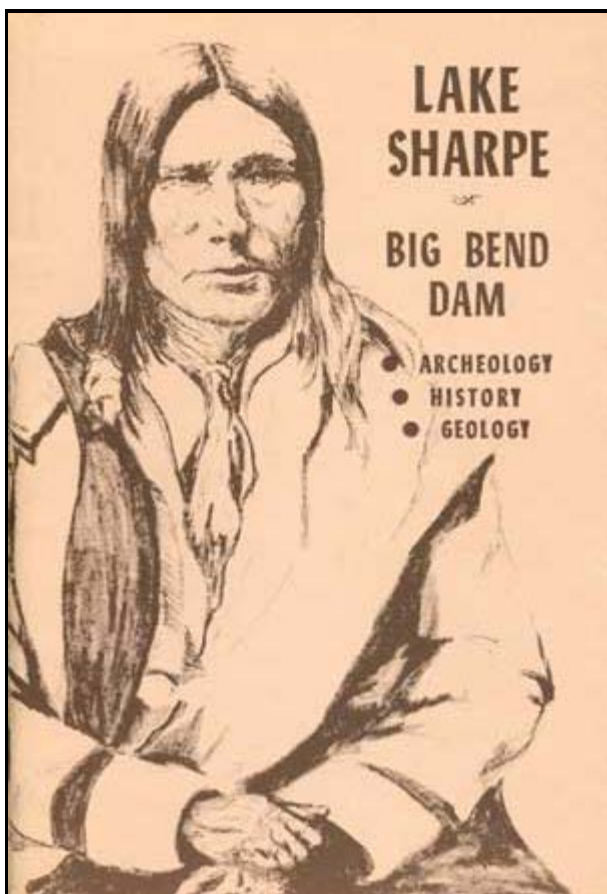


Lake Sharpe—Big Bend Dam

Archeology, History, Geology



LAKE SHARPE BIG BEND DAM

Archeology, History, Geology

Edited by
Richard B. Johnston

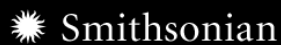
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THE INTER-AGENCY ARCHEOLOGICAL SALVAGE PROGRAM

COORDINATING AGENCIES

National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior
The Smithsonian Institution

COOPERATING FEDERAL AGENCIES

Corps of Engineers, United States Army	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Geological Survey, Dept. of the Interior	Office of the Science Adviser
Bureau of Reclamation	Tennessee Valley Authority
Bureau of Land Management	Soil Conservation Service, Agriculture
Bureau of Fish & Wildlife Service	Agricultural Stab. & Conservation Service
BPR, Department of Commerce	Urban Renewal Administration
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Missouri Archaeological Society	University of Illinois
Museum of Northern Arizona	

Museum of New Mexico
New Jersey State Museum
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New York State Museum
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Public Utility District #1, Chelan County,
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Public Utility District #2, Grants County,
Washington
Roswell Museum of New Mexico

University of Kentucky
University of Mississippi
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University of New Mexico
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Washington State University
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Wisconsin Historical Society

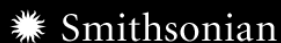


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THE INTER-AGENCY SALVAGE PROGRAM

The twisting course of the Missouri River was the home of varied groups of Indian farmers long before Europeans first arrived in the New World. Here were a numerous people living in strong fortified towns, cultivating fields of corn in the well-watered bottomlands and hunting bison on the plains beyond. With the coming of the explorers and the inevitable expansion of the American frontier, the Indian cultures began a long decline that ended only with their near extinction. At first the Missouri served as a highway for fur traders, then for a growing number of trapping parties and explorers, and still later for a surge of gold seekers and settlers heading for the northwest. At the same time, forts along the main stem, as the river has come to be called, formed part of a chain of military posts designed to protect and pacify the hostile frontier.

