

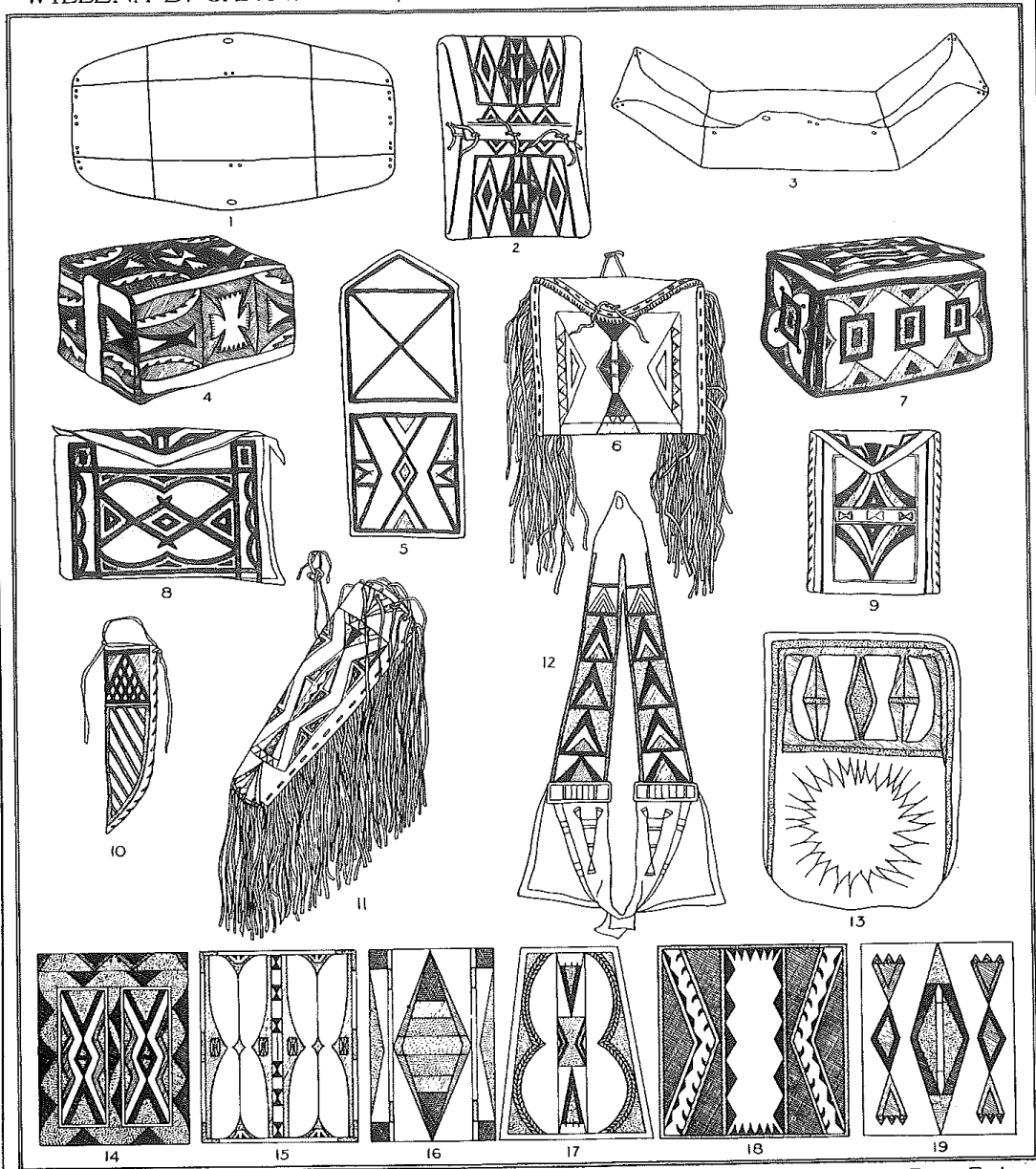
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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PARFLECHES AND OTHER RAWHIDE ARTICLES

