The Blackfeet Seasonal Round

In the summer of 1911 ethnologist C.C. Uhlenbeck interviewed elders of the South Piegan in Montana regarding Blackfeet lifeways. The chapter “How the Ancient Peigans Lived,” as told by Kainaikoan, Blood Man¹, and interpreted by Istkyáxtso, Joseph Tatsey describes in detail the annual seasonal round of one Blackfeet band.² The AápaitapΞ band moved15 times in one year. These places are not permanently inhabited by the Blackfeet, but were used during their seasonal hunting, gathering and religious activities. They begin and end near where they start in a river valley, Kainaikoan describes their activities as follows:

1) They begin at Itsipútsimaup, Battle Coulee, on the Kyúiesisχtaii, Bear River (Marias River), for winter camp. The band stays here until late spring when their horses are fat and have finished shedding their hair.
2) and 3) They move within and between the Katoysiks, Sweet Grass Hills, and the Aiix’kimnikuy, Cypress Hills, to hunt for buffalo bulls. The meat is dried and the hides are made into parfleche containers.

_Otsíkin_, Buffalo bean, _Thermopsis rhombifolia_, when Buffalo Bean was in bloom it was time to go hunt buffalo

_Buffalo_, Image courtesy of David R. M. Beck
4) They move next to the PaχkΞχkeyi, Pakoki Lake, to look for buffalo for skins to make lodge covers.

PaχkΞχkeyi, Pakoki Lake is a large shallow lake, this photo is during a drought year and the majority of the lake was covered in prairie grass.
A photo of buffalo on the Blackfeet reservation (next to a prairie lake), a representation of what Pakoki Lake may have looked like before the near extinction of the bison.

5) They move next to Akai’niskuyΞ Many Berries, to gather service berries, goose berries, red willow berries, and to start the processing of the buffalo hides into lodge covers.
6) They move next to *Einiótok’nisi*, Buffalo-Bull’s Head, to pick more berries, this time choke cherries, which they dry for winter use.
7) They move next to *lx‘kitsikitapΞiks*, Seven Persons, to hunt for elk and process the hides. (Elk hides were usually used for clothing.)
8) The move back to the Aiiχ’kimmikuyu, Cypress Hills, to cut lodge poles. (The only place on the Plains to find lodge pole pines.)
9) They move next to *Inokimists*, Long Lake, but *Kainaikoan* does not record their activities. It is possible that they were religious.

10) They move next to *Mátokeks oma’nis t̓̓moi otsîskitał̓piatu*, Women’s Society Left Their Lodge Pole, to “chase” stray buffalo bulls

On the Alberta prairies west of the Cypress Hills, *Mátokeks oma’nis t̓̓moi otsîskitał̓piatu*, Women’s Society Left Their Lodge Pole, has not been identified but this region is representative of the area.
11) They move next to $\text{E} \chi \text{komonu} \text{E} \text{siu}$, Green Lake, to process the hides of the stray buffalo bulls. They make more parfleche containers, rawhide for their travois, string from the sinew, and robes from the hair on the buffalo’s head.

In the area of Green Lake, it is possibly $\text{E} \chi \text{komonu} \text{E} \text{siu}$, Green Lake, but this has never been identified for certain.
12) They move next to A’isinaiχpΞ, Writing On Stone on the Milk River, to collect more choke cherries and dry them for winter use.
13) They move next to A’kekoksistaksuy, Women’s Point on the Milk River, to hunt antelope. (Antelope hides were used to make clothing.)

Mátokeks omoa’is təmoa otsitcksitaapiau, Women’s Society Left Their Lodge Pole is also an area that has not been identified for certain, except that it is on the Milk river near Writing on Stone.
14) They move next Ponákïksi, Cut Bank Creek in mountains, to cut more new lodge poles and complete the sewing of the buffalo lodge covers for winter use. They stay in the mountains until the first light snow.

15) They return to winter camp on Lower Cut Bank Creek near the Marias.
Kainaikoan reported that once the Aápaitap band set up their winter lodges, they built a corral for their horses and would hunt the local bison near the river valley. At this time of year they preferred to hunt 2-4 year old heifers. They dried the meat for winter use and made winter robes for their families. They augmented their preserved berries and meat with foods they found locally, which are usually collected in late autumn, such as; tree cambium, roots, black alkali, rosehips, kapsii, and bullberries. After the first big snow the women would collect all their winter wood. Once the band had all of its provisions for the winter – their horses corralled, meat, berries and other plant foods preserved, and wood collected – the men were allowed to return to the prairies to hunt buffalo for robes and other animal fur to trade.

Endnotes

1 Blood Man is probably Jim Blood. Jim Blood was a full-blood Piegan born in 1859. His grandfather was Chief-Mountain, one of the leaders of the Blood-people band of the South Piegan. Conversation with Bill Farr and J.P. De Josselin De Jong. Blackfoot Texts. (Amsterdam, Johannes Muller, 1914), pg. 120-121. I will assume that the band movements that Blood Man discuss in his interview are the movements the Blood-people band.

2 C.C. Uhlenback, A New Series of Blackfoot Texts from the Southern Piegans Blackfoot Reservation Teton County Montana (Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1912), pg. 1-38.

3 parflech – (in Native culture) a buffalo hide, dried by being stretched on a frame after the hair has been removed. • an article, especially a bag, made from this.