver and Cold Spring creeks that crossed park properties, but there was no longer much outside traffic along these routes. When Jesse and Tom Bingham came

across Wind Cave in 1881, much of the area was open range. It was a location where local settlers grazed their cattle and horses and where they hunted the wild game that still roamed the Race Track and the surrounding Foothills and Hogback. In fact, the Bingham brothers were hunting when they found the cave, as some claim, by accident. Again, it can be argued that this “discovery” may not have been entirely fortuitous. Since their brother Matthew lived, worked, and hunted with the Lakotas at this time, it would not be surprising to learn that Jesse and Tom may have had some prior knowledge of the cave’s existence but not its exact location (see Chapters Six and Seven).

When the family of Jesse McDonald squatted on lands around Wind Cave in 1888 and began to explore and develop the cave as a tourist attraction, the southeastern Hills were becoming a mecca for a flourishing cattle industry tied commercially to the town of Buffalo Gap. They were also drawing people to the popular spa industry centered at Hot Springs. Within a decade, the settlement near the thermal waters at Hot Springs moved from a cluster of log cabins and camping sites to a bustling town with hotels and businesses that catered to a wealthy, leisured class who now traveled to the area by train and trolley coaches. The developers of Wind Cave took advantage of the tourist bonanza and entered into a partnership with John Stabler who financed the building of a hotel at the site. The blustery feud that engulfed the Stablers, McDonalds, and the South Dakota Mining Company, who owned the subsurface rights to the land, led the United States to reconvey the land to the public domain, paving the way for the establishment of Wind Cave National Park in 1903 (see Chapter Six). Meanwhile, other settlers were coming to the area to make a living from livestock and crops, establishing additional homesteads along Beaver and Highland creeks and other sites within the modern-day boundaries of the park (see Chapter Six and Seven).

After 1877 and through the years of Wind Cave’s early development, Lakotas from the Pine Ridge Reservation, and probably some of the Cheyennes who lived with them, were gradually returning to the southeastern Black Hills. Once the military’s policy of reservation confinement was relaxed, small groups started to enter the Hills with the permission of their government agents. In the late 1870s, the Hot Springs area was settled by a small group of non-Indian men (and men of mixed ancestry) with their Lakota wives and descendants. In the following decades, even at the height of the “Indian Scare” between 1889-1900, Lakotas were reported in the area bathing at the thermal waters of *Minnekahta*, trading with local merchants and ranchers, visiting friends, and even camping in the town over the entire summer. There are also references to them picking berries, digging turnips, and collecting medicinal herbs in the Hills (see Chapter Six). Although there are many accounts of a Lakota presence in the southeastern Hills at the end of the nineteenth century, only a few are specific to the area of Wind Cave National Park. These indicate that the Lakotas visited the cave, camped on park properties, and traveled through the park en route to the locations where they cut their lodgepoles or to attend celebrations in white communities. Whether or not they used these occasions to hunt, gather plants, or conduct religious observances is unknown. They probably did, but these activities could have easily gone unnoticed, especially in some of the more remote sections of the park. Given the historic importance of the Wind Cave area to the Lakotas and the religious significance they continued to attach to the area, it is highly probable that small parties of Lakotas returned to this area to carry on any of a variety of procurement activities (see Chapters Six, Seven, and Fifteen).

Other than some of the events that took place along the Beaver/Cold Spring trails, which prospectors and settlers traveled from the Buffalo Gap and Hot Springs region to Custer, and the stories of Wind Cave’s discovery, its development, and the feuds surrounding its property, there are very few events on park lands of great historic or cultural importance to European Americans. Indeed, much of what has been written about the park in popular regional travel writings and in

the park's own promotional material focuses on the area's non-human features -- the geology of its unique cave and the identities and habits of its wildlife. The history of most of its human inhabitants has been largely incidental to how the park has come to represent itself and also how others have come to see it. The human stories that have entered into park programming are few in number and selective in character. They highlight certain events over others. Most of the stories play predictably to European American cultural values and traditions. The drama of the feud surrounding Wind Cave between 1884 and 1901 is worthy of interest and well-publicized because it makes perfect grist for the legend-making mills that surround the wider history of the Black Hills and the American West more generally. It fits into the popular storylines of conflict, the battles between Indians and cowboys, stage robbers and lawmen, and cattle barons and small-scale ranchers. These are all stories of how the lawless and "wild" West was tamed and domesticated to make way for "civilization" and tourists from the East.

Also prevalent in park interpretive materials are stories of discovery and exploration, from the sighting of the cave by the Bingham brothers in 1881 to uncovering new terrain in the cave's vast network of chambers and passageways by successive generations of spelunkers. These stories typically mark the milestones of discovery at the cave and some of the challenges spelunkers faced in their explorations. The stories take on a particular cast and follow a narrative construction prevalent in European American cultural traditions of the West, which is romantically envisioned as a wild land, a dangerous space where death is challenged by the courage and fortitude of heroic questers who search out, struggle against, and survive its perils. The questers secure their redemption and salvation by outwitting the wily forces of the West and its nature. Today, these kinds of heroic efforts are often associated with the popular leisure sport of rock climbers who scale the sides of difficult mountains, cliffs, and towers, but they can also be easily identified with the less visible recreational activity of spelunking.<sup>20</sup> The "descent" stories of spelunkers at Wind Cave National Park provide an interesting point of contrast and comparison to the dominant "ascent" narratives at Devil's Tower National Monument (Dorst 2000:307-310). In their own and very different ways, both celebrate the European American cultural theme of humans conquering "nature."

