

Have you gone on a vacation with your family to see a famous place from history? Maybe you've seen the heads of the presidents on Mount Rushmore, or perhaps Independence Hall in Philadelphia. This story is about another historic location in North America that probably didn't make it onto your Must-See list. You won't forget it, though. It has a very memorable name...

Oh, Give Me a Home Where the Buffalo Jump Off a Cliff by Shane Wilson

Sometimes, a famous place has a name that tells you exactly what it is. The Grand Canyon, for example, is one of the largest canyons on earth. The Leaning Tower of Pisa is also pretty obvious: a tower in Pisa that leans. However, you probably won't find a location with a name more literal than the famous Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta, Canada.

Thousands of years ago, Native Americans had limited tools with which to catch food. Spears and darts were the only weapons they had. These weren't very useful for catching large animals like buffalo, and sometimes hunting was quite dangerous.

Then they discovered that gravity could do the work for them. By studying the habits of buffalo, they learned to chase the animals off the edge of a 30-foot cliff. The buffalo would plummet to their death, where they would be carved up and put to use. The community was **industrious** in its use of the carcass: buffalo meat for food, fur for clothing, skins for drums, and bones for tools and weapons. Some called the buffalo "a walking department store."

Native Americans relied on Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump as a hunting ground for generations. Scientists who have studied the remains of buffalo at the bottom of the cliffs think it was in use for at least 5,500 years.

The name "Head-Smashed-In" comes from an old Blackfoot legend, which tells of a warrior who wanted to see what the falling herd looked like from below. Unfortunately, he was standing in the wrong spot. When they dug him out from under the pile of fallen buffalo, his head was...well, crushed. So the place came to be known as "Estipah-skikikini-kots," which means, "where we got our heads smashed."

In 1981, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump to be a World Heritage Site. That places it alongside such landmarks as Stonehenge and the Pyramids as important locations in early human history.

SKILL QUESTIONS

1. Okay, so... The author uses an interesting word: “industrious”. In the sentence, “The community was industrious in its use of the carcass” how does the word “industrious” describe the community?

- A. **The community is skillful at using the entire carcass.**
- B. The community is creating a kind of business based on the carcass.
- C. The community doesn’t know what to do with the carcass.
- D. The community is very hard-working.

The answer is A. Industrious means skillful, and the community is able to make food, clothes, and tools out of a dead buffalo. I’d say they’re a pretty skillful bunch. Now, if they could make a buffalo into gold, we’d really be on to something.

2. No luck with the gold, though. In that case... Why was the buffalo important to Native Americans?

- A. The buffalo was the only animal they could eat.
- B. The buffalo is an endangered species.
- C. **The buffalo provided many resources for survival.**
- D. They could learn the buffalo’s habits.

C is the right answer here. You can make a buffalo hamburger, you can make a buffalo coat, you can make a buffalo drum...you can do a whole lot with a buffalo. Native Americans relied upon the buffalo for the many ways in which they could use it to live a better life.

3. Hey, speaking of that long, weird name... How did Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump receive its name?

- A. It was named after the buffalo that fell off the cliff.
- B. **It was named after a warrior who was crushed by a falling buffalo.**
- C. It was named by the United Nations when it became a World Heritage Site.
- D. If a buffalo falls on you, your head will get smashed in.

Yes, it’s B. According to the passage, the name comes from a word meaning “the place where our heads got smashed,” after one unlucky fellow had a herd of buffalo land right on his noggin. Ouch.