An important part of this long history is centered in the area that is now the Big Bend Reservoir (Lake Sharpe). The remains of numerous Indian villages and camps, trading posts and military establishments were once to be found here. Now most are submerged, but before they disappeared, many of the prehistoric sites and places of historical significance were carefully studied by archeologists and historians representing a number of federal, state and private agencies. The program was a part of a unique salvage effort, sponsored by the federal government, to sample, record, and document important parts of our national heritage before these remains were destroyed.

The construction of dams and reservoirs, the stabilizing of river banks, and a host of additional water control and hydroelectric projects are bringing great changes to many of our major river systems. Unfortunately, it is precisely along our rivers that most of the records of our Indian predecessors and of our own historic past is to be found.

The Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program was organized to preserve and interpret the paleontological, archeological, and historic remains scheduled for destruction by federal water control and hydroelectric projects. The program is administered by the U. S. National Park Service with the advice and active participation of the Smithsonian Institution. Federal funds provide support for much of the work, but state, local, and even private monies have been utilized.

The excavation and recording of historic and prehistoric sites is but one aspect of the program. The material objects recovered, artifacts such as arrow points, pottery, military insignia, and the like, are preserved in the U. S. National Museum, in specialized museums of the National Park Service, or in the repositories of the participating states. Here they are reminders of the past—public property, equally available to all.

There is still another consideration, and in the long run a more important one. Objects are not gathered for their own sake. True, many of them, even the commonplace things of a century past, are interesting in themselves, but the archeologist and the historian see them in a very different light. Artifacts are tools, tools which can be used to amplify the written history of books and records—tools which can be used to compose a record where no written history

exists. This then is the ultimate purpose of the program, to extend man's knowledge of himself—to discover and interpret the past, making it meaningful for today.

The Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program operates over the entire United States. The Missouri Basin includes approximately one-sixth of the land area of the continental United States, exclusive of Alaska. Ten states—Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, fall within the boundaries of the basin. Six major dams have been built along the main stem, and innumerable smaller projects have affected tributary streams.

The basic stimulus for the Salvage Program was provided by the Committee for the Recovery of Archaeological Remains, an independent group of private citizens, composed of representatives of the Society for American Archaeology, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Council of Learned Societies. The committee was formed in response to the threatened destruction of important paleontological, archeological, and historic sites by public construction projects in all parts of the United States. The U. S. National Park Service, in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institution, agreed to administer the program on a national scale. Actual field investigations are carried out by units of the Smithsonian Institution and by a large number of state and private agencies. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation have provided support from the beginning. Without their recognition of the peculiar archeological and historical problems involved, the salvage effort would have been impossible.

Despite setbacks and temporary retrenchments, the program has been highly successful. Archeological research in particular has received an important stimulus. The construction programs have made possible a comprehensive, integrated program of archeological work, which would not have been practical under ordinary circumstances. No single institution or foundation could have borne the burden alone.

Irreparable losses have occurred, but this has been inevitable and even under ideal conditions it would never have been possible to excavate every site of importance. Recognizing these problems from the outset, an effort has been made to secure a sample from the various kinds of remains represented in each endangered area. This has resulted in the accumulation of a vast amount of information helping to clarify the story of the aboriginal peoples of North America. The Salvage Program has been a particularly successful effort aimed at the reconstruction of important parts of the American past.



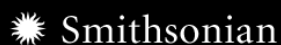
A typical landscape in the Big Bend country; this view to the northwest shows a part of the Big Bend

