

Cleaning the Buffalo Skull

—Boots Delano

When the head is removed after slaughter, clean all skin and flesh as soon as possible. If not done soon the blood and all the liquid will be absorbed by the bone in the skull. After the meat and skin are removed the caps now have to be removed. Using a plastic mallet rap the cap a few good blows. After this is completed, wrap a piece of carpet around the cap and with a pipe wrench work the cap loose. **WARNING** do not boil skull with caps on.

Secure a large container approximately 36" for 4 to 5 year old heads. A larger container will be needed for older heads. The container should be stainless steel or galvanized steel. I do not recommend aluminum as the chemicals can react to it.

I have boiled using wood fires, weed burners and gas burners they all work well. A good gas burner

(propane or natural gas) is probably the best. Remember, you have a lot of water to maintain at a boiling temperature so keep covered as much as possible.

Attach a strong wire to the head before installing in water, the wire will act like a handle, you will need it later. Fill the container about 3/4 full, bring to a boil and add a cup of baking soda to the water. Carefully lower the head into the container, the water will rise as the head is lowered. Make certain head is totally submerged in water.

Let head boil about 30 minutes, using the wire as handle, lift out to check condition of flesh and bone. When the flesh starts to separate from the bone and the bone turns pink the process is near completion.

When the bottom jaw has separated from the top, remove from the water and set off the ground and let cool and dry. Check top of head for

flesh, if it is quite clean, remove from water and store on a high, dry surface with bottom jaw. If another head is to be boiled add water to container, let water reheat add baking soda add another head. Refresh mixture if more than two heads are to be boiled.

While head number 2 is cooking, remove the loose flesh from the first head. This works well before the head cools completely.

After the skulls have had time to totally dry and are clean of flesh, a bleach process can be done. Extreme caution should be used at this point in time as this process must be stopped. I use a 30% clorox solution and the skull is in this mixture for only about 30 minutes. After the soak, the clorox must be stopped. A solution of about 20% brown vinegar will work well.

After the skull has dried, add horn caps and lightly spray with clear plastic acrylic.