



The Huckleberry Tradition

Giving Thanks for Earth's Bounty

August is a time for worship and thanksgiving, as was witnessed during the annual Huckleberry Feast held at HeHe Mill August 13th.

The traditional ceremonies were observed this year as they have been for generations. They are part of a lifestyle in the Indian culture that centers on giving thanks to the Creator for bountiful foods.

The seven drum religion is the backbone of the festivities for translating by song the Indian way of saying "thanks" to the Great Spirit. Each song has its own significance and plays an important role during the ceremonies.

Through songs the sun, the earth, the water, the vegetation, and solid foods such as fish and meats are acknowledged for their life-giving spirit.

The world was created by song and this is why the seven drum religion is so important. The sun observing the sun is the way of giving thanks for the light which aids us in seeing our needs. Thanks are given for the earth on which we live and depend for our livelihood. There is a song for water, which is the

main source of survival for both plant and animal life. We give thanks for all the vegetation such as roots, herbs and berries offered by the earth. And a song is sung for the fish and game which have kept the Indian culture alive through the years.

In the spring as the roots mature on the plains and plateaus, the spring salmon runs are at a high peak. During that season salmon is the main dish.

In the summer as the berries ripen, the women go out and gather them while the men are out hunting deer for venison jerky. It is then that venison is the main dish.

Right down through the years it has been the tradition to let no one into the berry patches before the regular ceremonies were completed.

When the berries are officially declared ready, one representative from each family is selected to go and gather the first fruits of the year for the festival.

It is not until the festivities were over that anyone can venture into the berry fields to gather and store the year's supply of berries.

Worship services begin even before the picking of the berries.

The women sing songs and offer prayers in the berry fields before they begin picking.

At the feast there is more worship. Seven rounds of seven songs are completed before the berries are brought into the longhouse. As the women file in with baskets of berries on their backs, they enter according to their ancestry.

Salmon is served first, then the venison, the roots and the berries. The final preparation on the table before anyone is seated is the water. The water is said to be used as a purification of the body before consumption of the new food. Choosh! is called, everyone drinks water, and the feast begins.

It is said that a lot of the old Indian customs have changed to fit into the modern Indian lifestyle. Some believe this will prevent the coming generations from thoroughly understanding the true meaning of the traditional root and huckleberry feasts.

For many it is a time for having fun and eating well, but for those who honor tradition, it is a time for giving solemn thanks for earth's bounty.



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