

W H I T E B U F F A L O

Among the tribes of the great plains of North America, there is a myth about the White Buffalo Calf Woman. She approaches the tribe and brings the holy pipe to the chief. She tells him, that this pipe will provide the tribe with a direct channel to the Great Spirit and bring plenty of bison. Then she changes herself into the shape of a white bison calf before she vanishes in the horizon.

In this game, you play as one of four tribes of the great plains, in a time of great historical change. You collect and play colored cards to move and hunt the great bison herds. Bison lets you add more Teepee Cards to your tribe. Each Teepee Card you add to your tribe, gives you victory points, but also makes future actions more powerful, as the value of cards in their color increase.

Only too soon, however, you also face the challenges brought on by the westwards expansion of settlers, the U.S. army, and by railroad companies. They will kill the great bison herds and bring the bison to near extinction. This is also the end of your way of life. You may find survival in submitting to their demands, sign treaties or even take the war path to gain momentum, when the opportunity arises.

Each time you retire a Teepee Card, your power is reduced, but so is also the price of the next Teepee Card, and with it the chance of reaping greater rewards. The game ends when either 2/3 of all bison have been killed, the last card in the Teepee Cards draw pile have been turned, or alternatively, when all players have passed. The winner of the game is the player who has scored the most points.

Setting Up The Game

A. Place 3 bison herd meeples in each territory of the game board.

B. Shuffle the 60 Action Cards and place them as a draw pile to the left of the game board. Action Cards can be recognized by the horse and hunter (bow & arrow) symbols on their back. The 3 top cards are revealed next to the draw pile and space is made for a discard pile.

C. Sort the 25 Teepee Cards, 6 Settler Cards, 6 Treaty Cards and 6 Railroad Cards into 5 sets by the roman numerals indicated on each card at the bottom. All these cards can be recognized by the teepee symbol on their backside.

Shuffle each set and stack them setwise with the set marked "I" on top, followed by the "II" set, and so forth. Add the special orange "Buffalo Bill" card in between set II and III. Turn the top 6 cards face up in a 2 x 3 card area below the stack. Place the 15 Destiny Cards (pink cards) in a draw pile, backside up, next to the Teepee Card draw pile.

D. Prepare the "hunting bag". Add the 3 red cubes and 1 white cube to the bag, as well as 5 brown cubes per player.

Add the black, blue and grey cubes to the spots on the buffalo death rate card, placed near the Teepee Card pool. For each Settler Card or Treaty Card, turned face up from set "I", add a grey and blue cube, respectively, to the hunting bag from the rightmost spots of this card.

Place the hunting bag, the War Card (red special card) and the White Buffalo Calf Woman (white meeple) within reach of all players.

E. Take the meeple and tribe card in your favourite color, draw 7 Action Cards on hand from the top of the draw pile, and 1 Destiny Card.

Determine the starting player randomly. You are now ready to play!



Game Play

White Buffalo is played over a series of rounds. Each player may take 1 action each round. The player who starts the game places their tribe and plays the first action. Other players then place their tribes and play their actions in clockwise order.

On your turn, you must do one of the following:

Take Action Cards. Add 3 Action Cards to your hand from the row of visible cards and/or from the draw pile.

Play Action Cards. Play horse cards of different colors to move your tribe. Play cards of the same color, with a hunter card on top, to hunt bison herds. Add cubes in territory to the "hunting bag". Then pull cubes from the bag.

Buy or retire a Teepee Card. Pay brown cubes to buy a Teepee Card, or take a Settler, Treaty or Railroad Card to retire a Teepee Card of the color indicated by the card.

Pass. Flip your tribe card for 3 pts if you see no way of moving forward, and end your game. If all players have passed, the game ends.

At the end of your turn, move all herds you have hunted Mancala style around the buffalo trail, and add played cards to the discard pile.

Take Action Cards

Simply add 3 Action Cards to your hand. There is no hand limit.

You may take any card(s) from the row of visible cards, and combine with cards from the draw pile. You may also take all 3 cards blindly from the draw pile. You may take a look at a card drawn blindly before deciding whether you will take a visible card or draw the next card blindly again.

When you've taken cards, refresh the row of visible cards if any was taken.

