

The Legend of Napi and the Rock

by Laurie Hodges Humble

The Okotoks Erratic is the largest rock in the Foothills Erratic Train. The Blackfoot Legend of Napi and the Rock tells how the erratic broke in two.

This is the Native American legend of Napi and the Rock as it was told to Blackfoot elder Stan Knowlton by his elders and old chiefs when he was a young boy on the Piikani Reserve in Alberta. Napi is the supernatural trickster of the Blackfoot.

In this particular story everybody knew Napi had cheated someone out of the nice buffalo robe he was wearing as he trekked northward with his pal Coyote. Napi had played tricks on so many other creatures the Sun and the Wind thought that they would play a trick on him. The Sun shone very brightly making Napi hotter and sweatier and the robe heavier. When the robe got too heavy to wear Napi asked Coyote what he should do with it. "Why don't you give it to the Big Rock?" said Coyote. So that is what they agreed to do. They went over to the Rock, praised the Rock, and Napi made a gift of the robe to the Big Rock. No sooner had Napi and Coyote headed off again when the Wind started blowing very cold air. Napi began to think he should have kept his robe. He tells Coyote to run back and take the robe from the Rock. Coyote doesn't want to have anything to do with taking back the robe. So Napi goes back and tells the Rock that he has come for the robe. To which the Rock replies, "You gave the robe to me." Napi responds, "What are you going to do? You have always been here and are going to stay here. I am going to be on my way." Napi takes the robe and heads off again with Coyote reluctantly by his side. All of a sudden Coyote hears some noise and looks back and sees the Rock rolling after them. Coyote and Napi become quite startled at what is going on and the two of them start to run.

Napi and Coyote run past all the animals which Napi had played tricks on. Napi asks the animals to help him. The animals are quite amused to see Napi finally getting a taste of his own medicine and will not help. Coyote realizes the Rock is only chasing Napi and so he runs away from Napi. Napi runs along prairies, coulees and rivers, staying just ahead of the rolling Rock. Napi is getting very tired. Some swallows finally decided to help him. The swallows swoop down and start pecking off pieces of the Rock. Some stories even say they use their droppings to break the Rock apart. The swallows see Napi is getting too tired to run much longer. They swoop down on the Rock one more time and stop the Rock by breaking it in two. Napi was safe. The Rock still sits on the spot near Okotoks, Alberta where it broke in two.

There are different versions of this Blackfoot legend, including one that tells a story about bats breaking the rock in two, thus their now pushed in faces. Mr. Knowlton did not hear the bat version until he was older. When he asked his elders and the old chiefs about why there were different versions of the stories he was told that the stories were like grass. 'Grass looks like it has a lot of different leaves on it, but when you get to the bottom it's the meaning that is in the root. As long as you tell the story to the best of your ability, in the end it all comes out to mean the same thing.'