itself. Photo: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution

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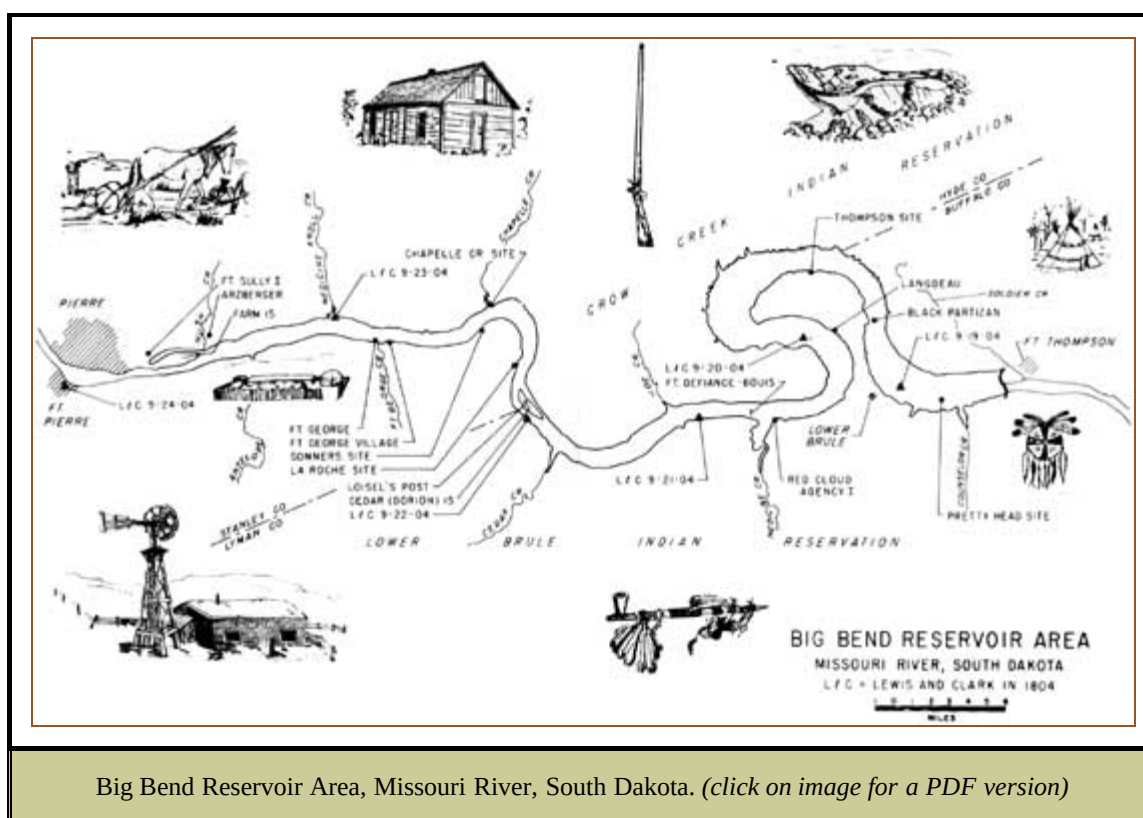
Archeology, History, Geology



BIG BEND DAM AND RESERVOIR AREA

Big Bend Dam is located in central South Dakota 987 miles above the mouth of the Missouri River which flows into the Mississippi at St. Louis. The reservoir created by the dam is approximately 80 river-miles in length, extending upstream from the community of Fort Thompson to Pierre, South Dakota. The Big Bend Dam was the last of six major structures to be built along the main stem of the Missouri River. The reservoir (Lake Sharpe) behind the dam was raised to normal operating pool level of 1420 feet (above sea level) in late 1965 and was designed to be held at a relatively stable level year-round.

The Big Bend area takes its name from a remarkable feature of the river called the "Grand Detour" or "Great Bend" by 18th century explorers who were the first Whites to visit and describe the region. At this point in its course the Missouri makes an almost complete loop which has a length of more than twenty miles, though the shortest distance across the neck or "gorge" is little more than a mile and a half. Walking across this narrow part or following the circuitous river route, explorers and later visitors were struck by the geography of this unusual section of the valley.



In the Big Bend area, the Missouri flowed in a trench between steep and often rugged bluffs which rose in places to several hundred feet above the channel. Established thousands of years ago, during late geologic time when the glaciers were receding, the trench marks the approximate limit of major advances of the ice sheets. As the glaciers melted and

disappeared, they left deposits of "drift" or rocky soil many feet in thickness which had been transported by the ice from the northeast. This drift may readily be seen by the motorist along the bluffs east and north of the river as one approaches Pierre on Highway 34 from the southeast. West of the Missouri the present terrain results from the erosion of much more ancient formations of marine origin such as the Pierre Shale, the source of "gumbo" soils.

