HIGHLIGHTS:

- Significance of painting buffalo skulls.
  Joe: I told them that is going to be transferred to me and they said, "There is Tom."

Diane: Yes.

John: This is September 25, 1968 in the home of John Hellson. The informant is Joe Gambler, ancient Blood Indian. The subject is the function and significance of the painted bison skull for the Medicine Pipe Bundle. Recordist is J. Hellson, speed 3 3/4 recorder Craig.

Diane: What do you call those, the buffalo skull?

Joe: Buffalo skull.

Diane: Yes, what do you call that buffalo skull?

Joe: It's just got one name, buffalo skull. There is no other name for it. In all holy ceremonies, the buffalo skull is associated with Medicine Pipes and the Holy Lodge and also the sweat lodges. There are three different ways and it's painted in three various ways. The Medicine Pipe painting is painted different and the Holy Sundance Lodge is also painted different and the sweat lodge is painted different too. The buffalo
skull is used in three ways. That is how it is.

Diane: How is it put out there?

Joe: After the sweat bath, the... now we will use it. There will be facial painting. The skull will not be painted. When it's brought in the sweat lodge the ceremonialist will tell the owner, "Come to me." He will instruct him and he will paint his face. It won't be put on top. It will... he'll tell him, "Now take it out and there is a pile of dirt in the back." He will tell him, "Put it on top of the dirt pile," and he will put it on top.

Diane: How was the dirt set? Was it set upright?

Joe: The ground was dug. That is why it didn't fall. It faced that way. Yes, the horns pointed to the north and its nose pointed that way. Now after the sweat lodge for it and after their sweat bath the man will tell the owner, "Take it to your home and put it just the way it's placed now at the back of your home." He will take it and he will place it at the back just the way it was placed. People give false informations. I will not add. I will not exaggerate and to be telling lies. Just the way I know, that is how straight I talk about these things.

Diane: When the pipe is put outside at the side, is the buffalo skull laid on top of the pipe, the sticks?

Joe: No, it's not put on top. When a pipe is going to be, when it's opened, sticks will be stuck into the ground and we will tie a stick crosswise and the pipe rests on that. And that is actually laid outside. The buffalo skull is important at the sweat lodge.

Diane: Now is it the... when they finish, when they finish... finish facial painting it?

Joe: Yes.

Diane: And the one that owns it now, does he put his pipe outside?

Joe: Yes.

Diane: He doesn't put it on top.

Joe: He doesn't put it on top.

Diane: He never puts it on top.

Joe: He doesn't have... he will not put it on top. A man's pipe, if it actually... he'll tie it above the doorway and there we walk out under it. It's above and if he does not want to put it there he'll put it at the back. The buffalo skull is below and the pipe is above. The tripods are this way. Here is the pipe and the tripods are leaning; that is how they are
set. A person will be telling stories just the way he think. That's how it is.

Diane: Is the skull put under the pipe or is it put separate?

Joe: The pipe -- I am telling you -- the one that is called the doorway tipi pole, that is where the pipe is tied. That is where it is hung on tripods and it is hung there. It is beneath the tripods.

Diane: Go ahead.

Joe: The black color, if he wants to apply it on that, if a person wants to use real ochre on it he will draw it with the ochre or if he wants to use black ochre he will apply black ochre on it. The right hand side will be dotted with ochre and black ochre and the nostrils are plugged with sage grass and the ears too. That is how it's done.

Diane: You were saying the black color or if real paint is going to be used.

Joe: If it's going to be ochre, there are two.

Diane: That is the one you mentioned.

Joe: There are two.

Diane: In the middle of its face?

Joe: Yes, there are two in the middle. It could be painted with real ochre or black ochre. That is how it's done.

Diane: Are there two lines in the middle?

Joe: No.

Diane: Oh, they're not two.

Joe: I am telling you, the middle could be with real paint or if it's going to be black it will be black as this.

Diane: Where is the skull put when a sweat lodge is built.

Joe: It will be taken in and after it's painted it will be taken out, at the back. I told you there is a dirt taken from the hole that was dug when the rocks are put in. That ground will be dug equilateral shape. They are dug like this. The dirt that is scooped out from the hole will be emptied and piled up right in the back of the sweat lodge. After the buffalo skull is painted it will then be taken out and it will be put on top of the dirt. Here is the sweat lodge and the horns will point this way. It will be facing west where the sun sets; that is how it's used.

Diane: These, the way it's painted, does that mean the
writing?

Joe: Its face is painted.

Diane: Yes.

Joe: Yes, it... the reason why it's painted that way, the Medicine Pipe robe. I forgot about this. I will tell you the story. The Medicine Pipe robe will be drawn like this and then it will be dotted and eagle claws are here pointed up. The skull is painted in that manner.

Diane: What does the writings mean?

Joe: It's all the dots. That is how the skull is painted and the Medicine Pipe owner's robe will be painted like that too.

Diane: Yes. No, I am saying is there a story to the writings, the dots?

Joe: No, there are no stories to them.

Diane: They are just painted on the skull.

Joe: They are just painted on, and the robe is transferable the same way as the skull and there is a song to the paintings on the robe.

Diane: They're just painted on.

Joe: Yes, and they are naturally associated to the Medicine Pipes.

Diane: He says does those dots represent hailstones?

Joe: I forgot to tell you that. As the pipes are from the thunder and hail, those are painted on the robe and the skull is painted like that too.

Diane: What does that painting in the centre mean?

Joe: It is a line to part the paintings on the skull and the same with the robe. You know that is to part the skull. This is an Indian word, that is, to part the paintings on the skull. The robe is painted in the same manner and the ones that are called eagle claws are pointing up. They are drawn like this. Here is the upper part and here are the eagle claws pointing up. There are only two of them and the others are pointing the same way.

