

The Maximilian-Bodmer Expedition, 1832-1834

the people



In 1832 a fifty-year-old German naturalist and ethnologist, Prince Alexander Philip Maximilian von Wied, along with a twenty-three-year-old Swiss artist he had hired named Karl Bodmer set sail from Europe to North America. Their Goal: to sail up the Missouri River and record all that they saw. The result: 2,000 pages of notes recorded by Prince Maximilian and over 400 drawings and paintings from the pen and brush of Bodmer, as well as a considerable collection of specimens and artifacts. Their trek completed in 1834, the two men sailed back to Europe to publish their observations of the aboriginal peoples, flora, fauna and geology of the United States - particularly the upper Missouri region. Bodmer's work falls into several categories, according to their subjects: landscapes, studies of animals, studies of artifacts, scenes of Indian life and Indian portraits.



Péhriska-Rúpa is dressed in a shirt trimmed with bands of yellow quill work and fringed with ermine, locks of human hair, and dyed horsehair. He also wears a striped wollen breechclout and quilled leggings. The leggings are made of the entire skin of a deer. The soft tanned skin was simply folded and sewn in a tube that would encase the leg. Around his neck he wears a necklace of grizzly bear claws fastened to an otterskin band and spaced with blue and white beads. Such necklaces were highly prized and very expensive. He also wears a beautifully painted buffalo robe and carries a ceremonial pipe decorated with horsehair, quill work and beads.

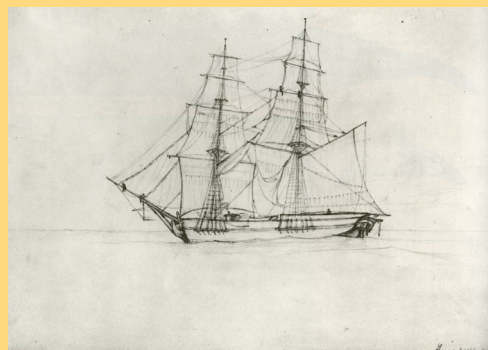


Péhriska-Rúpa was a warrior and a leader of the Hidatsa (Minatarre). He was a principal leader of the Hidatsa Dog Society of his village. He posed for this portrait dressed in his society regalia in 1834. According to Maximilian he was wearing a large cap made of magpie tail feathers with a wild turkey tail in the middle, a war whistle, and a large scarf-like trailer which was red over the left shoulder and blue over the right. The white tips on the glossy black feathers indicate the attachment of a tiny down feather to the point of each plume. The central, vertical plume is painted red. Dyed horsehair floats from colored sticks attached to the shafts of the turkey feathers. All of the regalia was in constant motion as the dancer moved to the cadence of drum and rattle. The rattle, made of small hooves or dewclaws of deer or elk attached to a beaded stick, is also a society emblem.

The Hidatsa (Minatarre) The Hidatsa, "*People of the Willows*," took their name from the many willows growing along the banks of the Missouri River in North Dakota, near their largest village. But it was the Mandan that named them "Minataree," "*they who crossed the river*." The Hidatsa are the original people of North and South Dakota. The Hidatsa too, were devastated by the smallpox epidemic of 1837. Remaining survivors regrouped themselves into a single village. In 1845, they moved the village to the vicinity of Fort Berthold, North Dakota. In 1871, by means of a federal governmental order, a larger reservation was established on which the remaining Mandan and Arikara tribes (of which the Hidatsa are members) live.

..... Documentation of the Journey

The Atlantic Voyage Rotterdam to Boston



The Brig Janus

Maximilian's voyage to North America began on the morning of May 7, 1832 when he departed from the family estate at Neuwied for the Dutch port of Rotterdam on the Rhine steamer Concordia. With him were Swiss artist Karl Bodmer and David Dreidoppel, Maximilian's personal servant and an experienced hunter and taxidermist.



Scene on the "Janus"

On the evening of May 17 the travelers boarded the American brig *Janus*, bound for Boston. Passage down the English Channel and around Great Britain's southern coast required a week of sailing; on the 24th they "saw Land's End, Cornwall, vanish in the misty distance, and bade farewell to Europe."