In the Big Bend area, only short, intermittent tributary streams empty into the Missouri from the northeast and only one larger stream, Medicine Creek, enters from the southwest. The Missouri bottom lands and the lower parts of some of the tributaries were formerly well timbered with deciduous trees such as cottonwood, willow, ash, elm, box elder, and hackberry. In certain areas along the bluffs—especially on slopes facing northeast, where suitable soil and ground water are available—groves of juniper (or cedar) add variety to the landscape.

The vast, treeless uplands above the immediate valley of the Missouri support such hardy native plants as buffalo grass and grama, which once provided pasturage for enormous herds of bison—the American "Buffalo"—a primary source of food and many other necessities of life for the Indian groups that occupied the region from early prehistoric times. Other larger animals of importance to the human occupants included elk, deer, and pronghorn antelope, with occasional bear, wolves and foxes. Smaller species such as deer, antelope and prairie dog are still to be seen. Along the timbered watercourses were numerous fur-bearers which were dependent upon the deciduous trees. With the coming of the fur traders, the barter for the pelts of these animals, and later for buffalo robes and hides, grew to major importance and strongly influenced the course of history of the Indians. Waterfowl and upland birds were also abundant, then as now, and the fly-ways of many native varieties of migratory fowl follow this part of the valley of the Missouri.

The climate of the region is one of great extremes, with hot summers and cold winters. Pierre, South Dakota, at the upper end of the reservoir, has recorded temperatures from 115° to -40°. Violent winds may spring up at any season of the year, frequently accompanied by torrential rain or heavy snow. At other times the winds raise dense dust storms. The average annual precipitation totals about 16 inches, although the actual figure varies widely from year to year; about four-fifths of the precipitation occurs in the form of summer showers.

The first human occupants of the region were chiefly dependent upon the native fauna, itself migratory, and then more abundant than at any time since. Native animals and birds provided food, clothing, materials for shelter and for many domestic and personal articles; the gathering of seeds, fruits and berries supplemented the diet.

Still larger groups made an appearance later and differed from their predecessors in practicing horticulture—the growing of foods, thus materially adding to the resources available to them. Particularly important among the new plant foods was Indian corn (or maize) because it could readily be grown by methods of primitive gardening and with proper drying could be preserved for long periods of time. Small garden plots were located on the sandy flood plains of the river, which afforded almost unfailing sub-surface moisture; essential for successful corn growing.