Another set of stories that have found a place in park representational materials are those associated with the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corp camps at Wind Cave National Park in the 1930s. The stories feature the various improvements to park properties, including a new elevator, administration building, roads, bridges, and campsites underwritten by the federal Work Projects Administration. These also follow familiar narrative themes in European American cultural traditions that, historically, at least, have celebrated the "wonders" of technology and development. It is not surprising that all of the WPA projects were in operation precisely at the time Borglum was blasting presidential faces into the granite walls of Mount Rushmore (see Chapter Six).

Surprisingly, many other stories about Wind Cave National Park, especially ones that take place above ground, have not been part of the park's historical self-representation, even though these play to many of the same cultural themes that cover the park's underworld terrain. Paramount among the neglected stories are those that relate to the many interesting incidents that took place along the Sidney-Custer trail, which entered the Hills at the Buffalo Gap and crossed park properties along Beaver Creek and its tributaries, or the Cheyenne-Custer trail that follows the western boundaries of the park. These trails, which have significance to both European

---

<sup>20</sup> The author speaks from experience as a recreational spelunker in her youth, repelling into cave entrances, fording underground streams, and squeezing and crawling through miles of narrow passageways to reach some of the spectacular amphitheater-sized chambers of caves in southern Indiana.

Americans and American Indians, speak to a much wider but still local history that ties the park to the world beyond its boundaries.

Much of the land that now makes up Wind Cave National Park was developed for cattle raising. Beyond the homesites near the cave, a number of settlers squatted on and then homesteaded lands over a wide area of the park, especially near reliable sources of water. Here they built ranches and farms of varying character and complexity. Many of them also used public lands adjoining their homesteads for grazing stock, logging timber for domestic use, hunting wild game, gathering berries for food, and collecting herbal plants for medicines. Much of the property added to the park in later years was once homesteaded or served as open access land, on which local European American residents depended for their own livelihoods. As park policies changed and additional lands, private as well as public, were added to the park, many traditional forms of use and access were halted. Over time, ranchers' relations with the Park Service and other federal land-holding agencies in the Black Hills became more antagonistic, and this only increased as the administration of public lands shifted from locals to outside professionals. In more recent years, the growing importance of the tourist, leisure, and recreation industries to the Black Hills has created another set of interest groups whose demands on public lands depart from and often conflict with those of traditional users (see Chapters Six and Seven). Nonetheless, there are many fascinating stories from the history and culture of local ranch life, including its dependence on open access to public lands and its conflicts with the agencies that administer them.

From the outset, the mission of Wind Cave National Park has been directed at preserving the unique features of its natural environment, especially its unique subterranean geology and its remaining as well as reintroduced wildlife. As is the case with other properties in the National Park system, where there is an emphasis on the pristine character of the lands under its stewardship, stories of prior human inhabitants and users tend to be disregarded perhaps because, as some scholars have recently argued, they undermine, or at the very least detract from, the larger mission of keeping park lands in their "original" state. This may be why so many national parks may also deemphasize or even deny earlier European American users, other than an occasional trapper and explorer.

Also of importance are the stories of how outside, and mostly urban interests, brought new kinds of cultural sensibilities to the area, and how these influenced park policy, especially after World War II. Both the cultures of rural ranch life and urban tourism deserve some place in park interpretive programming. Since 1903 much of the park's role in regional culture and history, as it pertains to European Americans, has been tied to tourism, travel, and recreation. The early development of Wind Cave was largely stimulated by the development of the spa industry in Hot Springs. Outings to the cave offered an interesting destination for people who came to the area primarily for the health-giving properties of the nearby thermal waters. The cave became a popular recreational diversion for the locals too. After the collapse of Hot Springs' spa industry, which pioneered the development of tourism in the Black Hills, sightseeing travel began to gain popularity. In time, Wind Cave became the most prominent site tourists visited in the Black Hills south of Custer. Indeed, it was probably the only attraction, until the mammoth exhibit was developed, to bring people to the southeastern Black Hills after Mount Rushmore was carved and roads were built leading tourists to the spectacular scenery of the Needles and Cathedral Spires. After the 1950s, the park's importance to the economy of the southern Hills, especially the town of Hot Springs, grew as travel and leisure began to outpace the region's traditionally dominant ranching and farming industries (see Chapters Six and Seven). The progression of tourism in the Black Hills and the cultural traditions associated with it offer another compelling way to represent Wind Cave's history. In fact, in some ways, the twentieth century use of park lands parallels the situation two centuries earlier when two different kinds of groups used the area simultaneously:

one stayed much of the year within the shadows of the Hills and the other traveled long-distances to access its resources on a temporary seasonal basis.

Even more conspicuous by their absence are tribal stories about Wind Cave and the area in which it is located. This is not surprising, however, given the distance the National Park Service has historically kept between itself and the tribal nations on whose lands its properties were developed (Spence 1999). As a number of scholars and journalists (Keller and Turek 1998; Spence 1999; Burnham 2000) have taken great pains to demonstrate, National Park Service properties contain lands of considerable cultural and even sacred importance to the tribes from whom they were dispossessed. Wind Cave National Park is no exception in this regard. Over the past century, it has largely disregarded the significance of this area to the tribes who once lived or who still remain within its reach, especially the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos. Hardly anything about the cultural histories and traditions that these tribes associate with the area has ever appeared in park informational and promotional materials. From the park's beginnings in 1903 until the 1970s, tribal peoples, including Lakotas and Cheyennes from the neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation, were not only ignored in the much of the park's interpretive material, they were largely absent in park activities. Except for occasional visits and their participation in a few public events, there is little in the park's own documents or other sources to identify any active tribal presence on the park lands. There is even less in park records and promotional literature that identifies the park with any significant tribal cultural affiliation other than William Campbell's letter and a one-page promotional sheet based on this letter from the 1930s (see Chapters Six and Fourteen).

