

## Salish Oral Histories

The following oral histories were compiled from numerous sources and published in: *The Salish People and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, The Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee and Elders Cultural Advisory Council, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005

### Pete Beaverhead

What I am going to tell is what was passed onto me by my paternal grandmothers, my maternal grandfathers, and my paternal grandfathers by their great-great-grandparents, and their great grandparents. . . The white men looked as if they were cold because their faces were white and red. Then, when the Indian people were met by the white men . . . the Indian people then spread out their fur blankets and motioned to the white men to sit on the blankets. Their chief told them . . . "Spread out the fur blankets so that the white men can sit on them. Maybe they are cold." . . . The Indian people thought the white men were cold because they were white-faced. (pp. 12-13)

### Pete Pichette (from Ella Clark's *Legends of the Pacific Northwest*)

Our people were camped in a kind a prairie along the Bitterroot River, a few miles upstream from the Medicine Tree. The place is called Ross's Hole now; the Indians then called it Cutl-kkk-pooh. They kept close watch over their camps in those days and always had scouts out because they feared an attack by an enemy tribe. One day two scouts came back to report that they had seen some human beings who were very different from any they had known. Most of the strangers had pale skins, and their clothing was altogether different from anything the Indians wore. "There were seven of them," the scouts told Chief Three Eagles [pronounced *Tchliska-e-mee* in Salish]. "I think they have had a narrow escape from their enemies. All their belongings were taken away by the enemy. That's why there is so little in their packs. Maybe the rest of the tribe were killed. Maybe that is why there are only seven of them. These men must be very hungry, perhaps starving. And see how poor and torn their clothes are." The chief ordered food to be brought to them—dried buffalo meat and dried roots. He ordered clothing also to be brought to them—buckskins and light buffalo robes that were used for clothing. One of the strange men was black. He had painted himself in charcoal, my people thought. In those days it was the custom for warriors, when returning home from battle, to prepare themselves before reaching camp. Those who had been brave and fearless, the victorious ones in battle, painted themselves in charcoal. When the warriors returned to their camp, people knew at once which ones had been brave on the warpath. So the black man, they thought, had been the bravest of his party. All the men had short hair. So our people thought that the seven were in mourning for the rest of the party who had been slaughtered. It was the custom for mourners to cut their hair. By signs, Chief Three Eagles and his counselors came to a little understanding with the white men. Then the chief said to his people, "This party is the first of this kind of people we have ever seen. They have been brought in safely. I want them taken out safely. I want you warriors to go with them part of the way to make sure that they leave our country without harm." So by the chief's orders, a group of young warriors accompanied the white men to the edge of the Salish country. They went with the strangers down the river from Ross's Hole

and up to Lolo Pass. The white men went on from there. They did not take with them the robes and clothing Chief Three Eagles had given them. Perhaps the white men did not understand that they were gifts. (pp. 93-4)

**Sophie Moiese via Louie Pierre and Ella Clark**

When the dried meat was brought to the men, they just looked at it and put it back. It was really good to eat, but they seemed to think it was bark or wood. Also, they didn't know that camas roots are good to eat . . . (p. 102)

**Francois Saxa, via Jerome D'Aste, S. J. and Olin Wheeler**

The Flathead [Salish] Indians were camping at Ross's Hole, or Ross's fork, at the head of the Bitterroot valley, when one day the old chief, Three Eagles, the father of Chief Victor and grandfather of Charlot, left the camp to go scouting the country, fearing there might be some Indian enemies around with the intent to steal horses, as it was done then very frequently. He saw at a distance Lewis and Clark's party, about twenty men, each man leading two pack horses, except two, who were riding ahead, who were Lewis and Clark. The old chief, seeing that these men wore no blankets did not know what to think of them. It was the first time he had met men without blankets. . . . The first thought was that they were a party of men who, traveling, had been robbed by some Indians of their blankets. He went back to his people and, reporting to them what he had seen, he gave orders that all the horses should be driven in and watched, for fear the party he had seen might be on a stealing expedition. . . . When they came to the open prairie he noticed that they traveled slowly and unconcerned, all together, the two leaders going ahead of the party and looking around, as if surveying the country and consulting with their men. He thought within himself: These must be two chiefs; but what can they be after? . . . From the easy and unconcerned way the strange beings were traveling, the Indians inferred they had no intention to fight or to injure them. Hence, when they saw the strangers advancing, in the same manner, toward them, and were already near their camp, the Indians did not move, but kept watching. When the two leaders of the party, coming to the Indian camp, showed friendship to the Indians, there was a universal shaking of hands. The chief then gave orders to the Indians to bring in the best buffalo hides, one for each man to sit on, and the best buffalo robes also, one for each man to use as a blanket. Then the two leaders, observing that the Indians were using, for smoking, the leaves of some plant, a plant very much alike to our tobacco plant, asked for some and filled their pipes; but as soon as they tried to smoke, they pronounced the *Indian tobacco* no good. Cutting some of their own tobacco they gave it to the Indians, telling them to fill their pipes with it. But it was too much for them, who had never tried the American weed, and all began to cough, with great delight to the party. Then the two leaders asked the Indians for some Kinnickinnick, mixed it with tobacco, and gave again to the Indians the prepared weed to smoke. This time the Indians found it excellent, and in their way thanked the men whom they now believed a friendly party. (pp. 103-4)