

OLD ARIKARA METHOD OF BUTCHERING A BUFFALO

The Indian method and order of cutting up a beef was considerably different from ours because of the different conditions of their life, and of the different uses and disposition of the skins, meat and other parts. The description here given of Arikara butchering in former times is from verbal information of several capable Arikara informants, and from observation of a demonstration of method in the killing and dressing of a beef in the ancient manner by a group of Arikaras on the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, in August, 1923.

First of all the Indian manner of removing the hide is different from the manner in which this is done by white men. The carcass was turned on the belly and supported in that position by drawing out the forelegs to the front and the hind legs to the rear. In this position the hide was opened along the line of the spinal column from horns to tail, and then slit down from this line along the outside of each fore and hindquarter, and then flayed back from each of these initial cuts. The carcass was left on the opened hide while the operations of butchering went on. It thus was kept from becoming soiled in the dust and sand of the earth. The portions, as they were cut away, were laid on beds of large herbage or on boughs of shrubs.

The Indian way of cutting up a carcass was different from ours, but was planned in such wise as to be best accommodated to their uses of parts, and their methods of preservation. For example, we make no use of the sinew, but that was a valuable part in Indian economy, therefore the meat-cutting plan must be such as to preserve that commodity. Also the only means they had for preservation of meat was by drying. On that account, the cuts must be so planned as best to prepare for the process of drying. And as butchering of the buffalo was a community industry, all members of the community being employed in the work in some capacity, the cutting up of a carcass must be according to a plan which would best facilitate an equitable division of the meat and other products.

To save unnecessary weight in transportation the cutting was planned to strip all the meat, leaving the bones on the prairie, where the animal was slaughtered, except those bones, which were taken for the manufacture of certain tools and implements. The meat on such bone portions as the backbone, neck and

ribs, while considerable in quantity and desirable in quality, was not of convenient disposition for drying; it was therefore utilized for immediate cooking and eating as fresh meat, while certain other portions were dried to preserve for future use. Large bones were broken with sledgehammers to obtain the marrow.

The larger muscles of the entire muscular system were removed whole, so that they might be properly, and in most suitable manner reduced to long, thin strips for drying. After the meat was dried, it was packed away in packing cases made from rawhide convenient for storage or for transportation.

The fat was removed and rendered down and poured, while still warm and fluid, into vessels where it hardened on cooling, and was preserved for future use. The larger intestinal organs often were cleaned and made into such containers.

The intestines were turned inside out and cleaned and used for casing in which choice bits of lean meat and fat were stuffed in proper proportions for cooking, being turned back again as they were filled, like the turning of a stocking or of the finger of a glove. A round stick was used to push in the filling, strings being tied around it and dividing it into sections, so that it would be convenient in eating and thus the contents would not be spilled. This morsel was cooked over a bed of hot coals and was greatly relished.

The heart, liver, kidneys, and tripe were usually cooked and eaten fresh; in fact the butchers often, while at their work, cut off and ate pieces of raw liver, seasoning it by pouring some of the gall over it. Some had the hardihood to drink the clear gall directly from the gall duct. The tripe was washed in the blood and divided among the butchers. This part was cooked by boiling.

In cutting up and portioning the carcass the butchers worked over one side, then they turned it over and took off the corresponding cuts from the other side. There were thus eight cuts or portions on each side. The eight paired portions in the carcass were the following:

1. Katak, the muscle back of the hip bone.
2. Swish, the muscle in front of the hip bone.
3. Hstihako, the long muscle extending from the top of the shoulders, along each side of the vertebral column, to the hip bone. The attachments of these two muscles form the main source of sinew.
4. Winu', the muscles of the foreleg and shoulder.

5. Kaku, all the muscles of the hind leg below the hip joint.
6. Wikakatakh, all the flank muscle.
7. Chisu, the muscle on the side of the neck.
8. Shatu', the whole set of ribs of one side.

Now, when these sixteen portions, eight from each side, have been made, there remain two more parts which count as full portions, and which naturally are not paired, namely the neck vertebrae in one section, and the dorsal and lumbar vertebrae in the other section. The tail, which is used for soup, is allotted with the other odd small parts, as the tongue, heart, liver and so forth.