

Unit 3 Document Set 1: Winter Counts  
Beede's Interpretation of High Dogs' Winter Count

[High Dog Version] A key to a winter "count" marked with the name Beede

1(1798) As old Indians say, this mnemonic picture means that it was agreed to among the people that any one of the tribe who was seen wearing the blue feathers should be an example to others in virtue and goodness, and should be esteemed by all as a guardian of the "nation." Four men were at that time set apart with the blue feathers. As I learn, this was not the beginning of this ceremony. By an old ceremony men were set apart as "atepyapi" (=fathers) and women as "inayanpi" (=mothers). By this ceremony with a dance persons were chosen as rulers in the tribe, and their admonitions were heeded. Sometimes a small child was raised to this class because some portent at its birth indicated its superior wisdom. Grown persons were raised to this class on account of some distinguished service to the tribe, as well as for manifest wisdom and foresight in affairs. Those raised to this class while they were babes are said to have been generally the most satisfactory administrators of justice. Such children received careful training both from those previously raised to this class and also from the grandmothers. Among very numerous other things too lengthy for record here, they were taught to admonish with discretion and with gentleness, to honor and respect all aged people themselves, to be kind to dogs and all animals as well as to human beings, etc. All rulers were expected to manifest these virtues. This subject should be fully written up, for right here was the seat of authority among all Souian tribes, - and this is a point which no writers seem to know. This was an aristocratic ruling class. The women attended to certain well understood affairs and the men likewise to certain specified things, the distinguishing mark of this class was the wearing of the feather. How many writers seem to suppose that the feather might be worn by anyone! Not so. If one of this class proved unworthy, he was not deposed, but from that time on, or until by expurgation he had purged himself of old offenses and adopted better manners he had small influence in the council-meetings, yet the people must respect him.

2(1799) A Whiteman called Chaske(=the first-born, and he was a son) came to this tribe and stayed permanently for the purpose of trade. Previous to this time traders had come and gone after a short stay.

3(1800) This was an exceptionally dry year. The Winds (Creatures?) drank up the streams, while women lay moaning in the tents in distress on account of the heat. The fiery Sun in anger at the people for something burned up the grass and foliage. The birds went to the great rivers far away, and sat in the thicket mum. The flowers were all gone. The buffalo went away. Water was sometimes found by digging down in beaver holes.

4 (1801) From the sum of all the stories about this record I am satisfied that there was a democratic gathering (the fundamental basis in all Souian administration) and that the trader previously mentioned induced some changes in some of the rules of government. And at this meeting the horsetail badge was adopted as an insignia for a ruler (if a man, - not if a woman). Note that the horse had become now important to the Sioux though only a portion of them had horses as yet. Note also that the horse was a sacred animal.

5 (1802) The Sioux while at war with the Crows took some crinkled horses or crinkle-haired horses. It is said this battle occurred southeasterly from the Black Hills.

6(1803) The Sioux captured some shod horses from the Crows, and concluded that the Crows were confederate [allied] with the Whitmen. This was the first time they had seen shoes on horses, though they were aware Whitemens' horses wore them, and some imagined these

horses of the Whitemen were trained to strike an enemy with these iron weapons.

7 (1804) Eight Sioux were killed by the Crows in a running battle. This occurred near the Black Hills, as they say. Though tradition varies I am inclined to think the trader above mentioned was slain with them.

8 (1805) The Crows attacked the Sioux in camp. The battle was long and well fought, but as the Crows were mounted two on a horse while the Sioux had not this disadvantage they won out, many killed.

9(1806) In war with the Crows a leader named Akile Luta was slain. The meaning of the name is uncertain - Luta means red. I think Akile was a name given him as a brave because at some time he had bravely brought back the corpse of one who was slain.

10(1807) A Sioux leader (spy) slain by the Crows.

11 (1808) The Sioux sent an expert out to find where the buffalo were as they were nearly out of meat. The Crows killed him.