LEAFLET 77-78

DECEMBER, 1936

3rd Printing, February, 1955

1. INTRODUCTORY. Containers of rawhide occupied a very important place in the lives of many large groups of western Indians in historic times. Before the horse was introduced by European discoverers and explorers these tribes lived in somewhat restricted areas. This limitation of range was due largely to the fact that journeys had to be made on foot and burdens born by the Indians themselves or by their dogs. The general scheme of life for these tribes, especially those living on or around the great Plains, was to spend the winters in permanent camps and the summers wandering about on the buffalo hunt, or tilling their corn fields. The other rawhide-using group of tribes, who lived across the Rockies in Washington and adjoining parts of Oregon and British Columbia, substituted salmon fishing for buffalo hunting and root gathering for farming, but otherwise followed about the same schedule.

This tendency toward a somewhat sedentary life gave these tribes the leisure to make containers of pottery, basketry or birchbark, depending on the environment in which each tribe lived; and at least semi-permanent places in which to keep these somewhat destructible and bulky articles.

2. HORSES were introduced by Europeans and brought about great changes in Indian life. In the West horses were first brought to the Indians by the Spanish, especially the expedition of Coronado which passed through Colorado and Kansas in 1541. Tribes of the Shoshonean family, the Comanche and various groups of Shoshoni, lived along and in the Rockies from Colorado and Utah to Montana and Oregon, thus forming a contact between the Spanish settlements in the south and the tribes of both the Plains and the Columbia Basin to the north. Largely through them the horse and its furniture—saddles, bridles and the like—were moved to the northern tribes. From this central area horses spread west to the groups across the Rockies and east to the Indians of the northeastern Plains, such as the Sioux and Cheyenne.

How long this process took is not exactly known, but the available evidence indicates that it began sometime in the early 17th or late 16th centuries and was completed by about 1750. It may not have taken so long, for many tribes could have gotten horses long before they were seen and described by explorers.

3. CHANGES DUE TO THE HORSE were many. In the home life of the Indian one change was to accentuate the tendency to wander which these tribes already possessed. They could now travel hundreds of miles with ease. Agriculture was soon abandoned, except by the southeastern Plains tribes, and with this restraining influence gone the tribes spent much more of their time on the march, though winter camps were still made. This new life changed the type of containers used by the Indians. Pottery was too heavy and fragile to be packed successfully on horseback. Those tribes which had made containers of birchbark moved away from the range of this tree. In view of these conditions the tribes turned to rawhide, or undressed animal skin, as an ideal material for the making of containers and various other objects. There was

plenty of it to be had from the hundreds of animals killed for food. It was light, weather-proof and very resistant to wear. And further, the tribal artists could decorate the material easily and effectively.

One group of rawhide objects is united by a common style of decoration. The remaining sections of this leaflet will describe the articles in this group, their distribution, and their decoration.

4. RAWHIDE MANUFACTURE. Hides freshly removed from animals were staked out flat on the ground, flesh side up. With the aid of a scraper of sharpened antler or iron and much laborious toil, bits of fat, meat, dried blood and the like were removed. The hide was then allowed to become thoroughly dry. Sometimes it was treated with warm water to keep it from too great stiffness. After the drying was completed the surface was gone over with a sharp tool which chipped or shaved off thick places and reduced the whole hide to an even thickness. The final step was the removal of the hair, which was scraped off after the hide had been turned over and staked down again.

The hide thus prepared was from $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{3}{16}$ of an inch in thickness. It was stiff, but bent without cracking and became fairly flexible with use, especially at folds. The surface was hard and smooth, the hair side being the smoother. Fresh rawhide is a light cream in color on the average. It darkens with age and use.

5. ANIMALS USED. In the old days the buffalo provided most of the rawhide, with elk and extra thick deer skins supplying the rest. In more recent times the hides of domestic cattle and of horses have been used.