During this same period, however, a great deal was being recorded and eventually written about the significance of Wind Cave, the Race Track and the neighboring Buffalo Gap and Hot Springs to the Lakotas and Cheyennes. Taken together, the stories associated with the park and its environs tell of happenings in mythic and historic times of great cultural importance to these two tribes, events that created and stand at the foundation of their cosmological understandings of the universe (see Chapter Fourteen). Why none of this significant cultural material ever become a part of the way the park represented itself to the public is difficult to fathom, and especially so when the recognition of a tribal cultural presence was being widely promoted in other parts of the Black Hills. Notwithstanding the fact that tribal stories about other areas of the Hills were generic and often based on ersatz traditions, they at least acknowledged some sort of tribal cultural attachment to the area. Even at Mount Rushmore, there were active efforts to feature local Indians, especially the Lakotas. From the 1920s to the 1960s, the Lakotas from the Pine Ridge Reservation spent a great deal of time in the Black Hills, camping and traveling from one community celebration to another over extended periods of time during the summer months. They were hired at special attractions because of their ability to draw tourists. Not only did a host of venues develop that involved the Lakotas, but a number of books were written about the lore and legends of the Black Hills that featured tribal stories about many of the area's most prominent landforms. Throughout this period, Wind Cave National Park was out of the proverbial loop, except for the brief attempt of one superintendent of the park, Edward Freeland, to involve the Lakotas in park activities between 1937 and 1938, and their attendance at one of the park's golden anniversary festivities in 1953 (see Chapter Six). The development of NPS policies that effectively kept tribal people out of the national parks or minimized their presence was part of a nationwide trend. Only in recent years, and with varying degrees of success, have national parks tried to involve local tribes in their management and interpretive activities (cf. Keller and Turek 1998; Spence 1999; Burnham 2000 for a more detailed discussion of this in relation to other national parks).

Until the 1970s, the Lakotas and Cheyennes, especially those living on the neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation, regularly visited places of cultural significance to them in the Black Hills. Even though much of their presence in the Hills took place in the setting of tourism, it can be suggested that this experience gave them a concrete context for retelling many of the traditional stories about the importance of the Hills and its various sacred sites, and this is certainly evident from the recollections of Nicholas Black Elk's grandchildren. Spending time in the Hills might have also opened opportunities to visit isolated locations to conduct important but unobtrusive ceremonial observances connected with fasting and other prayerful observances and also to collect plants and stones used in healing. It was in the decades after the 1930s that the Cheyennes of Oklahoma and Montana began to return to the Hills to visit some of the places of sacred significance to them, including sites in the southeastern Hills (see Chapters Six and Fourteen). Unlike the last decades of the nineteenth century, when Lakotas and Cheyennes from Pine Ridge returned to the Hills to carry on traditional subsistence pursuits, their activity throughout much of the early half of the twentieth century was probably focused less on procurement, other than the collection of berries and medicinal plants, and more on making a living through performance. In both instances, the area that is the Black Hills continued to be understood as a source of sustenance, a place that provided people with a means of livelihood. But more significantly, the Black Hills was a place of return, an area which reminded tribal peoples of their culture, a landscape that continued to reveal and teach them some of the basic tenets of their cosmologies, and that rekindled and indeed became integrally tied to their own sense of identity as Indian people and members of particular tribal nations. In these years, the Lakotas and even the Cheyennes were reasserting their relationship to the Black Hills, even if, at times, it was on the terms of the people who had stolen this land from them (see Chapters Six and Seven).

The essential point is that the Lakotas and Cheyennes never abandoned the Black Hills. They continued to return to the area, even in the face of the racism and hostility of some of the white citizens who now claimed and dominated the area. In many of their own legendary stories about the Hills, whites portrayed themselves as heroes and heroines who had struggled to survive and establish a place for themselves against the incessant attacks of local tribes. Stories of the trails that the settlers followed to reach the Hills' interiors frequently recount the battles that took place with local tribes along these routes. Whites were also not above inventing tales, some of which they attributed to local tribes, to justify their own dominance. The most famous of these, "The Legend of the Rose," by Richard B. Hughes (1957), is a good example of a tale that justifies the European American occupation of the Hills. As the story goes, on their way to the Hills, a group of prospectors in search of gold came across a village of Indians dying from disease and miraculously cured them. Envious of the white men's powers, an evil Indian medicine man organized an attack on the whites. This killing angered the Great Spirit, who stirred up his Thunders and Winds, blowing the ashes of the white men away from the spot where their remains had been cremated, frightening the Indians away from the Hills, and preventing them from ever entering their deep recesses. After his wrath had been appeased, the Great Spirit allowed his rains to return, and wherever they fell on the ashes of the "pale faces," wild roses blossomed. Besides "explaining" why the Lakotas and other tribes feared and avoided the Hills, this story builds a case for the moral supremacy of the whites and their presence in the Hills on divine grounds.

