

SOME GAMES OF ARIKARA CHILDREN

Slings were made by Arikara boys, just as slings have been made the world over. A pliable piece of hide was cut into elliptical shape about the length of the hand, and with a hole in the center. At each end was attached a thong about as long as the arm. The missile was thrown by swinging in a rotary motion and released by letting go one of the thongs from between the thumb and finger; the other thong held securely by being wrapped in several turns about the middle finger. Boys amused themselves by throwing pebbles at targets with slings.

Mudballs – Boys played at mimic battle with mud-balls, which they threw at their opponents from the end of a resilient wand.

Mudballs and Fire – In the fall, at corn-shelling time, when the cobs were burned in the evening, the boys delighted to make mud-balls and attach them to wands as described above, and then dip them into the burning corncobs. The brands adhered to the mud-balls and were hurled through the air. This was a night-time game, the main attraction in it being the spectacle of the flying firebrands. However, an added zest was given to this sport in the circumstance of circumventing the watchfulness of the women who were burning the cobs for the purpose of obtaining salt from the ash, and who naturally were exasperated by the boys messing up and destroying their ash-beds.

Willow wands – Boys made sets of wands of straight young willows. These were peeled and stained with berry juices or other coloring matter, or were marked with fire. This was done by cutting off part of the bark in rings or spirals, and then holding the wands over the fire. After thus being subjected to heat and smoke, the remainder of the bark was removed. This left the wands marked in designs of smoke-brown on white.

The object of this game was to send the wands forward as far as possible from a given stand by propelling from the hand with a glancing stroke upon the ground. The stake was the set of wands, as in the game of marbles among white boys when they play for “keeps.” The boy who sent a wand the farthest took all the wands played.

Coasting – Boys and girls separately or together played at coasting, and in various ways.

Sometimes a woman might have a buffalo hide which had not been dressed, and which required to be worked into pliability and from which she also wished to have the hair removed. She would let the youngsters have it for coasting. They would drag it to a hilltop and crowd on, as many as could find room. Then away they would go sliding down the hill. This action would be repeated until they were tired of the game or until the hide became too pliable to slide easily. In this way the children enjoyed great sport, while at the same time they were performing a useful service for the woman who owned the hide by depilating it and at the same time making it pliable, which she otherwise would have had to do at the expense of much hard labor.

Another device for coasting was made of buffalo ribs joined together with sticks tied across their ends with sinew. Sometimes they attached a head at the front, and tail at the back, with a piece of old buffalo robe to sit on. A thong attached at the front was used for guiding.

Stilts – Both boys and girls walked on stilts, which they made from poles, leaving a stump of a fork on the side at the height they desired for a footrest, which was bound to the trunk piece with a wrapping of thong.

Snaring Ground squirrels – In early spring the boys made nooses of horsehair or other material which would slip easily, and with long strings attached they placed the noose over the opening of the burrow of a ground-squirrel, the “flickertail,” and waited for the animal to appear. When it did so the watching boy jerked the noose and captured the animal. He killed it and set the noose again, and so continued. After catching as many squirrels as they wished, a group of boys would make a fire, roast their game, and have a hunters’ feast. After the wild onions began to grow, the boys no longer engaged in this sport, because the ground-squirrels would feed on the wild onions and their flesh was disagreeable for eating.