6. DISTRIBUTION. Rawhide was used by the tribes occupying the Plains between the Mississippi and the Rockies from Texas north to southern Canada (group 1); the tribes along the central Mississippi Valley (group 2); and around the western end of the Great Lakes (group 3); various tribes living in the eastern ranges of the Rockies (group 4); and to a lesser extent by the tribes of eastern Washington, southern British Columbia and the mountain areas between these and the Plains (group 5). The tribes listed below are known to have used rawhide containers and other articles of one form or another.

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|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Arapaho | 12. Dakota or Sioux | 23. Klikitat |
| 2. Arikara | 13. Flathead | 24. Kutenai |
| 3. Assiniboin | 14. Fox | 25. Mandan |
| 4. Bannock | 15. Gros Ventre | 26. Menomini |
| 5. Blackfoot | 16. Hidatsa | 27. Mescalero Apache |
| 6. Cheyenne | 17. Ioway | 28. Nez Percé |
| 7. Coeur d'Alene | 18. Jicarilla Apache | 29. Okanagon |
| 8. Colville | 19. Kalispel | 30. Omaha |
| 9. Columbia Salish | 20. Kansa | 31. Osage |
| 10. Comanche | 21. Kickapoo | 32. Oto |
| 11. Crow | 22. Kiowa | 33. Paiute |

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|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 34. Pawnee | 41. Sarci | 48. Ute |
| 35. Pend d'Oreille | 42. Sauk | 49. Warm Springs |
| 36. Plains Ojibwa | 43. Shoshoni | 50. Wasco |
| 37. Ponca | 44. Shuswap | 51. Wichita |
| 38. Potawatomi | 45. Similkameen | 52. Wishram |
| 39. Sanpoil | 46. Thompson | 53. Yakima |
| 40. Santee Dakota | 47. Umatilla | |

This alphabetical list breaks up into the geographical groups as follows:

- Group 1. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 22, 25, 34, 41;
 Group 2. 17, 20, 21, 30, 31, 32, 37, 51;
 Group 3. 14, 26, 36, 38, 40, 42;
 Group 4. 4, 13, 18, 24, 27, 28, 33, 43, 48;
 Group 5. 7, 8, 9, 19, 23, 29, 35, 39, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53.

It should be understood that all of these tribes did not use all of the rawhide articles mentioned in this leaflet. The general distribution of each type will be indicated under each heading when possible.

It should also be noted that all of the tribes who used rawhide articles did not make them but obtained them by trade with other groups. This is especially true of some of the tribes in group 5. Other tribes knew how to make such articles, but rarely did so.

TYPES OF RAWHIDE ARTICLES

7. PARFLECHE (par-flesh). This word appears to be derived from two French words, **parer**, to parry, to ward off, and **fleche**, arrow. It was apparently first applied to shields, but later came somehow to be given to the large painted envelopes which are the most important rawhide articles used by the Indians. The name is only employed by non-Indians, each tribe having its own word for the article.

The parfleche is made of an oblong piece of rawhide with straight ends and somewhat irregular sides (1). These sides are folded in toward each other until they overlap or at least meet (3). The ends are then folded in the same manner, thus producing a large envelope (2). Holes are pierced for thongs used to tie the ends and sometimes the sides together. There is considerable tribal variation in the arrangement of these holes. The folds are not sharply creased, which allows for considerable expansion of the capacity of the envelope. Parfleches range in size from 1 to 3 feet in length and from 6 to 18 inches in width. Smaller ones are made, but they are hardly more than toys.

Parfleches were chiefly used for the storage and transportation of foods such as pemmican and dried roots. But anything might be placed in them. Since their shape made them convenient for packing on horses, they were often made in matched pairs, one for each side. They have little use today and it is unlikely that many are being made. When worn out, pieces were often cut from them to make moccasin soles.

Parfleches were in common use among all of the tribes on the list. They seem to have been most used on the central and northern Plains and proportionately less as the distance from this center increased.