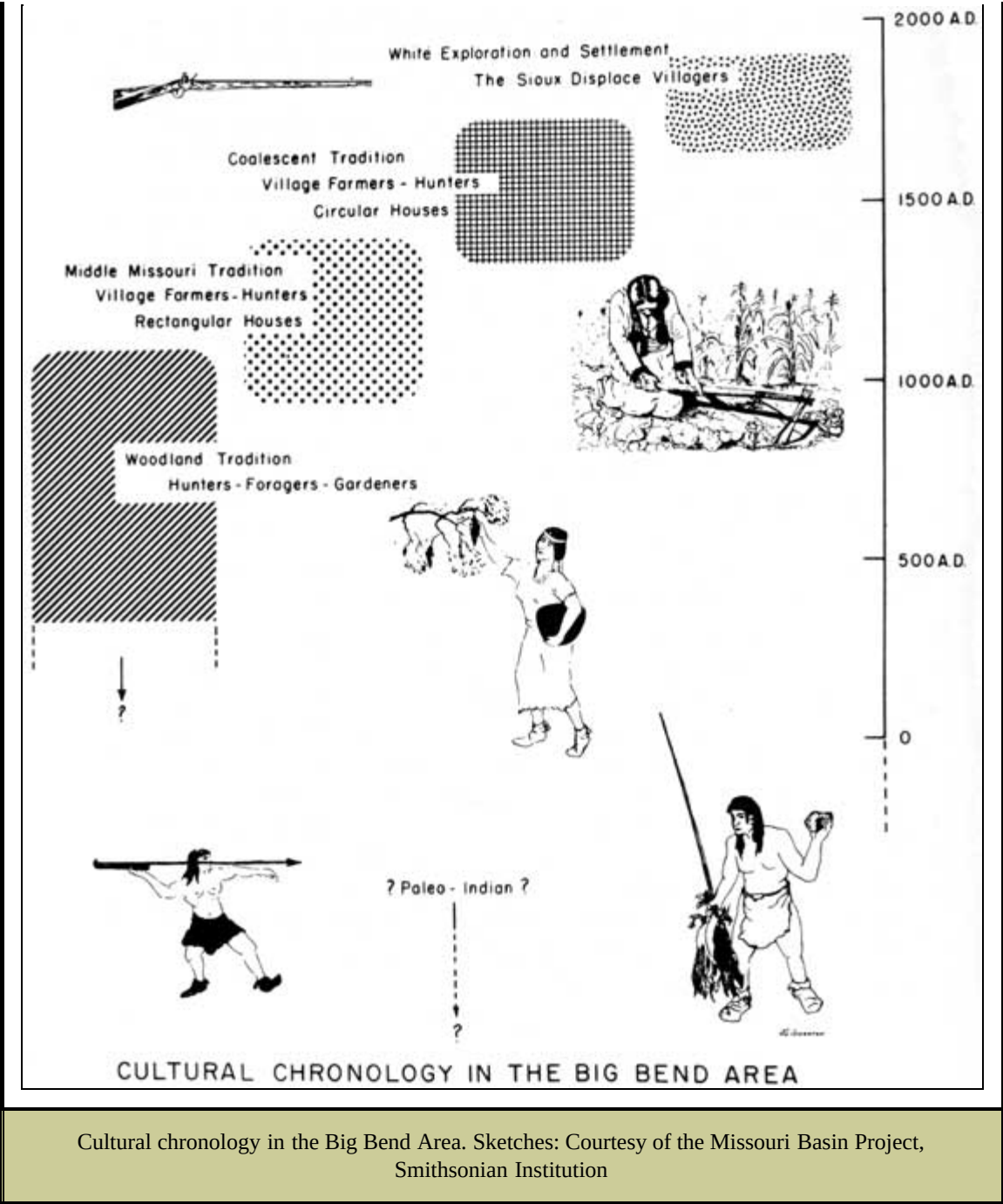
Through their skill in raising crops, which when dried and stored in pits or caches could be used long after the harvest, some of these communities of early horticulturalists developed a distinctive culture centered about relatively fixed villages. A reliance upon meat obtained by hunting, especially the bison, supplemented the diet of garden produce.

The remains of village sites of these semi-sedentary horticulturalists and hunters have been found in large numbers in the Big Bend area—more than 150 have been recorded. The

settlements were usually located on lower river terraces just above the Missouri itself, near potable if roily water, but safely above seasonal flood levels. Despite the passage of centuries, distinctive surface contours, readily recognizable as the work of man, are still to be seen at some of the village sites. These surface indications usually are in the form of clusters of shallow circular depressions, some as large as fifty feet in diameter; in certain instances, clusters of depressions are surrounded by a shallow ditch. The circular depressions are the sites of former earth lodges and the enclosing ditch the remains of a dry moat which was usually accompanied by a palisade of upright timbers. Elsewhere, dwelling sites are to be seen scattered along the edge of terraces and bluffs and lack traces of enclosing defensive ditches.