The American Ship Marcus in Rotterdam

The *Janus* encountered heavy seas during the first two weeks of June. The voyage was otherwise relatively uneventful. Cape Cod was sighted on July 3 and on the 4th of July they entered the port of Boston during the 56th anniversary celebration of the United States' independence from Great Britain.

Discussion Questions

Who is Prince Maximilian?



Why did Prince Maximilian bring Karl Bodmer on the expedition?



How does this exploration of the interior of North America differ from Lewis and Clark's expedition?



What subjects did Bodmer record in his artworks?



Imagine you are on an expedition, what findings would you record and how would you do that?

On the Missouri River St. Louis to the Bellevue Agency



Snags (Sunken Trees) on the Missouri

10th April - "at eleven o'clock, all our company having collected, the [Steamboat] Yellow Stone left St. Louis... There were about 100 persons on board..., most of whom were those called *engages* or *voyageurs*, who are the lowest class of [employees] of the Fur Company. Most of them are French Canadians, or descendants of the French settlers on the Mississippi and Missouri."



The Steamboat Yellow Stone

The *Yellow Stone*, in 1832, had been the first steam-powered craft to ascend the Missouri above Council Bluffs in an experiment by John Jacob Astor's powerful American Fur Company to see if steamboats could be substituted for the smaller keelboats in the trade on the upper river.

The Upper Missouri River The Bellevue Agency to Fort McKenzie



View on the Missouri, Blackbird's Grave

On the banks of the Missouri River above present-day Omaha, the explorers documented the grave of the Omaha chief Blackbird.



View of the Stone Walls on the Upper Missouri

Maximilian and Bodmer encountered magnificent scenery. The Prince exclaimed in his diaries about the remarkable hills, the uncanny natural architecture of the White Castles, and the spectacular stone walls. "...We again saw most singular summits on the hills. ...remarkable scenery, as we were approaching the most interesting part of the Mauvais Terres ["Badlands"]. Resembling mountain - castles, fortresses, and the like and they become steeper and more barren at every step."



The White Castles on the Missouri

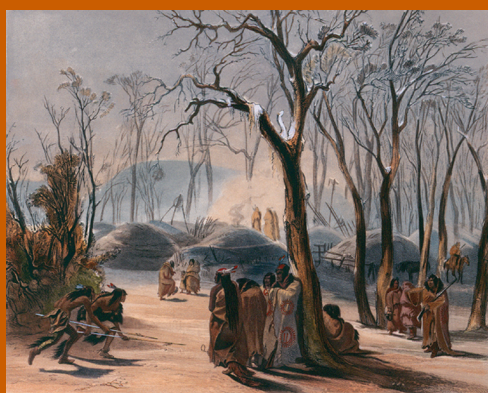
While observing herds of bisons and elks, Prince Maximilian wrote..."on the south bank, there was a thick, snow-white layer, a long extended stratum of white sand-stone, which had been partly eroded by the river. These singular natural formations, when seen from a distance, so perfectly resembled buildings raised by art that we were thoroughly deceived by them until assured of our error."



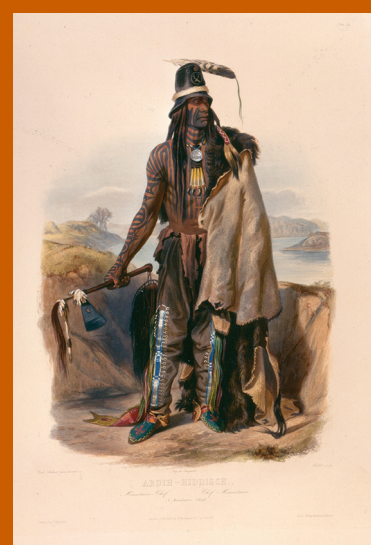
Fort McKenzie

Established in 1832, Fort McKenzie was the westernmost outpost of the American Fur Company. Maximilian had originally intended to continue to the Rocky Mountains but because of the danger of Indian hostilities the party decided to return downriver.