8. TRUNKS. A number of tribes in the central Mississippi Valley and west of the Great Lakes made rawhide trunks or boxes. These are made in two ways. One group of tribes, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Menomini and Potawatomi, fold a single oblong piece into the required shape and fasten it by sewing (4). The other group, Ioway, Oto, Ponca, Santee Dakota, Plains Ojibwa, Kansa, Osage and Omaha, cut one or more pieces according to a pattern. These are folded and sewed together (7). A third form, used by the Oto especially, combines these two methods. The trunks are from 1 to 3 feet long, 6 to 18 inches wide and about 1 foot deep. Some have their depth and width about equal, while others are considerably less wide than deep. The Sauk type has a front flap besides a lid; the Ioway type has only the lid. The sewing is sometimes done rather coarsely with thongs passing through holes, or finely with sinew thread. Both materials may be used on the same box.

The decoration of these two types of boxes is of interest. The designs which are to appear on boxes of the Sauk type are applied to the hide before it is folded. In this state the design is carefully and symmetrically worked out. But when the hide is folded the pattern is broken up and its plan entirely disrupted. The designs in Ioway type boxes are arranged in panels so that when the folding is done each panel falls into its place on the trunk without destroying the design. This interesting state of affairs is discussed in reference 23.

9. RECTANGULAR BAGS OR POUCHES were in common use among most of the tribes on the list. Most of them are made of a single piece of rawhide, somewhat longer than wide (5). The bags open either on the long side (8) or the short (9), the latter being perhaps more often seen. One short side or one long side, depending on the type, is extended to form a flap, usually pointed like that on a paper envelope, but sometimes having several points or a curving or straight edge. The flaps vary greatly in width. They are held down by a thong passing through them and the fronts of the bags. The sides which are brought together by folding are fastened in place with a thong or thongs passing through holes cut in the hide. Two pieces may be sewed together to make a bag of this type. Often the junction of the edge is bound with cloth before the sewing is done. Some bags have a very narrow piece inserted between the edges to give a little more depth. Another type has no flap, but only a narrow slit at one end. Sometimes there are thong handles. These bags are of many sizes and shapes, something approaching a square being perhaps more usual. The long sides are from 6 to 20 inches, and the short sides from 6 to 15.

Certain tribes, notably the Blackfoot and others in the north, decorate these angular bags with very long and heavy fringes down the sides (6). These are for ceremonial paraphernalia.

10. CYLINDRICAL CASES. For carrying rolled up feather war bonnets and long ceremonial objects many Plains tribes made the case shown by 11. It is made of a sheet of rawhide rolled into a tube somewhat larger at one end than the other. The edges are fastened together by thongs passing through holes. The top and bottom are closed by disks of hide also held in place by thongs. In their fullest development these cases are decorated by very long heavy fringes attached to the seam and around the bottom. The size of the fringe varies according to tribal custom. The cases are from 10 to 30 inches long. The diameter of the ends is from 3 to 10 inches.

11. KNIFE SHEATHS (10) for carrying large open hunting knives usually have a rawhide back and a beaded or quilled front of softer skin. But they may be made entirely of rawhide. A single piece, cut to a pattern, is folded and sewed along the edges. There may be a top flap. Size depends on the knife to be carried.

12. EYE SHADES (13) were occasionally made. They were caps with a wide visor and no crown, the latter being replaced by a series of serrations which gripped the sides of the head.

13. CRUPPERS (12). Those tribes which used elaborate horse trappings, such as the Crow, made rawhide cruppers extending from the rear of the saddle to beneath the horse's tail. They kept the saddle from sliding forward and also served to decorate the animal. In the illustration that part of the design which is left in outline is beaded.

14. MISCELLANEOUS. Besides the objects so far mentioned the Indians made a number of other things of rawhide. But because they were not decorated with the style of painting and design peculiar to the parfleche they are not described in detail in this leaflet. This group includes the large, round bull boat of the Upper Missouri tribes, buckets, dippers, cups, drumheads, rattles, shields and shield covers, cradles, and mortars for pounding meat and fruit.

