

○ ○ ○ Stepping Stones



FIRST NATIONS TREATIES IN ALBERTA: TREATY 7

Planning your learning journey

What are treaties and who are the First Nations signatories of Treaty 7?

FIRST STEPS



What are treaties?

Treaties¹ are constitutionally binding agreements between sovereign nations that set out the conditions for a peaceful alliance and surrendered interest in First Nations traditional lands. This was to allow immigration, settlement and a transfer of land title to the British Crown, as set out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. From the perspective of Indigenous people, treaties are built on an understanding of a respectful, cooperative and bilateral relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Treaties outline the rights, obligations and benefits of the signing parties to each other. The treaties in Canada are between the Crown and signing First Nations, and reflect the world views and understanding of identity by the signing peoples. The intent and provisions of the treaties does not end. This was assigned through a ceremonial and sacred agreement that incorporates the spirit and intent for treaties to last “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow.”²



Adapted from AADNC
www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/htoc_1100100032308_eng.pdf

*Note: This map shows the approximate area of treaty land as there is no consensus between rightsholders and stakeholders about exact treaty boundaries.





Treaty 7 elders have always maintained that what was included in the written treaty did not include all that was discussed and agreed to.

Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, 1996⁶



GLENBOW ARCHIVES NA-13-1

Blackfoot chiefs, 1884. Front row, L–R: Crowfoot, Sitting on an Eagle Tail, Three Bulls. Back row, L–R: Jean L’Heureux, Red Crow, Sergeant W Percy.

There are 11 Numbered Treaties across Canada, with Treaties 6, 7 and 8 encompassing most of Alberta. The reasons to sign treaties differed for the two signatory groups. The British Crown, and later the Canadian government, wanted land for agriculture, settlement and resource development. The signing of a treaty by the Crown was to extinguish Indigenous title to the land so the Crown could then exert claim. The First Nations in the territory now known as southern Alberta were concerned with the spread of diseases and the decline of the buffalo, their primary source of food, shelter, clothing and way of life. The [pipe ceremony](#)³ conducted prior to the signing of the treaty had strong cultural and spiritual significance. Participating in the sacred ceremony required the signing parties to speak the truth during negotiations and to keep any commitments made in its presence.

How did Treaty 7 come to be?

Treaty 7 was signed on September 22, 1877, at [Blackfoot Crossing](#)⁴ between the Crown and five bands in southern Alberta: the Kainai (Blood), Siksika (Blackfoot), Piikani (Peigan), Nakoda (Stoney) and Tsuut’ina (Sarcee). From the First Nations’ perspective, Treaty 7 signatories understood the treaty to be a peaceful agreement of sharing of land and resources. To the Crown, however, the treaty included surrendering traditional lands replaced with small parcels of reservation land. During this time, major changes were happening, such as the disappearance of the buffalo, disease, settlement and building of the railway to the west coast.⁵

What obligations, rights and benefits are included in Treaty 7?

[Treaty 7](#) differs from other Numbered Treaties. The previously signed treaties had provisions for a number of agricultural implements; however, the Treaty 7 signatories wished to concentrate their agricultural efforts on ranching. With this in mind, the treaty commissioners agreed to reduce the amount of agricultural implements and seed in exchange for an increased number of cattle, making exceptions for some bands who wanted to focus on farming.

Additional benefits are as follows:

- Every man, woman and child would receive five dollars annually.
- Salaries would be paid for teachers to instruct the children.
- Each chief and councillor would get ten axes, five handsaws, five augers, one grindstone, and files and whetstones.⁸

In exchange, the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Sarcee and Stoney First Nations were expected to “cede, release, surrender, and yield up to the Government of Canada” all rights, titles and privileges to their hunting grounds. They also had to promise to live at peace with other “Indians, Métis, and whites, and to obey the Queen’s law.”⁹ It is worth noting that Treaty 7 Indian reservation land was and remains to this day Crown land. Treaty First Nations cannot buy, sell or donate reserve land as the legal title remains with the Crown.¹⁰

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF TREATY 7 IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA?

At the Treaty 7 signing, the government attempted to assign one large reservation to two of the three Blackfoot-speaking tribes and the Tsuut'ina. However, only Siksika remained at the originally assigned reserve location. Kainai, who were to have shared a reservation with Siksika and Tsuut'ina, chose a reserve close to their traditional wintering grounds and the sacred Mookawansin (Belly Buttes) and Ninastako (Chief Mountain). Tsuut'ina moved west and settled close to Fort Calgary (now the city of Calgary). Piikani chose their traditional area close to the Porcupine Hills, between what is now Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod, as the site of their reserve.¹¹

The Blackfoot Confederacy

Blackfoot traditional territory stretched from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta and Saskatchewan, to the Yellowstone River in the state of Montana, from the Continental Divide in the west, to the Great Sand Hills in the province now known as Saskatchewan. The creation of the United States–Canada border split the Piikani into the Amsskaapipiikani in Montana and the Apatohsippiikani in southern Alberta.¹² Today, member Nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy include Kainai, Piikani, Siksika and the Blackfeet in the state of Montana.

