



Buffalo Hunt, Chase, plate 6 from the "North American Indian Portfolio"

Date

1845

Primary Maker

George Catlin

Medium

Color lithograph on paper

Description

In this Plate, representing a numerous group in motion, and closely pursued by a party of Indians, with Lances and Bows,

there is a fair illustration of the peculiar character of a vast deal of the "rolling prairies," in the great plains towards the Rocky Mountains; and which, by a phrase of the country, is denominated "Prairie Bluffs." These conical hills, which often rise to the height of several hundred feet, sometimes continuing in ranges and in regular succession, for a great number of miles, like tremendous waves of the ocean, are everywhere divested of timber and shrubbery, and covered with a short grass; and during the spring and summer months, watered by frequent showers, robing them constantly with the most intense and verdant green. These are the most favorite haunts of the buffaloes; and when hotly pursued they will often seek the highest summits to avoid the approach of their enemies; but even there, as seen in the illustration, the sinewy wild horse will carry his rider by their sides, where death is as inevitable as upon the level ground. The lasso seen trailing behind the horse's heels in this plate, and which has already been described, though it is nowhere used to arrest the fury of the buffalo's speed, seldom fails to be dragged in the chase, attached to the horse's neck and following in the grass some fifteen or twenty yards behind, that the rider who may fall to the ground, may grapple to it; and by running with it in his hand, have the means of securing his horse, and of being again, in an instant, upon its back. The lance which is seen carried in this chase, of twelve or fourteen feet in length, is a deadly weapon in the hands of these skilled by the constant handling of it for the greater part of their lives; equally valued and equally fatal, in war and the chase, as the bow and arrow; and used much in the same manner by all the mounted Indians of the great plains and prairies of America. The blade of this lance is of bone, of silex, or of steel, and the shaft, light and delicate, of wood. It is never thrown from the hand, but at the moment the horse is passing the animal or an enemy, the thrust is instantly made by passing the handle of the lance through the left hand, holding it firmly in his right, as the rider leans from the side of his horse. One blow (which is given with the suddenness of the darting of a snake's tongue, with great precision, and generally at right angles with the horse's back, not to entangle and endanger the lance) is generally all that is required, as the blade is dipped to the heart of the animal, which can run but a very few rods before it is down upon its haunches and dying.

Dimensions

Composition: 12 × 17 3/4 in. (30.5 × 45.1 cm) Sheet: 15 1/2 × 22 1/8 in. (39.4 × 56.2 cm)