15. DECORATION. The rawhide objects described in some detail in this leaflet share a common design style. This style is marked by the presence of rather simple organizations of geometric figures in symmetrical patterns. The elements making up the designs tend to be large and plain. Small decorative details are relatively infrequent (18), being most common in the Northwest. Bright color is a prominent feature of the style.

The designs were applied by two methods: incising or scraping; and painting. Of these painting is overwhelmingly the more common. Indian tradition says that incising is the older method and the existence today of only a handful of specimens showing this technic, all giving every appearance of age, bears out this story. By this method portions of the outer layer of buffalo skin were scraped away, or into this layer lines were cut which widened as the skin dried. The technic produced light lines and pattern areas on a dark brown background. The painted designs almost universally used were applied with

various sorts of brushes after the outline of the design had been drawn in with a pointed tool.

Some tribes drew the outlines of a number of parfleches or other articles on a hide and painted designs on them before cutting the hide. Others cut out the pieces before decorating them.

Tribes which lived around the edges of the rawhide-using area were inclined not to decorate their parfleches, trunks and so on. The Comanche of the southern Plains, the Menomini and Potawatomi in the Great Lakes region and the Thompson of British Columbia are examples of this tendency. Several tribes in group 5 did not remove the hair from the hide before making it into containers. This was an early practice in this area which tended to die out as painted rawhide spread from the east.

16. COLORS. Red, blue, green, yellow, black and brown are the colors used, other shades rarely if ever appearing. In recent years commercial colors obtained from traders have been used. Before their coming paints were made from colored earths, charcoal and various plants. They were often mixed with grease.

17. DESIGNS. The patterns appearing on rawhide containers are placed in angular spaces unless the shape of the object prevents this. More or less square areas are preferred. The designs appear on the tops of the end flaps of parfleches, less commonly on the inner flaps and backs; on the fronts and sometimes backs of envelope pouches; on all sides except the bottom of trunks; on the sides and ends of cylindrical cases; and on the upper surfaces of sheaths, eye-shades and cruppers.

There are three main types of designs: those made up entirely of triangular elements (14, 19); those combining squares and triangles (16); and those containing only squares. The first is the most common, and the last, the least used. The designs are usually enclosed by boundary and paneling lines arranged in many ways (14). Lines are generally straight but curves are not unknown (15, 17), though in some cases they may be unintentional. Each tribe tends to favor certain combinations and several groups of tribes also have their favorite patterns. But on the whole it is impossible to definitely assign any given article to one tribe. Only the group may be fairly accurately identified. Any statement about the basis for identification is beyond the scope of this leaflet. References 1, 5 and 7 contain full analyses of tribal and group styles. Identifications of drawings: 14, Ute; 15, Cheyenne; 16, Crow; 17, Blackfoot; 18, Salish; 19, Bannock.

18. ARTISTS. All work connected with making rawhide articles is done by the women. They prepare the hides, cut out the articles and do the decorating. Among Indian tribes abstract design is usually the province of women, while realism is handled by men. This is true in the case of Plains rawhide painting.

19. **SYMBOLISM** in the designs on rawhide containers depends on tribal custom and individual desire. There is no widely recognized system of symbolism, each artist deciding whether the design shall be decorative or symbolic, and, if the latter be the case, what it shall mean. On the whole symbolism is uncommon in designs of this type.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

21. Letter from Ralph Linton on Comanche work, 10-9-36.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

22. Letter from Gene Weltfish on Pawnee work, 10-20-36.

INSTITUTTET FOR SAMMENLIGNENDE KULTURFORSKNING, OSLO

23. Primitive Art—Franz Boas. 1927.

Illustrations in all but 12, 18, 20, 21, 22. Color plates in 9. 4 illustrates a parfleche decorated by incising.

Illustration acknowledgments: AMNH, 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13; Primitive Art, 4, 7; University of Washington, 14-19.

Thanks are due to Dr. Leslie Spier for assistance in preparing this leaflet.