



## **Crowfoot Regalia handover – FAQs**

### **What is the regalia? Why is it significant?**

The North American regalia consists of several items that once belonged to Chief Crowfoot who is an important Blackfoot ancestor. It includes a decorated deerskin shirt and leggings.

The regalia seems to have passed into the possession of Cecil Denny, a senior officer in Canada's North-West Mounted Police around the time of the signing of the Blackfoot Treaty, also known as Treaty 7, in Alberta. Although Denny and Crowfoot seemed to have had a relationship of mutual trust, the exact circumstances of the acquisition are unknown.'

The regalia historically symbolises a great time of change for the Blackfoot nation. Its return will greatly help the Blackfoot heal from the damage caused by long-term colonial policy. It will also serve to educate younger generations who want to embrace the pride in their indigenous identity, which was one of many things affected by this policy.

### **Who are the Siksika Nation?**

Since time immemorial, the Children of the Plains, the Siksikai'tsitapi – Blackfoot People, have lived in and protected a territory that stretches from the North Saskatchewan River in present day Alberta and Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone River in the state of Montana, from the Continental Divide in the west to Regina in the province now known as Saskatchewan. [siksikanation.com](http://siksikanation.com)

Today, Siksika Nation population is approximately 7800+ and is part of the Siksikaitsitapi – Blackfoot Confederacy. The Siksikaitsitapi refers to four Indigenous Nations which make up the Blackfoot people: the Siksika (Blackfoot), the Kainai (Many Chiefs), the Apatohsiipiikani (Northern Peigan) and Amsskapipiikani (Southern Peigan). Siksikai'powahsini (Blackfoot Language) is the language of the Siksikaitsitapi.

### **Who was Chief Crowfoot and what is his importance in the history of the Siksika Nation?**

The Blackfoot Confederacy was comprised of many clans, and Chief Crowfoot (Issapomahksika) was the leader of the Mocassin Clan, who was one of the signatories of the Blackfoot Treaty. He was selected to be the main spokesman, as he had built a relationship with the newcomers. The people recognized that Crowfoot built a relationship with the newcomers and was selected to be a spokesman for the Blackfoot people during



the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Blackfoot Treaty on September 22, 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing.

## **What is treaty signing?**

In 19th century North America, Native Americans were forced to abandon their way of life. This often led to conflict. However, in Canada's formative years, the British Crown acquired land through a system of treaties made with the local tribes.

The Blackfoot Treaty, also known as Treaty 7, offered the Blackfoot and other nations in the Alberta region an opportunity to avoid further conflict by becoming British subjects. Crowfoot persuaded the other leaders to agree to the treaty signing. Their understanding of this meant that land would be exchanged for regular financial payment, provisions and food. The treaty was supposed to protect their traditions and way of life. Sadly, the terms of the treaty were broken by the British Crown, and as a result Blackfoot people would suffer great poverty and starvation.

## **When did the regalia arrive in Exeter?**

Acquired by Cecil Denny in 1877, the regalia was loaned to the Albert Memorial Museum the following year by his sister who was a city resident. Years later, Denny requested that the local authority purchase the regalia from him. This resulted in a payment of £10 being accepted in 1904.

## **Who made the decision to return the regalia?**

In 2013, RAMM became a key partner in a major Leverhulme-funded project. This enabled Blackfoot elders to access the collection for the first time in 136 years. Subsequently, the Siksika submitted a formal request to repatriate the regalia.

Exeter City Council's Executive Committee made the final decision based on a report from the museum management team. This is a committee of elected councillors representing the population of Exeter.

## **Where will the regalia go to? Who will care for it now?**

The Siksika Tribal Council will be responsible for its care. However, it is being loaned to the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, a Siksika-run museum which is built on Bow River at the site where Treaty 7 was signed. Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park received major funding to build a new state of the art display suite to house the regalia.



## **Why has it taken so long to return the regalia?**

A formal request for the return of the Crowfoot regalia was received from the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park in 2015. Like all Accredited museums in the UK, RAMM is bound by its Collections policy to deal with requests for return, which are always taken seriously. The museum had to follow a process as under RAMM's current policy, the museum has an ethical obligation to carry out due diligence to ensure the long-term preservation of the returned material. This involved liaison with the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park and then Chief Ouray Crowfoot as representative of the Siksika Nation.

Chief Crowfoot confirmed that the Siksika Tribal Council, as the elected representatives of the community, would be prepared to take ownership of the regalia, if the transfer were agreed. He provided the necessary assurances about the long-term care of the regalia and financial information and confirmed that the Siksika Nation will lend Chief Crowfoot's belongings to Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park for display and the education of all peoples around their significance as part of world history.

The repatriation request went to Exeter City Council's Executive Committee to make a final decision on 7 April 2020. This happened during the Covid pandemic and so we have had to wait until travel restrictions have eased in order to arrange the handover.

## **Can you explain the importance of the regalia to the Siksika Nation?**

These types of regalia hold a sacred significance to the Siksika. There is an intricate ceremony accompanied by songs and a ceremonial face paint to an individual who is given the rites to own and wear these types of suits, also known as a Hairlock or Weasel Tail Suit. The sacred value of having these types of regalia in our community strengthens our ties to what the Creator has given to the Blackfoot People.

## **Will the regalia be displayed in Canada and if so, where?**

Siksika Nation will lend Chief Crowfoot's belongings to Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park for display and the education of all peoples around their significance as part of world history.

## **Will you be returning all the other objects that have ended up in the museum due to British colonialism?**



RAMM's collection consists of objects from many parts of the world and, in common with many UK museum collections, includes acquisitions made during the time of British colonialism in the late 18th century through to the early 20th century.

Since the late 1990s, the museum has received a small number of requests for the return of cultural objects. These are dealt with on a case by case basis, and human remains and sacred artefacts have been returned to indigenous communities, e.g. Tasmanian Aboriginal People, Maori and the Ngarrindjeri of southern Australia, respectively.

Across the country, on-going academic research and investigation is contributing to a wider discussion about British history, identity and legacy. As new histories are revealed and our understanding is deepened, the significance of some parts of the collection is likely to change. Public debate and political involvement means this has become a dynamic and on-going discussion.

As a museum Accredited under the Arts Council England Scheme, RAMM's approach to the repatriation and restitution of objects will be within the parameters of Arts Council England sector guidance. Decisions are made on the basis of considering all ethical implications, which includes the future use and long-term preservation of artefacts. RAMM is a local government service, so for significant items, repatriation will follow a formal decision made by councillors at Exeter City Council's Executive Committee.

### **Is this a slippery slope? Will there be nothing left in the museum if you send everything back?**

Museums' approaches to repatriation and restitution are constantly evolving in light of new research and ongoing public debate on the issue. RAMM always responds to legitimate requests for repatriation from representatives of communities of origin. Each case is treated sensitively and confidentially and any decision to return collections is subject to approval by Exeter City Council's Executive Committee. The museum's ethnographical collection numbers in excess of 12,000 items, only a small number of these fall into the categories currently considered for repatriation.