The self-proclaimed superiority of European Americans around the conquest and occupation of the Hills and their efforts to dominate and exclude the region's tribal inhabitants have never been absolute, however. There has always been room for slippage -- times or places where the press of a tribal presence on the landscape cannot be escaped or trivialized. The rich clusters of rock art sites, cairns, and tipi rings in the southern Hills make it hard not to acknowledge the preexistence of peoples with a much longer history in the area. Even when these have been defaced by the graffiti of the newcomers, they still reveal the presence of earlier peoples. But

when these sites are obliterated to make room for new construction, the stories they hold are lost and the evidence for reconstructing the tribal use and occupancy of the area seriously compromised. So much of the area around the entrance to Wind Cave has been transformed since the 1890s, and it is unlikely that archaeologists, even when given the opportunity, will ever be able to recover and identify the sorts of remains found, for example, at Medicine Creek Cave in the northwestern Hills, which reveal the long-standing spiritual importance of caves to tribes in the region (Sundstrom, L. 2002).

Some local whites also learned tribal stories about the area and its various sites, and a few used them to advertise ancient links to the Hills as a way to draw outside tourist audiences. From its beginnings, the town of Hot Springs drew on the tribal and naturopathic associations of its waters to promote its spa industry. Even though many of the stories were based on ersatz traditions, they still acknowledged a long-standing tribal connection to the area. Sitting Bull's Crystal Caverns was another attraction where Indian cultural affiliations were promoted. It was here that Lakota people like Nicholas Black Elk tried to educate European Americans about the importance of his culture and its relation to the Hills. For a short period of time, one park superintendent at Wind Cave attempted to build good relations with local Lakotas and establish a context where European Americans might learn something about their traditional culture. Notwithstanding the fact that some of these efforts might be viewed today as exploitative, appropriating tribal cultural knowledge for commercial ends, they did establish small lines of communication between local whites and their Lakota neighbors in an otherwise conflicted and often hostile social environment (see Chapter Six).

In this regard, it should be said that despite some of the long-term and overarching tensions that have marked relationships between the Hills' white inhabitants and neighboring tribespeople, there have been strong friendships between certain individuals and their families. Local town and county histories contain numerous examples of Lakotas/Cheyennes from the Pine Ridge Reservation trading with local European Americans, visiting and eating with them, and even staying on their lands for extended periods of time (see Chapter Six). Respectful and mutually beneficial relations appear to have existed, for example, with certain families in Hot Springs such as the Bingham, owners of some of the region's tourist attractions like the Duhamel family, and a few administrators of public lands in the Hills including Edward Freeland of Wind Cave National Park.

Meanwhile, outside the Hills, the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos were attempting to push their claims for the Black Hills before Congress and the courts. The Cheyennes and Arapahos did not succeed in getting their claims heard by either the Indian Claims Commission or the U.S. Court of Claims, but the Lakotas were able to move their claims forward, although most of the decisions that came down before 1970 did not rule in their favor. Given some of the early court decisions, the white citizens of the Hills probably did not view the Sioux's Black Hills claim as much of a threat. Confident that the law and its interpretation would be on their side, they appear to have seen the Sioux's case more as nuisance rather than as a real danger to their properties and way of life. This all changed in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Civil Rights movement sparked the resurgence of political resistance in American Indian communities nationwide (see Chapter Eight).

The first protest in the Black Hills took place at Mount Rushmore in 1970, followed two years later by the armed confrontation in Custer over the murder of Wesley Bad Heart Bull at the Buffalo Gap and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Once again, the Black Hills became the site of armed struggle and resistance. Some of the early protests of the Lakotas, which began as an alliance between traditional tribal elders of the Pine Ridge Reservation and urban Indian

youth associated with the American Indian Movement, focused on the injustices the Lakota experienced under the laws of the United States, from inequities in the handling of criminal cases to the illegalities of U.S. government actions in relation to tribal treaty rights. The politicization of the Lakotas in the 1970s stressed tribal sovereignty and the rights of tribal nations to define their own political, economic, and cultural destinies (Chapter Six). Racial tensions flared, and the Lakotas and other tribal people were no longer welcome in the Black Hills as participants in local celebrations, as performers in tourist attractions, or as casual visitors. It became uncomfortable, if not dangerous, for local Indian people to travel to the Hills subjected as they were to hostile forms of harassment (see Chapter Six).

In response to the political pressure of the 1970s, which brought about a dramatic resurgence of pride in tribal identity and culture, Congress began to enact a number of laws which gave tribes more power to protect and control their interests, including their religious rights to public lands. It also led the Lakotas to reconsider the path some of their leaders had taken to achieve justice for the illegal seizure of the Black Hills. Well before the Supreme Court awarded the Lakotas a substantial cash settlement for the illegal taking of the Black Hills, many Lakotas were moving towards strategies that would bring about the return of public lands in the Black Hills to tribal ownership. As the political winds changed direction, all of the Sioux tribes who were party to the claim refused to accept a cash settlement for the Hills. Instead they wanted the public lands in the Hills returned to them, including those within the boundaries of Wind Cave National Park (see Chapter Eight).

In the 1980s, the Lakotas began to reoccupy public lands in the Hills to bring their case to the attention of the American people. Lands under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service at Devil's Tower National Monument and Wind Cave National Park were occupied for short periods of time in 1981, and in the same year, those under the care of the U.S. Forest Service at Victoria Creek, known as the Yellow Thunder Camp, were occupied and held for nearly eight years as legal cases over Lakota access rights wound their way through the courts. Besides the occupations, other Lakotas were using new federal policies and statutes to gain permits and temporary access to public lands in the Black Hills to practice their ceremonial observances from pipe ceremonies and sweatlodges to Sun Dances. They were arguing their cases before federal administrators and district judges in federal and state courts to gain protections and restrictions for sacred sites in the Black Hills. In doing so, they met with failure as well as success (Chapters Six and Eight).

