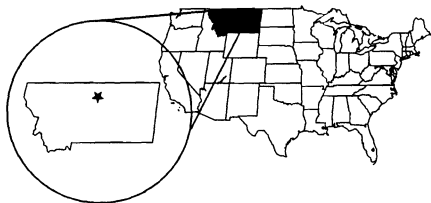


ASSINIBOINE & GROS VENTRE



Sharing the 589,000 acres of the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana are the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre tribes. The Assiniboine, whose name in Algonquin means “those who cook with stones”, were once part of the Yanktonai Sioux. They lived in the region around Lake

Superior—today’s northern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario. The Assiniboine split off from the Sioux in the 1600s and migrated westward to what is now Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and Montana.

The name “Gros Ventre”, meaning “big belly” in French, derived from the hand motions used to describe this tribe in the sign language of the Plains. The Plains Indians used sign language to bridge the different oral languages of the many tribes of the region. The sign for this group (which called themselves *Ah-ah-nee-nin*, “White Clay People”) was to pass both hands in front of the abdomen to show they were big eaters. The Gros Ventre, decimated more by European diseases than by war, were moved to the Fort Belknap reservation in the 1880s, joining the Assiniboine.



The flag used by these two nations is green, a rare color in Native American flags, with the reservation seal in the center. The seal is formed by a traditional Indian shield which illustrates the protection of the two nations in the past, present, and future from loss of tribal identity, culture, and land (*Seal of the Fort Belknap Reservation*, undated pamphlet). The shape of the shield refers to the circle of life, a frequent concept in Native American beliefs in which every thing in life depends upon every other thing. Seven red-white-and-black feathers hang from the shield. Six feathers stand for the twelve elected council members who represent the

three districts of the reservation. The seventh and central feather stands for the tribal chairperson.

The shield bears many elements. The four directions and the four seasons are recalled by the use of the four main colors: red (actually a reddish-orange) for summer, yellow for fall, white for winter, and green for spring. The central buffalo skull, divided into brown and white yet remaining one figure, symbolizes the co-existence of two tribes functioning as a whole. Across the forehead of the skull is a jagged line representing the Milk River, a tributary of the Missouri, which flows through the reservation.

Above the skull in green is Snake Butte, a landmark known throughout the region. Because many Indians seek visions there, Snake Butte is considered sacred by many Plains tribes; one of the few natural springs in the area rises there. Two arrowheads facing each other emphasize strong ties with the past. Across the top of the shield in black is "SEAL OF THE FORT BELKNAP RESERVATION", below in black is "GROS VENTRE / ASSINIBOINE / FOUNDED 1889", referring to the date of the formal establishment of the Fort Belknap Reservation. 🍀