12(1809) The Sioux crossed the Missouri River and on the east side captured a large number of stray horses, and this gave them a better supply of horses than they had ever had before. They say this crossing was made at a place a few sleeps north of [the present-day city of] Pierre, S.D.

13(1810) They had smallpox or some such disease which caused great loss of life. This was in the winter.

14 (1811) A Whiteman came to live with them. He built a small log house. He was a small man and inclined to stay in his house a good deal, so they named him Little Beaver.

15 (1812) The Sioux were camping easterly from and at the Black Hills. The Crows attacked them and were beaten off with one left dead.

16 (1813) The Sioux fought with the Crows and Little Bear, the leader was killed. By questionings I am satisfied these Tetons knew vaguely of what was going on in Wisconsin at this time, but took no interest in it. They did know of the "1812 war." They believed all Indians should keep out of it entirely "till the Whitemen had eaten up each other" and then seize the opportunity for regaining territory, as far east and south as possible. They tell me these matters were discussed. And I am repeatedly surprised to find how much these Tetons knew in some way of what was going on in the East.

17(1814) A Crow Indian by the name of Little Bear, (called also Uta or Wayutau) came to camp on a pretence of friendship with a member of the tribe, and was slain with a buffalo-bone. Not infrequently I run across accounts of a "friendship" formed between two men whose tribe were inimical. There should be a monograph written on this subject of "Indian Friendships." I know of nothing giving any sort of correct idea of what it was. Similar visits were also made not infrequently for the purpose of attending the Rites of an intertribal secret fraternity, but the visitor was bound in honor not to do any spying. Sitting Bull went to the Arikaras on a certain occasion for this purpose when the Arikaras were deadly enemies of the Sioux. And later he saved the life of an Arikara on the battlefield because the Arikara belonged to his secret society. This matter should be written up as fully as faithfulness to secret society vows may allow.

18 (1815) A Sioux stole a horse from another Sioux, and was punished by being so bored with an awl in the left jaw that the mark would be always a visible brand upon him. Some say he was shot in the jaw. Not so. The old men tell me he was tried by a court and sentenced to have his jaw bored with an awl. I have found many accounts of similar court trials. The judges were the men referred to in the first paragraph of this account. They all say this was the first theft ever known committed by a Sioux against another Sioux. They say this thief got the idea by hearing how a powerful Whiteman on the frontier would steal horses from other Whitemen.

19.(1816) Most Indians say this picture means that in a battle with the Crows the Sioux used hoops with horsetail hair on them as signals. I believe its real meaning is that the Sioux were badly beaten and lost many scalps, and that this euphemism was given to the next generation to cover up chagrin.

20(1817) A Chief's son by the name of Buffalo Bull died. The son's name was Buzz. "His

pipe was wrapped up in a white buffalo skin for one year, then his estate was divided." This is the non-committal way of saying that certain things were placed in the bundle at the door (outside) for one year and then a certain sacred ceremony, including the distribution of his goods and the pious burial of the bundle, was performed for the benefit of his Soul. I am not at liberty to state what this ceremony was. Few Indians under 60 years of age know these Rites.

21 (1818) There was a windstorm in the wintertime which blew the winter camp to pieces.

22 (1819) A Whiteman by the name of Joseph came among them and built himself a log house.

23 (1820) The Sioux in this summer celebrated for the first time in their history the sundance. They had known of it before, but had never used it. Medicine men of great repute persuaded them that if they would use this sacred dance it would give them power to resist the threatened inroads of the Whitemen, and so they adopted it as part of their customs. From this time on the medicine men replaced the "Wosna-kage," the old time priests. I write this as I learn it first hand there is a whole history here.

24 (1821) A star or comet fell while it was thundering. Location uncertain.

25 (1822) A leader named Dog Ghost went out hunting and froze to death.