People of the Blackfoot Nations refer to themselves as Niitsitapi,

meaning “real people,” or Siksikaitsitapi, meaning “Blackfoot-speaking real people.” Each Blackfoot Nation is a distinct group with its own Blackfoot language dialect, traditions, stories, ceremonies and history.

Kainai (Blood)¹³
Population: 12,500 members
Language: Blackfoot
Member of Blackfoot Confederacy

Piikani (Peigan)¹⁴
Population: 3,600 members
Language: Blackfoot
Member of Blackfoot Confederacy

Siksika (Blackfoot)¹⁵
Population: 6,000 members
Language: Blackfoot
Member of Blackfoot Confederacy

Tsuut'ina (Sarcee)¹⁶
Today the Tsuut'ina reserve adjoins the southwestern city limits of Calgary and has about 2,500 members. *Tsuut'ina* is the term used by the Athabaskan (Dene) meaning “many people.” Tsuut'ina people strongly believe that education is a universal right that fosters the well-being of the individual and the community.¹⁷

Stoney-Nakoda¹⁸
Stoney-Nakoda Nation has a combined population of 5,500 members and includes the Bearspaw, Chiniquay and Wesley First Nations. The Stoney people are the original “people of the mountains” known in their Nakoda language as the Iyarhe Nakoda. The Stoney people are the only Indigenous people in Canada that, after signing a treaty, were assigned a single land allocation for three individual groups. Today, they are known as the Iyethka, “pure people.”¹⁹

NEXT STEPS



Treaties are the basic building blocks of the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

—Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatchewan

Reconciliation is about awareness, acknowledgement, atonement and action regarding Canada's history and working together to renew Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. First Nations people today view the treaties as a sacred covenant that applies to all the land in the treaty area, not just reserve land. “We are all treaty people” means that we all have rights and obligations with respect to the treaty area. Many school jurisdictions and schools demonstrate understanding of treaties during meetings and events by acknowledging the historical rights and contributions of First Nations people who have shared their land with Canadians. As well, introducing First Nations elders and leaders who are in attendance shows honour and respect for our peaceful coexistence and shared community.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

What does the phrase, “We are all treaty people” mean? Do all people of Treaty 7 benefit equally?

How do differing world views impact the interpretation of treaty provisions in modern times?



HALI HEAVY SHIELD

The big rock near Okotoks is the Okotoks Erratic²⁰ and was formed from beds of silt, sand and pebbles deposited over 520 million years ago. The Blackfoot story reveals not only how the rock was split but also why bats have squashed-looking faces. The Blackfoot word Ohkohtok means rock.

NOTES

1. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), “Treaties with Aboriginal People in Canada,” www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032291/1100100032292 (accessed October 17, 2017).
2. Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories: Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto* (Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1880).
3. INAC, “Treaty Research Report—Treaty Six (1876),” www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028706/1100100028708 (accessed October 17, 2017).
4. For more information go to www.blackfootcrossing.ca/.
5. Hugh H Dempsey, “Treaty Research Report—Treaty Seven (1877)” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], 1987), www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028789/1100100028791 (accessed October 17, 2017).
6. Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider and Sarah Carter, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Kingston, Ont: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 330.
7. INAC, “Treaty Texts—Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No 7,” www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028793/1100100028803 (accessed October 17, 2017).
8. INAC, “The Numbered Treaties (1871–1921),” www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1360948213124/1360948312708 (accessed October 17, 2017).
9. Hugh H Dempsey, “Treaty Research Report—Treaty Seven (1877)” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], 1987), www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028789/1100100028791 (accessed October 17, 2017).
10. INAC, “Land Management,” “Reserve Land” www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100034737/1100100034738 (accessed October 17, 2017).
11. Alberta Teachers’ Association, *Education Is Our Buffalo*, [www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollection/Documents/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20\(PD-80-7\).pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollection/Documents/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20(PD-80-7).pdf) (accessed October 17, 2017).
12. Glenbow Museum, “Niitsitapiisini Teacher Toolkit,” www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher_toolkit/english/culture/socialOrganization.html (accessed October 17, 2017).
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14. For more information go to <http://piikanation.wixsite.com/piikanation>.
15. For more information go to <http://siksikanation.com/wp/>.
16. For more information go to <http://tsuutinanation.com/>.
17. Canadian Encyclopedia. “Tsuut’ina.” www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sarcee-tsuu-tina/.
18. For more information go to www.stoneynation.com/.
19. Stoney Education Authority. “History.” www.stoneyeducation.ca/History.php (accessed October 17, 2017).
20. For more information go to www.history.alberta.ca/okotoks/.

Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers’ Association **Walking Together Project** intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to meet the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Foundational Knowledge competency in the Teaching Quality Standard.

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For additional resources and information on Walking Together, visit www.teachers.ab.ca.

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EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION



The Alberta Teachers' Association