Play Action Cards

When you choose to play cards, you may make several plays during your turn, if you wish. To keep track of your play, place any cards played in front of you as distinct plays, and discard your played cards only at the end of your turn.

There are two types of card plays :

Move. Play one or more horse cards in *different colors*, to move your tribe :



To move from one territory to another, you need just 1 horse value. To move into a second territory, you need 2 additional horse value. You may make a hunt action in between your moves, but will still need 2 horse value to proceed your movement, and of one or more different colors than the previous move.

Hunt. Play cards of the same color with a hunter card on top :



The hunt value determines how many cubes you may pull from the "hunting bag" - with a maximum of the number of herds in your territory, *or* the number of cubes available to pull from the bag.

When you hunt, lay down all hunted herds on the side, to indicate that these have been hunted and should move after your turn. Before each hunt, add any cubes in territory to the "hunting bag".

Then pull the number of cubes from the bag corresponding to your hunt value, and resolve the effects of each cube, in the order outlined below.

Key Concept - Teepee Power

Teepee Cards of the same color as cards played, add a +1 each, to cards of that type in your action.

This means, that if you play a hunt action, a Teepee Card of the same color will add a +1 to hunt cards played. If you play a move action, horse cards of the color of one or more of your Teepee Cards will receive the benefit.



The power of the color of your Teepee Cards means you will be able to make more potent actions during the game, if you play wisely.

Resolve Cube Effects

 Bison. Added to your Tribe Card. More than 6 on card are lost and returned to the hunting bag.

 Immature hunter/warrior. You get no bison from this hunt. Leave in territory or activate the *war card*.

The War Card

When you draw a red cube, you may take the war card, and add the red cube to a vacant slot. If you take the war card from another player, you also take the cubes on it.

When you have the war card, you may add pulled cubes of the indicated colors to the card, as long as there are vacant spots.

When you buy Teepee Cards you may use any or all of the cubes on the War Card in place of bison. If the War Card is emptied of cubes, the player loses the card.



Settlers. Check the revealed grey spots of the buffalo death rate card, and add that number of herds to the track of lost herds. Leave cube in territory.



Professional hunter. Kills 3 herds. Added to the bag between the second and third set of Teepee Cards, when the "Buffalo Bill" card comes out. Always returned to bag.



US Army. Check the revealed blue spots of the buffalo death rate card, and add that total number of herds to the track of lost herds. Leave cube in territory.



Railroad Company. Check the revealed black spots of the buffalo death rate card, and add that total number of herds to the track of lost herds. Leave cube in territory.



White Buffalo Calf Woman approaches the tribe. Move the white meeple to the territory. She attracts 1 herd to the territory, from each adjacent territory. She stays in the territory. Return the white cube to the bag.

When you have finished your turn, move all herds you have hunted and laid down on the side, *Mancala style* around the buffalo trail, adding one at a time to each following territory. Add all played cards to the common discard pile.

You may take 1 new Destiny Card if you're in the territory of the white meeple.

Buy or retire Teepee Cards

Add a new Teepee Card

You must have bison in stock in order to buy a Teepee Card. Each card costs you 1 bison, but each time you buy a new card, you must also feed your people and pay again for Teepee Cards already added to your tribe. To find out your price for the next Teepee Card, simply count the number of bison icons on your tribe card and Teepee Cards, including the card you wish to buy. When you pay for a new Teepee Card, you add the brown cubes paid, to the hunting bag. You may use cubes from the *war card* to pay.

Retire a Teepee Card

Instead of adding a new Teepee Card, you may consider to retire a Teepee Card, by taking a matching Settler, Treaty or Railroad Card and flipping both backside up in your play area. This reduces the cost of your next Teepee Cards, but your Teepee Power is also reduced. However, you may keep all points from retired Teepee Cards, and the points you can get from more (and cheaper) cards might outweigh concerns over your lost power.

Important : All players start the game with negative scores. Collecting sets of Settler, Treaty and Railroad Cards reduces these, as indicated by each card.

After a card has been acquired, refill the vacant spot with the next card from the draw pile. If "Buffalo Bill" comes out, simply add the orange cube to the bag, and refill the slot once again.

The End of the Game

The game ends immediately when 2/3 of all herds have been lost. This means that all spots on the lost herds track along the edges of the game board, has been filled. There are two other ways, in which the game may end.