26(1823) The Sioux went away to war with the Crows, and some Whitemen stole their corn while they were away. (Note this record as it confirms what I am often told, that those Sioux Hunkepapa Indians who more closely followed the Mandans, as they [the Mandans] retreated from year to year up the Missouri, first learned to raise corn; and then this agriculture was readily adopted by the western Tetons. There was a good progress in agriculture among the Indians of the upper Missouri, which was in some way obliterated by the coming of the Whiteman. Fishhook village, south of Fort Berthold had 400 acres of corn when Gen. Sully came to them.)

27 (1824) They have the ceremony of anointing a buffalo horn with clay and hanging it near the camp so as to make the buffalo come. The formula of this ceremony is known to old men now living. The sort of clay used was the same as that with which the breasts of the scouts were anointed as they were about to go into the Custer-Sitting Bull Battle.

28 (1825) They were camping on the bottom by the Missouri River, and a sudden and unprecedented rise of water in the early spring drowned over one half of the tribe (it was probably only one band of a complete tribe). This is said to have occurred on the east bank of the river near the place where the railroad bridge is soon to be built at Cannon Ball. The Indians call the place "Dead Horsehead Point, because after the flood the shore was lined with horses' heads. Their horses were corralled for the night, and were all drowned but a straggling few.

29 (1826) A famous chief named Corn Stalk went with a party against the Crows, and returned with scalps.

30 (1827) For the first time they used snowshoes in hunting buffalo.

31(1828) They passed the winter by Bear Butte, near the Black Hills.

32 (1829) A man looking for buffalo was found on the prairie shot and frozen. He is called Froze-on-the-Prairie. I think he shot himself by accident. Suicide was at this time practically unknown among them, and I never heard of any human being suiciding to keep from freezing to death in the open. This death comes unexpectedly, and without pain. I have been once frozen beyond consciousness. The reviving is keen pain.

33(1830) A battle with the Crows, and many were slain.

34(1831) Brown, a Whiteman shot and killed an Indian, being jealous on account of his wife. (In these times, and previously, this was considered the just penalty upon a man for a domestic offence. Such an offence they say was seldom committed). [handwritten note added: "What was done to Brown by the Indian's friends I am pledged not to relate. Look at the picture."]

35 (1832) A log house was built by an Indian for the first time. (A point worth noting for a score of reasons.)

36(1833) This year is named "Stars-all-Moveing Year". The falling of the stars in this year is said to have caused great consternation. They feared the Great Spirit had lost his control over the creation.

37 (1834) Some say this picture means: "The first war bonnet was made with horns on it." This picture,

or something similar to it is seen on more than one historical record, and this is the explanation of its meaning usually given to Whitemen. Is that its real meaning? Not at all. I know its real meaning and a whole chapter connected with it. It tells the sad tale of the Souian vain hope to resist what they saw must be the destruction of their race by the inroads of the Whiteman. No more can be said.

38 (1835) "A fight among the Sioux and many killed" is the explanation given. How much more it really means! Note the three small faces purpose-drawn to resemble Whitemen's faces, and read the rest for yourself. Why the fight? Some wished to gracefully yield to the inevitable, others were ready "to kiss the gun," and still defy the Whiteman's arrogance.

39 (1836) six Crow chiefs were killed by the Sioux.

40 (1837) Small pox carried off to "Wanagi-yakonpi" many of the suffering people. I have heard tales of this terrible winter too pitiable to record.

41 (1838) The Sioux take many spotted horses from the Crows in a battle.

42 (1839) An Indian woman hanged herself "because her husband was killed" as it was put to a certain Whiteman. As I have been told the woman was a maid, and there was a love-romance behind the act. This was the first suicide among these particular Sioux Indians since an epidemic of suicide subsided, before this account begins.

43 (1840) Elk Spider, a chief was killed by the Crows.

44 (1841) Snowshoes used again.

45 (1842) A chief lost in a battle with the Crows, and supposed to be dead, returned later with a Crow Horse.

46 (1843) Measles. No great mortality.