Winter Village of the Minnatarres Late November, 1833



Maximilian and Bodmer made a cold, nine-hour trek from Fort Clark to one of the Hidatsa villages to observe a ceremony. They stayed several days and the sketches for this aquatint print may have been done at that time. Comprised of about eighty households, the village is most probably Eláhsa, the largest of the Hidatsa settlements on the Knife River. "*The Hidatsa go into the forest on either side of the Missouri River in winter, where they find protection against the winter weather. Their winter villages are in the thickest parts of the forest and their winter lodges are built near to each other. During the winter season there is more life on the frozen river as the people move from winter quarters to Fort Clark.*"



Addih-Hiddisch ("Maker of Roads"), Hidatsa Chief

Addih-Hiddisch was a great warrior and the chief of the village of Awachavi. He was a member of the tribal council responsible for the defense of all three Hidatsa villages, he was the keeper of an important medicine bundle and had an impressive war record. In this portrait he wears a Euro-American hat topped with a coup feather and has a peace medal around his neck - signs of his political status. The hat and the peace medal were given to Indian leaders by the American Government in respect for their position as leaders of their people. Addih-Hiddisch's body was not painted but was tattooed with geometric patterns on his neck, arms and chest. His tattooing was one with a needle dipped in blue-black dye made from willow bark. The stripes and symbols, which may represent war exploits, are embellished with red paint. His leggings are trimmed with blue and white beadwork and the knob like painted symbols may stand for the many horses he captured and gave away.

The Thunderbird once appeared to him in a vision, promising battle success thus the bird design on his quilled moccasins. The scalp and scalp-lock attached to his war hatchet are trophies taken by him and his followers. Bodmer painted him in 1834. A hundred years later, Addih-Hiddisch was still remembered by the Hidatsa as an outstanding leader.



All images are by Karl Bodmer and are from the collection of Joslyn Art Museum unless otherwise noted.

Timeline featuring the buffalo



Buffalo on the Upper Missouri

50,000 - 80,000 Years Ago

Scholars theorize that bison emigrated in several ancestral forms from Northern Asia, crossing the Bering Strait Land Bridge between Asia and North America. The ancestral forms of bison were much larger. Some early species had horn spreads of over six feet and stood nearly twice as tall as modern bison. Today there are only two sub-species of these ancient wanderers, *Bison bison* (Plains Bison) and *Bison bison athabascæ* (Woodland Bison).



Buffalo and Elk on the Upper Missouri

Pre 1600 - 1800 C.E.

An estimated 60 million bison roamed the North American continent. The Plains Indians revered the buffalo; they believed the Great Spirit put buffalo on the Earth to provide for them. The Buffalo formed the foundation of their way of life. They used every part of the animal. A fat buffalo cow could provide 400 pounds of meat. The hides of both male and female bison could be used for shelter, clothing, ceremonial regalia, weapons, tools, and camp equipment.



Women of the Mandan White Buffalo Cow Society

1834

At noon [25th December 1834] there was a concourse of Indians in the fort: the women's band of the "White Buffalo Cow" had come to perform their dance. The company consisted of seventeen, mostly older women and two men, with the drum and the schischikué; the first of these two men carried a gun in his hand. A stout elderly woman went first; she was wrapped in the hide of a white buffalo cow, and held, in her right arm, a bundle of twigs in the form of a conucopia, with down feathers at the top, and at the lower end an eagle's wing, and a tin drinking vessel. Another woman carried a similar bundle. All of these women wore round their heads a piece of buffalo hide in the form of a hussar's cap, with a plume of owl or raven feathers in front, some of which were dyed red; only two of them wore the pelt of a polecat; all the men were bareheaded.



Head of a Buffalo

1850s

Although Congress passed the first game laws to protect the buffalo in 1855, the building of the railroads opened the Great Plains area to the profitable business of shipping hides, meat and tongues and later, bones. The decimation of the buffalo, along with other wildlife rapidly changed the eco system and the Plains Indian way of life.



Mandan Buffalo Robe (Mató-Tópe Buffalo Robe)

In addition to food and shelter, warm robes for the cold months were made from the hide and its thick wool. Plains Indians used no written words to record personal biographies, family and tribal history, religious practices or tribal ceremonies. Instead, they used picture-writing or pictographs, and winter counts painted on buffalo or deer hides.