Court rulings on cases stemming from the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 were generally not friendly to tribal interests. Public agencies and their administrators varied greatly in their efforts to either oppose or support tribal interests (see Chapter Eight). While the U.S. National Forest Service generally resisted Lakota efforts to practice their religion on the lands under their jurisdiction, the U.S. Park Service was much more accommodating even in the face of court battles that ruled against park management policy. This was the case at Devil's Tower National Monument where the interests of rock climbers collided with tribal religious users. Other than the brief politically motivated occupation at the park in 1981, Wind Cave National Park administrators appear to have attempted to find workable ways for local tribes to meet some of their religious obligations, from opening park lands to religious observances such as the Sun Dance to meeting requests for soils brought to the surface of the earth around prairie dog towns (Ron Terry 1999, Personal Communication). In the absence of resistance on the part of park staff and competing interest groups for the use of park properties, little attention or publicity has surrounded the tribal use of park lands for religious purposes since the late 1970s. Indeed, this use has such a low profile that it has not appeared, at least as yet, on the radar screens of journalists and scholars. This has probably served the interests of the park administrators, who do

not wish to attract unwanted attention, but also those of tribal religionists who value privacy in the conduct of their religious observances (see Chapter Twelve).

Besides the occupations and attempts to secure permits for religious activities, the Lakotas were pushing other strategies to reclaim the Black Hills. By the mid-1980s, they had secured backing from several congressional delegations to move bills through Congress that would support the return of sizable portions of public lands in the Black Hills. The first bill, known as the Bradley Bill, was heard before the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1985. Largely due to opposition from the South Dakota congressional legislation, it never reached the floor of the Senate for debate. Subsequent attempts at bringing other land reclamation bills before Congress failed and never even reached the hearing stage (see Chapter Eight).

While Lakotas and Cheyennes pressed their religious claims to the Hills, some European American scholars and journalists began to challenge the legitimacy of these claims. As writers had done a century earlier, the new critics argued that the Lakotas, at least, never had any significant spiritual attachments to the Hills. They advanced these claims either by trivializing the Lakotas' contemporary ideas or by denying that these beliefs had any historical precedent. The work presented in this report should certainly lay to rest any doubts about the historical depth of tribal beliefs surrounding the landscape that makes up Wind Cave National Park (see Chapters Twelve, Thirteen, and Fourteen).

As to the idea that Lakotas were newcomers who had taken the Hills by force and had not occupied the area long enough to sanctify it, one point needs to be made. European Americans have long tried to cast the Lakotas' occupation of the Hills in the reflection of their own conquest history. By viewing the Lakotas' relationship to the Hills solely as the outcome of aggression and force, European Americans are able to legitimize their own occupation on the same "right of conquest" grounds. In this historical picture, Cheyenne and Arapaho rights and interests in the Hills are generally ignored. But this scenario is misleading because it tells only part of the much more complex story that this report has gone to great pains to document (see Section One and also Chapter Seven): that the Lakotas and the Cheyennes and the Arapahos before them established their rights to the Hills through peaceful partnerships as much as through war and conquest.

## **VII. RETURNING TO A COMMON GROUND**

The history of the Black Hills from 1742 to 1877 was marked by peaceful forms of relationship among some of the tribes who lived in its reaches. These were relations of cooperation, cemented by ties of marriage, familial associations, and close friendships. They entailed territorial sharing, alliances against common enemies, collaboration in subsistence, and co-participation in ceremonial and religious activity. Through these relationships, tribes exchanged ideas, contributing to the development of regional cultural traditions that included stories about the landscapes they lived in and shared (see Chapter Seven).

As pointed out many times before, today's Lakotas are not the same people as the Lakotas of the seventeenth century. The peoples who make up the population of the Oglala Sioux tribe at Pine Ridge, for example, share strong and well-documented genealogical roots with the Arikaras, Poncas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes, all of whom lived and traveled in the Black Hills before the main body of Lakotas arrived and took up residence in the area during the early nineteenth century. Before their arrival, Arikaras, Poncas, Arapahos, and Cheyennes shared ancestries with the Apaches who lived here probably as early as the sixteenth century. Decades, indeed cent-

uries, of intermarriage created strong and tight social networks within which sharing, cooperation, and collaboration were not only possible but also encouraged across tribal boundaries. Although punctuated by periods of hostility, the Lakotas' relations with the Arapahos and Cheyennes were especially strong and enduring. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, these three tribes lived together in peace and jointly defended the Hills against the incursions of other tribes, notably the Crows and Pawnees, and together, they attempted to thwart the advance of European Americans into their beloved Hills. Before these three tribes dominated the Hills, they were co-occupied by Kiowas, Plains Apaches, Comanches, and Crows who tried to keep the Lakotas and Shoshones at bay in the late eighteenth century. In these battles, the Arapahos and Cheyennes seem to have been caught in the middle with some aligning themselves on the side of the Kiowas, others with the Lakotas, with many more attempting to remain neutral (Chapters Three and Four).