In the rare (but possible) case, that the last card of the Teepee Cards draw pile has been reached and revealed, the game round is played to it's end. After this round the game ends.

If all players have passed and flipped their tribe cards, the game also ends.

End Scoring

Use one of the enclosed scoring sheets to calculate your final scores. There are several ways to score points :

- 3-7 points from each Teepee Card.
- Scoring one or more Destiny Cards. Destiny Cards are scored exclusively - one Teepee Card cannot be part of more than one. Player has to choose.
- Sets of unique Teepee Card symbols. Sets scores as indicated on the cards.
- Reduce negative pts by collecting sufficient Settler, Treaty and Railroad cards.

Names, Visuals and Colors

Notes on some design choices

"White Buffalo" seeks to tell a complex story about the high plains tribes who sustained life from hunting the great bison herds on the North American continent. In a period of more than 200 years, they were the masters of the horse and of this vast area. Historically these peoples has been referered to as "prairie indians", "natives", "first people", "indian americans" or "native americans".

Thought and care has gone into creating a game which tells a story about their way of life and the challenges that faced these tribes with the decline of the great bison herds.

The four tribes of the game are represented by the colors red, blue, green and yellow. The tribes could be the lakota, blackfoot, crow, apache, comanche, arapaho or cheyenne tribes, or any other of the hundreds of tribes that lived in this area during this vast stretch of time and sustained life from hunting the great bison herds. I have deliberately made the decision not to name what tribes are played in the game, since first, it has little bearing on the gameplay, and second, I do not want to single out any particular tribe or culture, since the game is about all these cultures and ways of life, not any particular historical tribe or historical event, except in the broadest terms. Instead it is up to the players to use their imaginations and find a play style where they can meet the oportunites & challenges that arise from the gameplay.

The role of violent conflict has deliberately been toned down, to focus on the main thing of the game - the bison hunt and decline of the great bison herds. There was a lot of warfare going on during this time; fighting between tribes over access and dominance over areas, and wars with the US army, which escalated after the Civil War. However, it was the near-extinction of the bison that brought the tribes to their demise. As the bison declined, their way of life could not be sustained. And that was my focus in the game.

Many of the territories which are indicated as such on the game board were not established as states of the USA at the time when the game purports to start (early 1700s), in fact the USA was a reality only in 1776 after the War of Independence, and the expansion westward accelerated only in the 19th century, the railroad being the primary accelerator of developments.

In the game the territories serve primarily as a way mechanically to show the wanderings of the bison herds as well as the gradual loss of dominance/control of the high plains territories, stretching from Canada in the North to Texas in the south, with the expansion of settlers, railroad construction workers and US army outposts. The names of the later US states has been put on the game board as a reference only to the areas we're in geographically. The game is only historical in the broadest sense, in trying to convey the feeling of loss of control, the plains tribes experienced with the decline of the bison, to the players.

Similarly, the loss of control for the tribes is represented by abstract colored cubes - blue for expansion of the US military, grey for settler wagon trains, and black for the railroad. These cubes and their effects are distilled abstractions of a vastly complex historical development.

Visuals

For all images used in the game, my goal has been from the outset to use art which is close to or contemporary with the period of the game, made by 18th and 19th century artists, and which could be used in the game freely, because these works have entered the public domain. I have tried to choose images for the cards which seemed to convey the theme in an iconographically strong way, while not falling too much into "wild west" cultural stereotypes.

The Title

The "White Buffalo" of the game title may sound curious. As is referred to in the intro of the rules, the title refers to a Native American religious myth, which is tied to the albino bison, which was very rare. The coming of the "white buffalo calf woman" was a sign of hope. She brought the ceremonial pipe to the tribes and the promise of plentiful bison. For the tribes, who relied almost entirely on the bison, it was always a crucial concern if there were animals to hunt and what the future prospects of the hunt would be. She and her powers in the game represent this. I thought it was important, that there was a feeling of hope in the game. Her presence and effect on the gameplay adds some spirituality to a game, which is otherwise mostly about ressource management and how humans can exploit their natural environment. The White Buffalo is a reminder, that there must always be a balance.

Morten Blaabjerg, march 2022



White Buffalo.

Drawing by Michael Løhde Andersen for the game