***Archaeology and History in Your BackYard - Community Buffalo Hunts***

Hello Everyone, this is **Archaeology and History in Your BackYard** and my name is Sharon Hanna. KXNM 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience, with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own back yard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas here in Central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting the past.

The information for today’s program comes mostly from the book Manzano A Study of Community Disorganization, a Masters Degree thesis prepared for the University of New Mexico by Wesley R. Hurt in 1941. The thesis investigated the declining condition of the village at the end of the 1930s. Its purpose was also to create a written record of the early history of Manzano through interviews with the local citizens.

In the early years of Manzano, food sources for the communities in the area were limited. With the constant raiding by various groups it was difficult to keep livestock and the people had to compete with natural predators for what little wild game existed. Of all the natural resources eaten, buffalo meat was the most important.

During the Mexican period and well into the time of American occupation the Spanish-Americans in the Rio Grande Valley and in villages to the east hunted buffalo in the fall. About October they started out in ox carts for the plains of west Texas. Several wagon owners banded together into groups of about 15 to 20 men. Wagon owners took along several experienced buffalo hunters hired on contract. The owners themselves rarely hunted. For many days the parties traveled eastward until they arrived at the plains in the vicinity of present day Lubbock, Texas and the Red River country.

After sighting buffalo they would select a camp near a spring, lake or water course and have a meal prepared by the cook. Often there would be no wood near the camp so buffalo chips served as fuel for making a fire. The next morning the hunters would ride out on fast horses trained for buffalo hunting. When sighting a herd they would give chase. The buffalo were killed with a lance that had a steel point about a foot long. This point was hafted to a strong pole about five to six feet long. Only a few hunters had muzzle-loading rifles. The buffalo were stabbed at a point below the shoulders. A high lung shot would cause the lungs to fill with blood; a low lung shot would take longer to kill. The hunters did not stop after stabbing the buffalo, but continued in the chase until they had killed all the bison they wanted on that day. In a single chase a hunter could bring down as many as twenty buffalo. Only cows were killed as the bulls were often too tough to eat.

Each hunter was followed by a man on a slower horse whose job it was to kill the wounded buffalo with a dagger. A biology professor friend of mine who hunts buffalo with a muzzle loader told me trying to slit the throat of a wounded buffalo would obviously be very dangerous, but a well-placed stabbing action at the base of the skull would sever the spinal column with instant results.

The buffalo were skinned and most of the hides were thrown away. The fat under the skin was taken off in large slabs and rendered into chicharones, or cracklings, and lard, which was also used for making manteca, a form of butter. The head, legs and hooves were not utilized, although the hip bones and ribs were sometimes taken back to Manzano to make soup. Occasionally large bones would be split and the morrow removed and heated to make oil.

After the buffalo were skinned the meat was cut into slices and hung on a frame called a percha. This was a wooden framework with rawhide lines, resembling a clothes line. The strips of meat were allowed to dry overnight and the next day in the sun. The following day the meat was taken down, laid out on hides or grass and pounded to make jerky. The tongues were considered a delicacy and eaten while in camp.

At the end of the hunt the meat and bones were loaded into the ox carts and the party returned to Manzano. Upon their arrival there was great rejoicing. The families gathered around to meet and greet the hunters and there were many dances and parties.

At Manzano the dried meat was sometimes ground in large stone mortars made of basalt. In 1939 Manuel Griego of Manzano had in his possession a large mortar that weighed about 300 pounds. It had belonged to his grandfather, Antonio Padilla, who was a buffalo hunter.

On these long trips the Manzanenos occasionally encountered Plains Indians, usually Apaches and Commanches. In the early period, they tried to avoid the Indians as they were often at war with some of the tribes. During the peaceful encounters the Manzanenos learned many of their buffalo hunting techniques from those Plains people.

Julian Sanchez of Manzano told about his only buffalo hunt. He left the village on October 3, 1876 with a party of local hunters and men from Lincoln, New Mexico. Only two wagons were used. At that time he was only seventeen years old and was considered too young and inexperienced to be a hunter, so he was assigned duty as cook’s helper. After traveling 300 miles they reached the Llano Estacado and camped near a large salt pan called the Ojo de Aquilas. Sanchez and a young inexperienced hunter named Jaramillo saw an old bison. Sanchez aimed his rifle at the bison, but since he did not know what spot to aim at, he held his fire. He was also afraid to shoot because he was in open country with no place to escape from a wounded buffalo. His uncle from Belen had better luck by digging himself a pit beside a water hole and was able to kill several animals. The last buffalo Sanchez saw was an old bull on the plains east of Pinos Wells.

Another hunter, Francisco Aragon, who was born on December 3, 1866 in Chato, a community about two miles south of Manzano on a road winding into Red Canyon, went on his first buffalo hunt when he was seven years old with his father. They traveled in large ox carts with canvas tops. They camped on the plains near Lubbock. On this trip there were only four hunters. They hunted with lances and firearms, wore leather clothing, and killed between 70 and 80 bison. As Aragon became older he earned his living driving ox carts hauling supplies between Las Vegas and Lincoln and along the Pecos River. One of his favorite watering places was Pinos Wells.

During the early period of American occupation until about 1877 buffalo hunting furnished a major means of subsistence at Manzano. Firearms became widely used as were American-made wagons such as the Murphy wagon that required eight oxen to pull it. It was five feet high, five feet wide and fourteen feet long. Another wagon was the army type that had iron axles and took six oxen to pull it.

The length of the hunt varied, depending upon the distance traveled, success of the kill and weather. Sometimes the hunt took two months, lasting into winter. Surplus meat brought to Manzano was generally sold in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Vegas.

After 1876 bison became too scarce and the community hunts were discontinued.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7:00 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology in Your Back Yard Monday at 1 PM, Tuesday at 7 PM, Friday at 10 AM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening.