

Arranging a Meeting in Central Alberta in 1754

On Monday, October 14, 1754 Anthony Henday met the Great Leader of the Blood Tribe, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, on a hillside west of Pine Lake. It was a grand occasion, carefully arranged and planned. How could such a meeting be arranged in the days before telephones, post offices and e-mail? This was the first time any member of the Blackfoot Confederacy had met a white man. Meeting the Great Leader was the objective of Henday's year long journey from Hudson's Bay to present day Alberta. His goal was to try and persuade the Blackfeet to come to Fort York on Hudson's Bay to trade. Up to that time the Cree had acted as middlemen traders between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Blackfeet.

The meeting was possible because Henday had two Cree guides, Connawappaw and Attickasish. Both were familiar with the route between Hudson's Bay and Central Alberta. They knew where to find the Bloods in the fall. Henday was like a passenger on a bus tour. Someone else decided where to go and looked after the basic necessities of travel.

The Bloods probably knew Henday was coming well in advance of his arrival at their camp. As early as mid September Henday's party had seen sign of the Bloods, fresh horse dung and horse paths. Likely the Bloods had seen his party which was traveling on foot. Until Henday saw the Bloods on horses Europeans did not believe that they had horses which were introduced into southern North America by the Spaniards 200 years earlier.

On September 29 Henday's party was visited by two Bloods on horseback. They told him that the main camp was 8 days walk away. On October 1 a party of Blackfeet consisting of seven tents, probably 40 to 50 people, met with Henday and said they would inform the Great Leader that he was coming. These visitors too were on horseback and were armed with bows, arrows and bone spears. The smoke from Blood camps was visible to Henday's party for at least two weeks before he met the Great Leader.

On October 11 Henday's party crossed the Red Deer River southwest of Nevis and traveled generally southwest. On October 13 they were joined by seven Bloods on horse back who told Henday's group that they would meet the Great Leader the next day. On October 14 Henday's group met 40 Bloods on horseback. The leaders of Henday's group, Attickasish, Connawappaw, Cocamanikisick and others did the communicating and went on ahead of the main group of Henday's party. What they saw was the camp of the Great Leader, consisting of two rows of tents with more than 100 tents in each row. The camp likely comprised between 2000 and 3000 people. Henday met with the Great Leader that day and following two days after which the two groups parted ways.