47 (1844) They killed seven "tigers" in the Black Hills, and as this territory was claimed by the Crows they killed seven Sioux as reprisal. (Note this item with care. It should lead, with many other things, to a reconstruction of some published ideas regarding intertribal geography. AS early as 1834 I find the Indian stories, as well as [other] stories by other items telling of the Crows over by the Black Hills, with a small band of Shoshones living just beyond them, and on friendly terms with them. As I have heard it, Sakakawiyen [Sakakawea] whom the Sioux call "Zitkadan-wiyen (=Bird Woman) was captured from this small band of Shoshones, and not from the main group of the same "nation" farther west.

49 (1846) One man alone defended "the feathers," the flag, against great odds in a battle with the Crows. Another explanation (and the correct one) is that a general democratic assembly was made for the purpose of enacting more rigid rules regarding the respect due those who wore the feathers (i.e. the aristocratic class). Seeing this class not always respected by Whitemen, who now quite often came to them, had led the common Indians not to hold the feather in so high respect. And so the very basis of the Souian system of government (the court, and to quite an extent the legislature) was in danger, and with this the "nation was though to be endangered.

50 (1847) They camped by a creek (in South Dakota), and from having obtained Whitemen's blankets they called it "Blanket Creek".

51 (1848) The Crows took a Sioux woman and held her as a "slave".

52 (1849) They went to hunt buffalo, and were surprised by the Crows.

53 (1850) Chief Catch Turtle died.

54 (1851) They wintered by Slave-heart Butte (South Dakota).

55 (1852) A distemper in the winter. This same winter they made a treaty with the Crows.

56 (1853) Chief Four Horns was killed. A Crow killed by a Sioux.

57 (1854) Bear Heart was killed by a Crow Indian.

58 (1855) They had a Whiteman in camp with long grey beard, and they took care of him through the winter. (I have heard this man's name was John Johnson.)

59 (1856) Good Bear tore a war-bonnet from a Crow's head in a fight.

60(1857) They returned from a battle with the Crows, having killed many.

61 (1858) A man named Paunch killed a white buffalo.

62 (1859) Five brothers named "Sinko-hanska" (=Long Dog) killed by Crows.

63(1860) "A man killed 10 race horses, and so was named Race-Horse." This interpretation, as given, resembles some poetry in that it is intended to conceal rather than to reveal. The fact is a secret.

64 (1861) "They tracked the Crows who had stolen some horses from the Sioux and in a fight a Sioux leader named Tracks Weasel was killed." This explanation is frequently given of this picture story. Is it correct? Not to anyone with even a slight acquaintance with mnemographic writing. The great delicacy of the Sioux nature forbids them to say that this record tells how some of their people experienced for the first time a certain dread disease which was contracted from Whitemen, and the disease being in virgin soil caused untold misery to those who contracted it. This true explanation with full descriptions of the symptoms and suffering, without medical aid has often enough been given me by old men, and I think it but just to state it frankly. [This was probably a sexually transmitted disease which Reverend Beede and High Dog are embarrassed to name.]

65(1862) They exterminated a band of "HAKES" with whom they fought. These were probably Creek Indians.

66(1863) While fighting the Crows they found a boy Crow in a coyote-trap and killed him.

67(1864) They captured and held a White-woman. They would not give her up because they liked her and believed she meant good luck to them. (Probably Mrs. [Fanny] Kelly?)

68 (1865) "They discovered a way to make blood pudding." I have heard this explanation given to inquisitive Whitemen who were permitted to see the records, and have seen it actually written as quoted by an Indian of the young generation before a Whiteman's edification. Other accounts also are given with a twinkle in the eye. What does it really mean? It is a single picture, instead of a double one, as in No. 64. It means the same as that mnemographic record minus the Tracks Weasel affair. In short it means, as Tetons put it in their dialect, "Leje awicaya" the same dread disease mentioned in no. 64, and named according to one of its symptoms which the sufferer could not cover up as easily as he could cover pain. I know this from the best of authority, and deem frankness in the matter progress.

69 (1866) Pizi, Gall, the man of all men on the Indian side when Gen. Custer and his men went down in defeat on June 25 1876, was taken by Gen. Miles and held prisoner. It was for a time believed he had been put to death. [This statement about Gall's captivity cannot be substantiated] For a noble and just account of this man, see McLaughlin's "My Friend the Indian."

70 (1867) "A Sioux woman broke her leg." "A Sioux woman died over in Montana." etc. These are the interpretations of this picture the meaning of which is well known to many still living. Let the man who sees this mnemographic story decide for himself what it means. No one ever told me in plain words its meaning.

71 (1863) They slew 15 Crow Indians.

72(1869) They slew 30 Crow Indians.

73(1870) Chief Crowfeather died (natural death)

74 (1871) Little Crow, a chief died.

75(1872) Turning Bear killed a Crow who came to his tent to fight.

76 (1873) A Crow stole a white horse from someone.

77(1874) A fat Crow Indian was killed by the Sioux. There are many tales of this giant. After slaying him they dissected him hoping to discover why he grew so large. A member of my church who assisted in this dissecting has told me about it many times. He says the man would weigh about 400 pounds, and that the flesh on his thigh was as thick as 2/3 the length of a knife blade, and was yellow in color.

78 (1875) This record reads literally: "In the early summer we were visited by Apache Indians who rode white horses." The fifth grade pupil knows what occurred in June 25 1876. [The Battle of the Little Big Horn]. Any number of old Indians have told me it refers to the Custer-Sitting Bull Battle. Old Indians who have a good idea of the Whiteman's way of reckoning years persist in calling this year 1875 instead of 1876. And so they [the Sioux] may be off a year in some of the other dates. I have written all dates as they understand them. Somewhere between 1833 and 1875 they lost a year.

79 (1876. really 1877). Sitting Bull made a treaty with the French (half-bloods) in Canada.

80(1877 - really 1873) One Star was killed by the Crows.

81(1878 - really 1879) Little Bear was killed by the Crows.

82 ( 1880) He-has-a-red-spear died.

83(1881) The man in this record is Chief Gall in citizens clothes. Of course, dozens of men living now know what it means, but for some reason no one will give me the real meaning. I suspect it refers to a time when he, as a policeman stopped a sundance near Fort Yates. Maj. McLaughlin can probably give the exact date of this remarkable feat of bravery. There are other episodes in Gall's career as a faithful citizen to which it might refer.

84(1882) A Whiteman called White-beard (Maj. McLaughlin?) led the hostiles to feel friendly toward the government.

85 (1883) White -"beard went on a buffalo hunt with the Indians.

86 (1884) Three Crow Indians came to visit them as friends.

87 (1885) Little Crow died.

88 (1886) An old warrior named [unknown- perhaps Hawk Shield] died.

89 (1887) Good Elk died.

90 (1888) Four Horns died.

91 (1889) There was an eclipse of the sun. The Sun turned black and died.

92(1890) A woman was killed by a tree falling on her.

93(1891) Sitting Bull was slain. [December 1890]

94 (1892) He-has-a-spotted horse died.

95 (1893) Horse Shoe died.

96 (1894) He-has-a red spear died.

97 (1895) Chief Gall died. (See if they have this year correct) [Gall died in 1894]

98 (1896) A woman was burned to death in her home.

99 (1897) A sickness caused pimples on peoples heads.

100 (1898) A woman once taken captive from the Crows and always living with them died.

101 (1899) Spotted Bear died.

102 (1900) Hawk Shield died.

103 (1901) Good elk died.

104 (1902) Bull Head died.

105 (1903) Buffalo ghost died.

106 (1904) A star died (disappeared.)

107 (1905) Beaver Shield died.

108 (1906) Rain-in-the-face died. [September 1905]

109 (1907) Feather Hawk died.

110 (1908) His-horse-rears died.

111 (1909) There was an issue of horses.

112 (1910) There was a comet.

113 (1911) Buffalo Fool died.

114 (1912) Children had measles and the [the following words added in script] same year a star burned up.