When today's Lakotas proclaim an ancestral connection to the Black Hills that stretches back to time immemorial, they are correct if we view their past in the light of a complex history of intertribal marriage and alliance and the cultural amalgamation that this history wrought. Seeing Lakota history from this perspective, however, has a major drawback for the purists who see tribes, including their own, as well-bounded and self-contained entities that conquered the territories they held by force and occupied them exclusively. Certainly the Lakotas' entrance into the Hills entailed conflict and competition, but it also came about through marriage and cooperation. The Lakotas may have ultimately become the dominant population in the Black Hills but they were never their exclusive "owners." In varying ways and degrees, their occupation of the Hills always took place in association with their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies, a fact that many of their respected leaders including Red Cloud, Black Hawk, and Nicholas Black Elk, among others, clearly recognized. Some European American and Native American commentators may choose to downplay, or even deny, this side of the historical record, but it serves little purpose other than an exclusionary diversion to allow some groups into the Hills and keep others out.

Many origin stories tied to the Hills, which assign the region and its various landforms a spiritual status, are not unique to single tribes (Sundstrom 1996, 1997). As is the case with the Buffalo Wife, Great Race, and Orphan Boy stories, which have particular applicability to the region of Wind Cave, they speak to a common stock of symbols and understandings about the significance of this place. To be sure, the stories vary in their details and in the weight of their importance from one tribe to another and even among divisions within the same tribe. People in the same tribe have even applied some of these stories to other places. Inconsistencies of this order have given some writers an excuse to challenge the credulity of the stories that tribes attach to their landscapes. While such inconsistency is often problematic in European American ways of thinking about the world, it is not troublesome to the people who tell the stories because they understand that their "truth" resides in the deeper meanings that these invoke about a place. The template of the Buffalo Wife story is a good example, one that has been applied to many separate places, but which nonetheless speaks to common experiences with and understandings of particular kinds of underground sites, notably caves. In other words, certain landforms evoke a particular class of stories, which get revised and reinterpreted according to the specific sites to which they are applied and the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the people who tell them.

There are also other narratives relating to significant and sacred landscapes that are fairly unique and specific to particular tribes and tribal divisions. The story cycle of George Sword, an Oglala intellectual at the turn of the twentieth century, is one of these; it tells about the birth of the Four Winds and the original emergence of humans, the *Pte Oyate*, from Wind Cave. Although the particular way this cycle is constructed, and its storylines woven together, is distinct, it nevertheless contains a common stock of symbols and understandings widespread in Lakota and Dakota traditions (Fletcher 1884d) and also familiar to other Siouan tribes, such as the

Poncas and Omahas (Fletcher & LaFlesche 1972:1:63,119-121). Nor are the stories of *Tokahe's* travels, once he arrives on the earth's surface, radically different from some of the narratives associated with the Cheyennes' heroes, Sweet Medicine and Stands on the Ground.

Despite variations and inconsistencies in tribal stories about particular landscapes, many of them address fundamental and widely shared cosmological tenets about the nature of life and the character of the universe. When they do so, they evoke the sacred knowledge and spiritual understandings that are at the heart of the way each tribal nation and its people see themselves and interpret their presence in this world. The landscapes and the stories exist in a dynamic relationship to one another, feeding, but sometimes challenging, one another as people attempt to come to terms with their own time and place. In seeking this knowledge and understanding, the tribal nations of the plains have developed some common ways to approach that which is sacred. Ethnographers have long recognized that Cheyenne and Lakota Sun Dance observances, along with certain kinds of healing lodges, were woven out of a common and shared fabric, and that they are fundamentally different from the Sun Dances performed by other tribal nations of the Great Plains. As argued earlier, the inspiration for this dance was carved out of their mutual presence in and shared understanding of the place it began, namely the Black Hills and more specifically the places of Wind Cave/Buffalo Gap and Sundance Mountain/Bear Lodge Butte (see Chapters Twelve and Fourteen).

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos shared a common ground in and around the Black Hills that they jointly occupied and defended. It was an area where they shared access to the region's rich resources and built a sense of community through marriage and collaboration in subsistence and trade. In the process of this sharing and community-building, they not only developed common understandings of the area but also enjoyed a common access to the sacred spots that revealed the centrality of the Black Hills in their lives. The loss of this land was deeply felt by all of the tribal nations who were attached to it. Their inability to come together politically in the twentieth century to reclaim it has engendered some bitterness. Yet, overriding some of their political differences is a profound and mutual sense of anger and frustration at being denied access to the Black Hills, particularly the public lands on which some of their most sacred sites rest.

When the United States seized the Black Hills from the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos in 1877, the federal government became the sovereign over the land. Yet, it wasn't for another decade that government agents began the process of surveying its land and enforcing its proprietary laws. As it was under tribal control, the Black Hills and the areas surrounding it were public domain lands. Even though individual citizens logged the timber, staked claims on the minerals, ran cattle on the grasslands, and built dwellings and commercial businesses in the area, no one theoretically owned any of the Black Hills, except perhaps for mining claims, as a form of private property until the government transferred fee patents to the property under the terms of various homestead acts. Until then, it remained a common grounds, open to any party with an interest in using it and extracting its resources.

After surveying its land and validating private mining claims and squatters' rights, the government set aside huge tracks of land in the Hills' interiors for a national forest reserve, established in 1897 and opened much of the land between the Hogback and Cheyenne River to homesteading. Many extractive enterprises in the Hills were able to quickly capitalize because they did not have to invest in a substantial part of their means of production. The minerals, grasses, and timbers were part of an open commons, free to anyone with the interest and wherewithal to extract the resources. This situation contributed, in large part, to the early boom

of the large-scale, investor-owned cattle operations in the Hills, many of which folded after the disastrous winter of 1886-1887.

