

Cheyenne Narrative about Na Kovehe (Bear Lodge)

(also known as Devils Tower)

Once there was a man and his wife. The wife went out to fix the smoke wings to prevent smoke in the lodge. While she was doing this, a big bear came and carried her off. This man had six brothers of which he was the oldest. After losing his wife this man mourned greatly. He would go out and cry out to the bear and defy him. The bear took this woman to a cave that was his home. The youngest of the brothers told his oldest brother to make him a bow and four arrows. Two of the arrows were to be feathered with eagle feathers and painted red with the paint that they got from the hills. The other two arrows were to be feathered with buzzard feathers and painted black. He had two red arrows and two black arrows. The arrows were not pointed. The brother was told to make them blunt and not to sharpen them. The seven brothers then went after the oldest one's wife, who had been carried off by the big bear. The youngest man told his brothers to take plenty of arrows, to fill their quivers full. The youngest brother had only the four arrows, the two red ones and the two black ones. The others had as many as they wanted.

When they got close to the bear's den, the youngest man told his brothers to sit down and stay there. This youngest brother had great power. He got up and walked around. He turned himself into a gopher and dug a hole into the bear's den big enough to bring the woman out. The bear that had taken the woman was lying with his head in the woman's lap. This man, who had changed himself into a gopher, had the power to put the rest of the bears in the den to sleep. He also had the power to put the big bear, that had stolen this woman, to sleep. The hole he had dug was just big enough to take the woman out. He turned back into an Indian. He spoke to the woman and told her that he was there to take her back. He also told her that his oldest brother thought a lot of her and had been mourning for her. He told her to take her blanket and make a pillow out of it and put it under the bear's head. He then told her to crawl backwards into the hole he had dug. He took the woman out and they came to the place where he first went in. The six brothers were still sitting there. After they came out, the hole closed up.

When this woman got out she told those seven people that they had better be leaving, and leaving fast, because the big bear was one that could not be killed. Arrows would not go into him. The youngest brother, with the four arrows, kept looking back. The big bear came out of his den and walked around it. He found the trail where the Indians had left. He took the rest of the bears with him. This big bear was the leader. Soon the Indians saw the bears coming, and coming fast.

Soon the Indians came to the place where "Bears Tipi" is today. The youngest brother always carried a small rock in his hand. He told the six other brothers and the woman to close their eyes. He sang a song and finished it. The others opened their eyes. The rock had grown in size. He sang four times and when he had finished, the rock was just as high as it is today. He was able to do this because he was a "Holy Man."

When the bears got up to the big rock they all sat down in a line, except the main one and he stood out in front. The bear called out, "Let my woman come down." The youngest Indian answered the bear saying, "You might be a 'Holy Bear,' but you cannot get her." He mocked the bear about his power and being able to do almost anything. The brothers killed all of the bears except the leader. This bear growled and tried to get to the top of the rock by jumping. He could get up quite a ways, but could not reach the top.

While the bear was trying to get to the top of this big rock, the youngest brother shot a black arrow at him. It didn't hurt him. The bear got farther up every jump he made, by taking a run. The bear's claws made the marks that are on the rock today. The third jump the bear made, the Indian shot a red arrow at him that didn't go in. The fourth jump, the bear almost got there. This man shot him with the last arrow. It went into the top of the bear's head and came out below his jaw. This arrow killed the bear. The youngest brother then made a noise like a bald eagle and four of these eagles came there. The Indians took hold of the eagle's legs and were carried down to the ground.

When they reached the ground, the youngest man told his brothers to pack in a lot of wood and put it on top of the bear that had stolen the woman. They piled a lot of wood on him and then set it on fire. When the bear got red hot it popped. Small pieces, like beads, of different colors flew off him. The youngest brother told the rest of them to put the pieces back into the fire with a stick. If they put the pieces back into the fire with their hands the bear would have come to life again. They burned the bear down to ashes.

After this there were a lot of young bears running around there. The Indians killed all but two. The youngest brother talked to them. He told them not to bother the people anymore. He cut their ears and tails off. That is why bears have short ears and no tail, to this day.

Story told to Dick Stone by Medicine Top, July 21, 1933. Medicine Top heard the legend from his father and before telling it prayed to the Great Spirit to help him tell the story "straight and true." The Cheyennes are very cautious in telling this legend as it is considered sacred, and punishment is expected if it isn't told "straight and true."