Other less settled native peoples, who moved freely about the region following the migrating buffalo and other game, probably clung close to the Missouri and its tributaries. For both the settled villagers and the more venturesome buffalo hunting tribes and bands, the introduction of the horse—through trade with other Indian groups to the south and west—and of the gun—through trade with Whites—were of major importance since they permitted still more extensive travel over the Plains as well as more efficient hunting. Still, for these First Americans of the Northern Plains, as for the Whites who followed them, the river was the chief geographic feature of the area and the focal point of their activities.

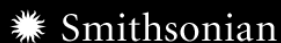




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PREHISTORY IN THE BIG BEND RESERVOIR

Men have lived in the Great Plains for more than ten thousand years. Those who came first, the Paleo-Indian, as archeologists call them, were hunters of the mammoth and the giant bison. They were not the mounted hunters so well known from motion pictures and television; instead, they pursued the great herding animals of the end of the last ice age on foot, driving them into traps or spearing those that had become mired in bogs or waterholes. Horsemen did not appear on the Plains until the 18th century. They too were bison hunters but with a way of life that was strikingly different from that of the earlier hunters.

Archeologists know little about the early hunters within the limits of the Big Bend country. Several early sites have been found but only a few have been excavated. Perhaps the best known is the Medicine Crow Site near Fort Thompson at the lower end of Lake Sharpe. Here, the remains of an earth-lodge village, probably dating from the 18th century, was found overlying a series of deeper, older occupations. The evidence is not entirely clear but small groups of hunters must have camped here as early as the end of the glacial period.

Agricultural peoples did not appear in the northern and central Plains until about the time of Christ. While they too were hunters, they are assumed to have cultivated small plots of corn and probably other crops as well. The term Plains Woodland has been applied to these newcomers because they appear to have had a culture reminiscent of the widespread Woodland Tradition that flourished in the eastern United States.

As was true with the early hunters, the Plains Woodland peoples were not numerous and their village or camp sites are scarce. Within the Big Bend area a few such sites are known, one of which now lies beneath the Big Bend Dam. Of the others, the La Roche Site in the central part of the reservoir, has been most enlightening. Like the Medicine Crow Site, the La Roche village contains several occupations or components. The earliest is representative of the Plains Woodland horizon and has provided good evidence of a distinctive house or lodge—something not previously discovered. The structure was oval in floor plan, with a row of large posts down the center (presumably to support a ridge pole) and numerous smaller posts around the margin. Probably the house was "loaf-shaped" and covered with bark, hides, and/or thatch.

The house was associated with typical Woodland artifacts, of which pottery is the most readily identified. In order to compact the clay, the surfaces of Woodland pottery vessels were beaten with a wooden paddle wrapped with cords of twisted sinew or fibre. The resulting surface, "cord-roughened" as it is termed, is characteristic of Woodland pottery and that of the following sedentary village period.

Other evidence of Woodland peoples is in the form of low dome-shaped mounds which were once common in the Fort Thompson area. A number have been excavated by the Smithsonian Institution and while there is variability, the pattern is essentially the same. Customarily, the mounds contain, the remains of primary and/or secondary burials with a scattering of artifacts. Similar sites extend well up the Missouri River into North Dakota; many others of a