Starting in 1880, the public commons was contained. Lands that settlers squatted on and improved were turned into homesteads, many of which were patented as private property. Unoccupied lands, or lands on which no improvements had been made, became subject to restrictions on their use, with fees charged and leases let for extracting certain resources from them, notably timber and grass. Even the land within the present-day borders of Wind Cave National Park was homesteaded and/or leased for grazing rights well into the twentieth century. Much of the land in the interior region of the Black Hills, which remained in the public domain, was open to multiple uses and users, but it was managed by federal agencies within the Department of Agriculture or the Department of the Interior. Over time, these agencies began to selectively admit and exclude users to the commons. They prevented Lakotas from cutting their lodgepoles at the sites they customarily used for these purposes, and in general, they discouraged their presence in the commons. Federal agencies also restricted timber and grazing permits to ranchers whose homesteads bordered public lands, and they prevented small and local logging outfits from doing business in the Hills, preferring instead to let timber leases to large outside corporations. Few restrictions, however, were imposed on mineral extraction because of the liberal provisions of the 1864 Mining Act, many of which are still in place today. Although theoretically U.S. Forest Service lands, as one example, were publicly owned, multiple use areas, they increasingly became a reserve for a select and privileged group of users whose character shifted over time as local and national priorities for the forests changed. By the end of the twentieth century, however, many sections of the publicly owned land in the Black Hills had taken on some of the more restricted qualities of national park property with missions aimed at preserving the land for wildlife instead of stock (Geores 1990; see also, Chapter Seven).

When Wind Cave National Park was founded in 1903 and a wildlife reserve established on adjacent lands in 1912, its original eleven thousand acres gradually became off-limits to many of the extractive uses associated with national forest lands, although livestock grazing continued inside park borders until the early twentieth century. In keeping with its mission to preserve the originality and integrity of the landscapes over which it had jurisdiction, the NPS gradually prohibited this use also. Eventually, only recreational camping/hiking and the spectator sport of sightseeing were allowed to take place on the park's lands. Over the next century, more lands would be transferred to park jurisdiction, including adjacent parcels of public land and private property holdings that bordered the park. Today, more than half of the lands now under park management have a history associated with some kind of extractive use, and even its original holdings, experienced some degree of development. Because of the park's location, its original and acquired lands were marginally impacted, relatively speaking, by extractive developments, but they were not pristine and without a prior record of human history. One only needs to look at the large list of non-native plants that grow on park lands, many of which are Eurasian volunteers that typically seek disturbed and heavily grazed habitats, to confirm this (Pisarowicz 2001k; see also, Chapter Eleven and Appendix B). Including current efforts to restore the grasslands to a "native" state, the park is, and has always been, a historically altered environment. In this light, the questions of interest are not about how park lands constitute pristine and isolated islands of nature, but rather how the lands have dynamically changed in the course of a history with different waves of human occupation, and how their natural resources have been transformed in the process.

The history of the bison's presence and absence on park lands, and its relationship to the changing human landscape of the Hills, the neighboring grasslands, and the nation at large is one of the park's most compelling narratives especially when one adds tribal stories to the picture.

After all in Lakota belief, this is *Tachante Tatanka*, the “Heart of the Bison Bull,” the *Tatanka makalpeya*, “the Stomping Grounds of the Bison Bull,” and the abode of *Waziya*, the first Buffalo Man, and his grandson, *Waziyata*, the North Wind. It is also the site of the Great Race where the very nature of the relationship between the bison and humanity was established. So much about Wind Cave National Park, its landscape, land forms, animals, plants, and minerals returns to the bison in local tribal traditions. Wind Cave is the home of the bison. In fact, the reason for establishing a wildlife reserve near the park in 1912 was predicated on the introduction and preservation of a small herd of bison donated by the National Bison Association. Before European Americans took control of the land that makes up the Black Hills and the Great Plains more generally, it was part of what some scholars have come to identify as the great “buffalo commons” (Binnema 2001). It was an area where vast herds of bison roamed, numbering in the millions, and where humans based much of their life on the animal’s habits, habitats, and movements. This was the bison’s country; they were the “chief of the animals” and the Black Hills, “the chief of the land,” was their home. No one owned this vast commons. Instead, tribal nations entered into social arrangements with each other to share access to the herds in the territories they lived and traveled. Tribes formed loose confederations with each other to defend and/or gain access to bison grounds (Ewers 1975; Albers and Kay 1987; Albers 1993, 1996; Binnema 2001). The Black Hills were the center of one of these grounds, and they were occupied by successive confederations of tribes who shared joint access rights and who fought together to acquire and to defend them from outside encroachment.