Diane: You were saying that this was the parting line.

Joe: The parting line will be drawn with ochre. It will be this wide. It will be painted crossways and then there are the eagle claws pointing up.

Diane: You are talking about the blanket.
Joe: Yes, and the skull. And the skull, and if you want to do the skull, it will... the eagle claws will not be drawn on the skull. A song will be sung and he will take the blanket. He will pull it four times.

Diane: Is there a song for the buffalo skull?

Joe: There is a song for it.

Diane: And how many are the songs?

Joe: I know there is one song and there are two songs for the blanket. The persons that open the Medicine Pipes cannot sing the buffalo skull song. It was transferred to my deceased friend. He doesn't know the song when he wants to sing it at Big Smoke ceremony. He has a brother who teaches him and who owned the Long Time Pipe and I used to sit with him at the Big Smoke ceremonies and he used to tell me to sing the buffalo skull song for him and I sing it for him. I told Skunk (Bob Black Plume) the time he wanted to sing, I told him to sing the buffalo skull song. He didn't know the song. He told me to teach him the song. I told him, "I am not going to teach you the song. You was saying that you know all the songs, so you sing the song."

Diane: Is the buffalo skull transferred separately?

Joe: It is transferred separately. Now it will... nobody owns it now. The people that owned it are all dead. It was transferred to my friend and he died too. It's a year ago when he died. Nobody owns it now and the Medicine Pipe owners have all quit.

Diane: What is your friend's name?

Joe: His name is Low Horn (Jim Low Horn).

Diane: When did you last see the buffalo, when it was last used?

Joe: There is a man, his name is Chief Owl (Big Sorrel Horse). He owned the pipe. He made a sweat lodge and I was taking the rocks in for him and so I... the ones that work at the sweat lodge don't participate in the sweat bath. They don't have a sweat bath. The curtain for the door was not lowered yet and I was watching them and that is how it was painted.

Diane: When was this?

Joe: It was a long time ago. There is a man by the name of Chief Owl (Big Sorrel Horse), the son of Eagle Bear.

Diane: Has it ever been used again?

Joe: Lately, a man by the name of Don't Own a Nice Horse (Jack Low Horn), he owned the pipe too. And my friend, he built a
sweat lodge and it was transferred to my friend.

Diane: And it was never used again.

Joe: It was never used again.

Diane: If the paintings ever rub off, if it's used all the time and if the paintings rub off, who is the one that will repaint it?

Joe: The ochre is mixed with oil and when applied it will not rub off. They are mixed with oil, that is why they look bright.

Diane: But if the paints ever rub off who is going to repaint it?

Joe: Whoever it is transferred to will brighten the colors and the same with the painted robes. If the colors fade the owner will brighten them all. And the one that the skull is transferred to and if it fades as it is put outside the colors will never rub off. The ochre is mixed with oil and even if it's kept for a long time the colors will stay on and the same with the Sundance skulls. They're put outside and they don't rub off. It's a mystery. The ones that are mixed with oil never rub off.

Diane: Where do they get the buffalo skulls?

Joe: They are taken and found in buffalo jumps. They are scarce. The sweat lodge that is going to be built, if there is no skull, the one that is going to build... if there is no skull the one that is going to build the sweat lodge will be looking for it. He will find it and he will put it in his box. There are no more buffalo jumps now that the people of the past use. A corral is built against a cut bank. They'd chase the buffaloes over the bank and they jump into the corral and then they'd slaughter them.

They'd slaughter the buffaloes right in the corral; that is why there are so many skulls lying around. We went to a buffalo jump and there are a lot of bones. This was last Monday.

Diane: What does Getting A Man mean?

Joe: Well, that was his life. It was given down. It was given down from the heavens. The one that gave it down to earth, the man that was given the pipe was in the heavens above. He was told by the man above, "I give my pipe." Now they are called Getting A Man That is what it is.

Diane: He didn't say what it meant.

Joe: He didn't say what it meant. Okay, the Medicine Pipe owner was told by the man above, "If a person goes to your home and asks for something, refuse what he asks for. If you want
to refuse him, don't talk to him." That is why we never go and ask for something from a Medicine Pipe owner. I am crazy to come and ask for some money. A Medicine Pipe owner will give by force the things a person asked for. He (John Hellson) doesn't know I naturally take him for a relative, that is why I ask for something from him. That is what it is. There is the Water Bundle Pipe and the Medicine Pipe. I didn't hear why they are called Getting A Man Pipe and the Water Bundle Pipe. When I came to be sensible I started to hear about them. There is nothing. There are a lot of sayings that we argue about. I will trace the meaning of Getting A Man. I'll trace why it is called Getting A Man.* I got an elder brother; I'll ask him. He is the only old man. No elderly man knows it.

Diane: What would a Medicine Pipe owner's wife be called?

Joe: A selected man's woman.

Diane: And his children?

Joe: A selected man's children.

*The reason why a Medicine Pipe is called in Blackfoot Getting A Man Pipe. A Medicine Pipe owner will select a man to whom he will transfer his pipe. He will approach this person and he will get his man. It's just like selecting a man for office.

John: An added note in the event of this information was not recorded. John Hellson speaking. And the Medicine Pipe skull, Mr. Gambler claims if the skull is facing one, face up, the left-hand hailstone design is painted with real paint (red). The right-hand side of the skull, the hailstone design is painted black. The dividing line, the color of the dividing line, is the choice of the owner of the pipe. The nose is stuffed with grass or sage and the ears also but he claims the eyes are not stuffed with grass. This is the end of the recording. Correction: the dividing line, the color of the dividing line is the choice of the pipe owner. It can be either red or black. End of recording.

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