1867

In 1876 the Kansas Pacific Railroad reached the heart of buffalo country. Thousands of buffalo were killed to feed the men in the construction camps. The celebrated scout William "Buffalo Bill" Cody was employed as a hunter for one of these camps. He was paid \$500 a month to supply the headquarters of 10-12 buffalo a day. Buffalo Bill, with his horse, rifle and accompanied by one man in a wagon, killed 4,280 buffalo in 18 months as a hunter.



Piegan Blackfoot Man

Plains warriors often painted their robes or shirts with symbols of their war deeds. The figures on this elk hide worn by this Piegan man indicate that he had many successes in battle; there are wounded adversaries, and many horses, furs and other weapons taken from his enemies.

1870s

An estimated two million buffalo were killed in one year. Germany had developed a process to tan hides into fine leather. Bison bones were used in refining sugar, making fertilizer and fine bone china. General Philip Sheridan promoted the slaughter of bison herd to deprive the Indians of their primary food source.



Hidatsa Buffalo Robe

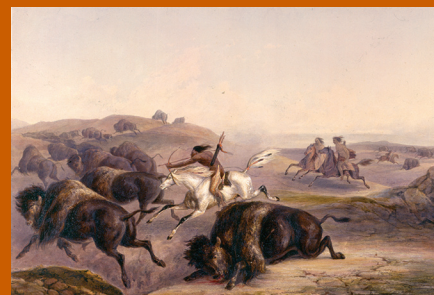
An inscription on the reverse of this watercolor attributes the ownership of this robe to Péhriska-Rúpa, the Hidatsa warrior. Several battle episodes are portrayed in pictographs.

Winter Count Robes - Pictographs were an ancient form of communication using simple word symbols. For example, the word symbol for a buffalo was an outline of a buffalo skull. Each tribe used a different style but the symbols were somewhat universal. This was done in order to overcome any language barriers with other tribes. Most Plains Indians counted the years by winters. They documented the year with a type of calendar called a winter count. Symbols of important events of a tribe's history were painted onto a large animal hide, usually buffalo. The winter counts not only showed the events of a single year, but often portrayed the events of a succession of years. Handed down to families through the years, winter counts were an important means for communicating family and tribe history.

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Leader of the Mandan Buffalo Bull Society

The buffalo was a sacred animal to the Plains Indians, a central part of their mythology and their religion. For example, the Pawnee believed that the Milky Way was formed by dust left by the spirit-buffalo. The Mandan performed the Bull Dance as part of a ceremony to ensure success during the buffalo hunt. The Blackfoot tribe performed a ritual dance called the Buffalo Dance before and after each hunt as a special way of thanking the buffalo for sacrificing some of their own so that the Indians could survive.



Indians Hunting the Buffalo (Bison) Buffalo (American Bison) and the Plains Indians:

A Gift from the Great Spirit The historical relationship between people and nature, is expressed through the story of the American bison and its relationship to the people and history of the American West. According to Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux, "the buffalo is the chief of all animals and represents the earth, the totality of all that is." The role of the bison in the lives of the Plains Indians, materially and spiritually, can be better understood through Karl Bodmer's drawings and watercolors, which documented the Buffalo - and its importance in Plains Indian culture. Prince Maximilian wrote - "*The consumption of this animal is immense in North America. It has become as indispensable to the Indians as the reindeer to the Laplanders, and the seal to the Eskimoes. It is difficult to obtain an exact estimate of the consumption of this species, numbers of which are decreasing annually as herds are decimated and driven further inland. Recently, the Fur Company sent 42,000 buffalo hides down to river in one year, to be sold to the United States at four dollars a piece. Fort Union alone consumes about 600-800 buffalo annually, and the other forts in proportion. The numerous Indian tribes subsist almost entirely on buffalo, selling their skins after retaining a sufficient supply for their clothing, tents, etc., while the agents of the company recklessly shoot down the noble animals for their own pleasure, often not making the least use of them and removing only the tongue.*"

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