The Hills have always been a commons. Even after European Americans arrived, they still retained some of this character as an open access range. Only now the use was focused on the animals the newcomers brought with them – cattle. The newcomers, who owned the stock privately, ran them over lands jointly shared and managed through the formation of cattle associations and the institution of the roundup. By the 1880s, cattle had become the dominant ungulate of the commons, replacing and often standing in competition with native species. The habits of cattle led to the overgrazing of lands throughout the Black Hills and the destruction of grasslands and timbers that supported the remaining native ungulates, elk, deer, bighorn, and antelope. In time their numbers would be substantially diminished and another species, the elk, extirpated. This happened not only as a result of commercial, subsistence, and sports hunting but also because of grazing practices and the despoliation of the lands on which cattle were fed. In order to save many of the native species, game laws were instituted by the state of South Dakota, grazing leases were restricted by the forest service, and sections of public land in the Hills cordoned off to create spaces to reintroduce and protect wildlife at Wind Cave National Park and neighboring Custer State Park (see Chapters Six, Seven, and Ten). Wind Cave National Park’s first herd came from New York by way of Massachusetts and before that their origin has not been identified. To this original herd, animals were added from Yellowstone and wildlife reserves in Alberta, Canada. The pedigree of the herd at Custer State Park, however, is more local, and it includes animals from Scotty Phillips famous ranch whose progenitors were saved in 1881 by the rancher Frederick Dupree, who lived on the Cheyenne River Reservation north of the Black Hills in South Dakota. Some of these lines may also be present in the park’s herds because, in the past, it was not uncommon for some of the park’s herd to break through fences and roam among the herds of the state park (Bohi 1962).

Bison are now thriving on park lands in the Black Hills, and they are even being reintroduced on privately-owned lands, including some of those on the northeastern edge of the park (O’Brien 2002). As bison return to their former commons on public lands, private holdings, as well as tribally owned properties, their relations to humans are also changing. Throughout the plains and even in other areas of the United States, bison are becoming a form of stock raised and bred like cattle because of the growing popularity of their meat. Tribal nations in the region now own

some of the larger herds, which are kept primarily for tribal use. Although some tribes have adopted practices akin to stock raising, others, such as the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, have maintained a policy of keeping the animals as much as possible in a natural, open range habitat with minimal human intervention. With few exceptions, white ranchers are instituting more controlled stock techniques in the raising of their herds, and very soon, producers may be called upon to identify, as is the case with poultry and beef, whether their meat comes from “free range” stock or not. Bison and other game at Wind Cave National Park and Custer State Park are managed too, and the animals killed as a conservation measure with the meat donated, at least in the past, to local tribal and educational institutions (see Chapter Six). In relation to styles of management, the lines separating some of today’s bison herds owned and maintained by private enterprises for commercial ends and those under the care of public parks are nearly indistinguishable. What separates them are the purposes for which they are being kept, and in the case of the national parks, these are largely in the interests of species’ survivance and public spectatorship.

Today, Wind Cave National Park, like other parks in the national park system, remains a public commons, open to all citizens of this nation and foreign visitors, too, but for limited uses consistent with the mission of the park service to preserve its natural resources and to keep its landscapes in tact. These uses are largely restricted to viewing park lands along roads, trails, and waterways and at established campsites and other types of lodging. Camping in non-developed areas of parks, as typically practiced by backpackers, requires special permits, and in some areas, it may be prohibited because of fire risks and other dangers. Park users are generally prohibited from disturbing natural resources, for example, collecting plants and quarrying minerals, although they can fish in season and take wild fruits. Over their history, however, parks throughout the West have encouraged certain groups of users and discouraged others. Whether intentional or not, American Indian peoples have usually been excluded from making traditional use of public commons under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Under restrictive policies aimed at preserving a park’s natural resources, many traditional procurement activities were disallowed, including the gathering of plants and minerals for religious purposes. Until recent decades, the conduct of religious observances was prohibited as well, even when their impacts were negligible and less invasive than the construction, improvement, and maintenance of campsites, trails, and roads for tourists and recreationists. As a number of commentators have argued, it would have seemed, at least prior to 1970, that parks were open to everyone except American Indians who desired access for traditional reasons. Closely following this pattern, there was another form of exclusion, and that is the absence of a tribal viewpoint in the construction of informational and interpretive materials about park lands, even when these lands had been occupied and owned by tribal peoples for thousands of years.

Under criticism and political pressure, the national parks are now being asked to become more inclusive with respect to the use and interpretation of their lands. They are now being asked to develop policies that accommodate traditional tribal interests and uses in the management of park properties. Increasingly, tribal peoples are reestablishing a presence in the parks for these purposes. Some of their efforts have led to contestation and even litigation with other user groups, as in the battles between rock climbers and tribal religionists over access to Devil’s Tower National Park, but others have led to efforts at joint management, as is the case with Badlands National Park, or more modestly, collaborative efforts in interpretive programming as exists at Glacier National Park. These attempts have not always been successful, however. One only needs to witness the recent standoff at the Stronghold in the Badlands National Monument between members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service, or the continuing legal battles over the boundary lands at Glacier National Park to see otherwise.

Since the 1970s, tribal religionists, most of whom are Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos, have returned to Wind Cave National Park to conduct their spiritual observances and to request access to certain resources for use in religious contexts. Except for the Lakotas' brief occupation (which also included some Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal members) of the park in 1981, park staff and administrators have accommodated some tribal needs without incident. For a longer period of time, Lakotas and other tribal peoples have come to the park as "visitors," indistinguishable from the rest of the public who accompany the guided tours of its subterranean landscape. Today, school districts from the neighboring Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations regularly bring their children to the park on field trips. Both of these conform with standard forms of access available to the public. What has not happened, however, is any lasting and visible effort to include tribal viewpoints in the construction of narratives about the park's subterranean and above ground landscapes, its history, and resources. If the park truly stands as common grounds, an inclusive space, then it must include the stories and perspectives of all the peoples who make up its history, especially the tribal peoples who think of this area as a very special, indeed a sacred, place in their world. In modern times, three tribes who still hold this knowledge and understanding are the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and probably the Arapahos.