



THE STATE OF TEXAS ANNIVERSARY REMEMBRANCE DAY FOUNDATION
THE TEXAS BISON STUDENT STUDY GROUP JOURNAL

“Why Prairie Dog Barks and has a Black Tail”

(PART 1)

Edited by

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A prairie dog living among the bison of “The Official State Bison Herd of Texas” at Caprock Canyons State Park
Photograph #154 by Dan Baeza, a 2013 Intern of The STAR DAY Foundation sponsored by HorseBack Magazine
of Cypress, Texas, captured during a May 3-5, 2013 photo shoot at the Park.

A long time ago when the animals could talk, T̄ar̄akuu or prairie dog had the reputation for being a ‘loud talker.’ His voice carried over great distances and even on days when the mean winds blew over the prairies, T̄ar̄akuu could be heard sharing songs and stories he learned from life on the prairie. He was such an entertaining young man—everyone so loved his stories!

When the tribes moved across the mountains, T̄ar̄akuu would often lie hidden in the tall prairie grasses near their camps, listening to their stories and songs. He learned from them quickly and easily. Long after they left, T̄ar̄akuu could be found, sitting on top of his burrow and singing the songs that he learned.

T̄ar̄akuu was one of the first to see the strangers who came from across the big waters. Their language was difficult to learn and complex. Their songs were unfamiliar and the instruments that accompanied their songs were made of trees. He was fascinated. He watched as they had their heads down looking at flaps with dark colored images. He watched with interest as they ate and drank from strange objects. Everything about them was interesting as he observed them crossing the land going in the direction of the setting sun. They seemed to be on their way to the edge of the earth.

One day, after watching the strangers for a good length of time, T̄ar̄akuu decided it was best to head in the direction of his own burrow to get some rest. It had been a good long day and he was tired. He was a long distance away and a short nap in the tall grasses might refresh him for the journey ahead. He would still be home before nightfall. He looked all about him and noticed a huge herd of buffalo in the distance. They were quietly grazing with their heads down. He was not too concerned because they would be gone by the time he awoke from his nap.

Tʔrʔkuu fell into a very deep slumber. Suddenly from nowhere—there was the most unspeakable pain in his tail! It was so painful that he leaped up and threw back his head and opened his mouth to scream--nothing came out! He tried again and this time all that came out of his mouth was a sharp little bark! It was a sound that Tʔrʔkuu had never heard before. He slapped at Buffalo's hooves with his tiny little hands to get his attention.

Buffalo took two steps back once he heard the sharp shrill little bark. It startled him. There before him, stood the little prairie dog in terrible distress. All Buffalo could do was stare with an open mouth! Buffalo felt terrible. He apologized and said, "Forgive me little dog. I did not see you sleeping on the ground." Tʔrʔkuu was in such pain all he could do was bark.

Buffalo said, "I am going to North Country where there is medicine to restore your voice. When I return, I will bring this medicine back to you and you will be able to sing, tell stories, and once again, be the camp crier!" Tʔrʔkuu barked in agreement. Tʔrʔkuu is *still* waiting for the Buffalo to return. Subeetʔ

Background Note: Today, Tʔrʔkuu wears a black scar on his tail where the Buffalo stepped on him.

Original Story by Harry Mithlo (Comanche, Penʔtʔka Band and Chiricahua Apache)

Translations:

Tʔrʔkuu = Prairie Dog

Nʔmʔ Kʔtsu = buffalo (Comanche cow)

Subeetʔ = end; all finished

Editor's Note: Professor Pahdopony is an Assistant Professor of Arts and Humanities, a Tribal College Fellow and Dean of Academic Affairs of The Comanche Nation College in Lawton, Oklahoma. She is a member of the Comanche Nation. Professor Pahdopony shall share a Comanche historical perspective to build and strengthen cultural bridges of understanding between Texas students and the students of the homelands of the Comanche Nation through art, music, dance and writings. She shall pioneer and lead an effort to share the culture, heritage and history of the people of the Comanche Nation well known as great Texas' Plains bison hunters.

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