



Welcome Robert Black Bull And the Blackfeet Buffalo Horse Coalition

By Shiela Cochran

It is a beautiful, sunny day. The sky has wisps of clouds breaking up the blue. The wind kisses your face carrying the sweet scent of horses, leather and the earth. You hear the clanking gates, soft snorts of the horses, and the joyful voices of children. It is a happy, busy sight to behold.



The large round pen is the centerpiece of the activity. A 10 year old boy is astride his trusty steed. There is a counselor in the arena guiding the process between the boy and his equine partner. The yellow horse is a trusted veteran of the program. In the silence of that moment, the boy and the horse come together as one. The songs of the ancestors fill the boy's soul. The yellow horse carries him down the good, red road.



Over looking the scene described above sits a teepee decorated with two horses, one blue and one red. A man stands next to this teepee that symbolically states a dream. The man, who has been able to realize this dream, is Robert Black Bull. And the dream is the Blackfeet Buffalo Horse Coalition.

Sometimes life takes us down roads that twist and turn where we end up meeting people who make an impact on our life in extraordinary ways. The road that Bob Black Bull traveled upon one day led to a chain reaction of extraordinary experiences. In 1994, Bob traveled upon a road that led him to meet the Brislawns. What was once the ghost stories of a time long past, of a culture tucked away in story and memory was now real and alive. The legacy of the Buffalo Runner was about to be resurrected. The Brislawns gifted two mares to Bob Black Bull and through the sale of his art was able to purchase six more mares.



By the early 1700s, the Blackfeet were a strong horse culture. The horse changed the way of travel, hunting and warfare. They became the infamous Buffalo Runner. Unfortunately, approximately 100 years later, the Blackfeet were defeated by the U. S. Calvary and placed on the reservation. The systematic slaughter of the

buffalo and Buffalo Runner sealed the fate of the Blackfeet Horse Culture. All that was left were the stories.

On September 14, 1994, through the twists and turns of a journey, the Buffalo Runners returned back to the Blackfeet. Bob Black Bull brought them home to Seven Eagles Ranch, 633 acres located in north central Montana.



This is not the end of the story, it is the beginning. Bob Black Bull started the Blackfeet Buffalo Horse Coalition. He brought back to the children of his tribe a part of them that was missing. Traditionally, the children of the tribe were the care givers of the herds. This was a rite of passage to adulthood. When the Buffalo Runners were destroyed, a part of the children was taken away. The BBHC helps children relearn their culture and become whole. As part of this program, children learn the traditional ways of keeping the horses, the Blackfoot language, and traditional craft.

There are three ongoing programs besides additional workshops. They are:

- **Stay in School/Century 21**, monthly program where the children come to work with the horses.
- **Browning Youth Initiative**, monthly program where the whole family (ages 3-83) comes to participate. The children learn to work with the horses, ranching skills and traditional crafts.
- **Special Needs Class**, the children come for 2-3 hours per day to help with the horses and learn traditional crafts.



I invite you to go to their website: www.buffalohorse.org and read about their program, especially all the letters they have received. As one person stated, the difference seen in the children is because of the “magic of the horses”.

The meeting of two people, the gifting of two horses, the return of the Buffalo Runner, the beginning of a program; was it luck, kismet, or destiny. Whatever it was that caused the chain reaction, I don't know. It's a wonderful, successful program with a herd of more than 80 horses currently. Unfortunately, it is now at threat of being lost. The owner of the Seven Eagles Ranch generously reduced the cost of the ranch to be purchased by the BBHC. But now needs payment and the BBHC doesn't have the needed funds to purchase the ranch. The program is not supported by the tribe. It is a nonprofit, 501c3 that is supported

by cash and in kind donations. Please support the Blackfeet Buffalo Horse Coalition. Every dollar counts and is greatly appreciated.

As much as this article was to introduce to our membership one of our newest members and the program, it was also to inform you of its plight. This program is much needed and has been tremendously successful. I would hate for this dream to end.

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I hope the association of the Blackfeet Buffalo Horse Coalition and the Horse of the Americas is a long and happy journey!



Photos are courtesy of: the BBHC, Toni Rush, Bear Thomas and the Library of Congress.