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[browning](#) > Content

# Indian Relay

By *steve*

Created 2007-11-01 13:28

[browning](#) [Feature article](#) [horses](#) [relay](#) [Video](#)

## Body text:

BROWNING, Mont.--Indian relay is a way of life. It is modern plains' horse culture.

There is not a lot of money to make even if you win, but you make enough to get down the road to the next race and maybe even feed your crew. The team sacrifices for the benefit of the horses when you win. The first thing you do is pay the horses--they get their "cut."

Teammates split whatever is left over. I have been a part of a team that won the National Indian Relay Championship at the Eastern Idaho State Fair, and the family that owned the horses lived without electricity just so we could afford specific feed supplements for the horses. Luckily it paid off. There were teams that did not win anything, and I am sure they took good care of their horses as well.

Relay is a family sport as much as a dangerous sport. Relay teams consist of family members and close friends, but it is the extended family that gives the greatest support to the teams. A huge family network of money helps teams endure the extreme cost of travel and entry fees; family and friends help finance the team. You can bet on race day that they show up to offer their support as well as their criticism. Commercial sponsorship has not played a role in supporting these races.

Native people have kept the sport of Indian relay alive as pari-mutuel horseracing has declined in Montana and largely moved to Billings.

A few tribes own their own tracks and hold their own races, such as the ones at Stampede Park in the Blackfeet Reservation town of Browning held during the North American Indian Days celebration in July. Crow Fair also holds relay races each August. The Crows experiment with the rules, though the races stay pretty close to the original version.

The Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho holds races throughout the summer but its biggest relay race takes place during the Shoshone Bannock Indian Festival and All Indian Rodeo in August.

Sheridan, Wyo., holds a race during July that is billed as the "world championship." I have never liked this title, because the track does not conform to conditions at other race tracks. The exchange is done within a confined area, forcing the rider to jump off on one side of a line and get on the horse from the other side of a line. It really clouds thing up, rather than running the race the way it was intended. Yes, that it is my opinion.

Many places used to have relay as part of city or county fairs but because of the high cost of insurance, fair boards are shying away from what they see as another cost they don't need.

On the other hand, the fair misses out on a huge opportunity to charge at the gate, not to mention the concession stands that sell food and sodas. If you really want to get down to it, the entire town or city loses out on retail sales all over town because of the large number of Indians who come from the reservation for the weekend to see the races and shop.

*The song in the video is "People of the Sun" by Rage Against the Machine.*

**Blurb:**

It's a way of life and the modern plains' horse culture. It's a family sport—and dangerous.

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—Author and description override

**Author(s):**

Wayne Smith and Rayne Charette

**author description:**

Wayne Smith and Rayne Charette are Blackfeet. Wayne Smith is studying photojournalism at the University of Montana in Missoula. He is a graduate of the Freedom Forum's 2006 American Indian Journalism Institute and interned as a photographer at the Rapid City (S.D.) Journal. . Charette is a student at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Mont. Smith and Charette are brothers.

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