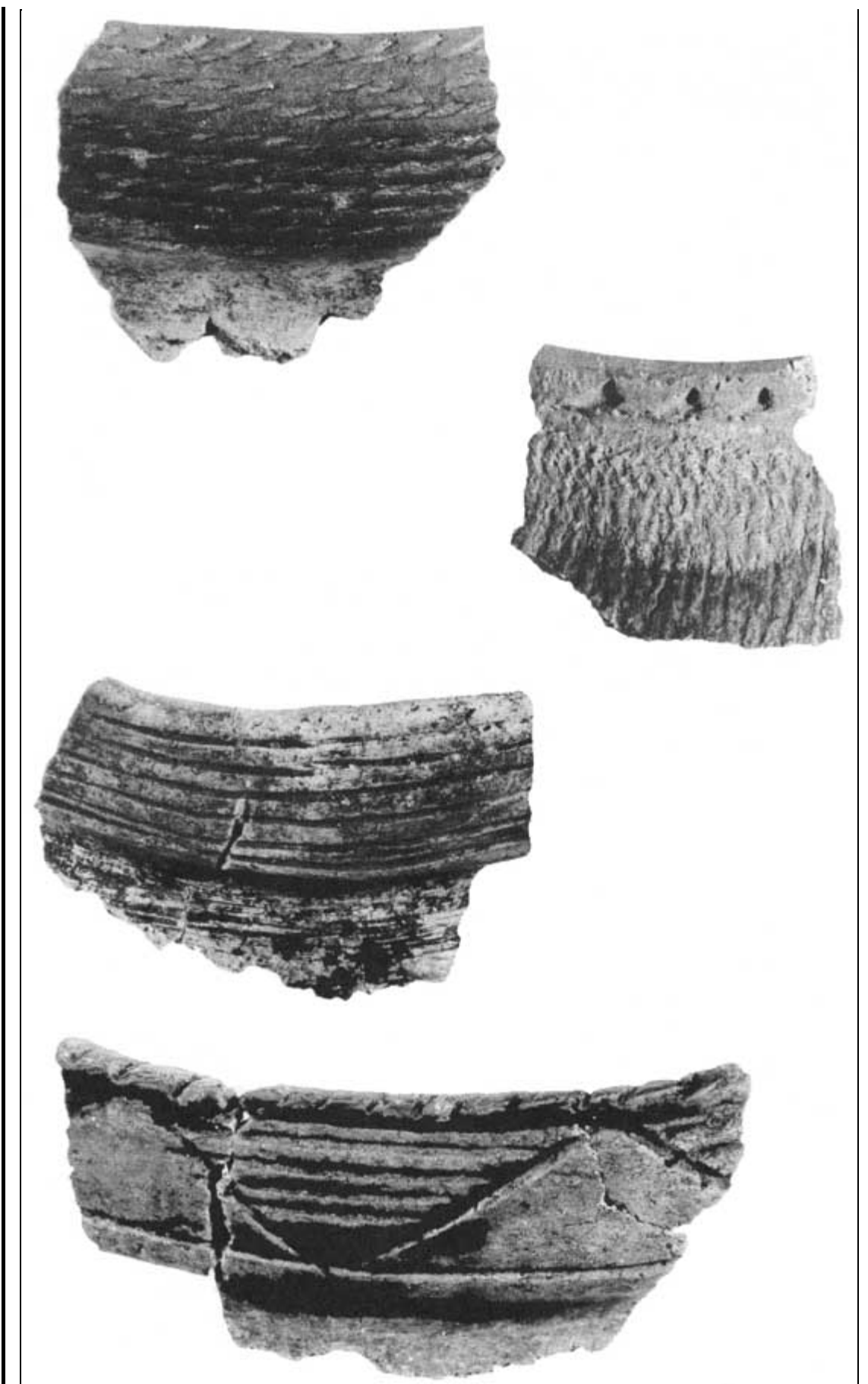
related pattern have been found in the once forested country to the east.

Sometime around A.D. 800 a new and much more complex way of life emerged in the Lake Sharpe area. True villages appeared for the first time and a larger population is apparent, allowed by an increased emphasis upon agriculture. Hunting continued as an important adjunct to the subsistence economy but the evidence, especially the relatively large size of the new towns, indicates a primary reliance upon farming.

The villages of the Middle Missouri Tradition, as archeologists have come to call the new development, were usually located on the bluffs overlooking the river. Typically the villages averaged between fifteen and twenty dwellings, with an estimated population of 200 to 300 people. A distinctive exception is the Sommers Site, opposite Chapelle Creek, where just over one hundred lodge depressions are visible. It is possible that more than 1,000 people lived here. There is a definite, planned arrangement of the lodges within many of the villages. They are aligned in rows parallel to the river and separated by narrow streets but, unlike our modern cities, the front of each house faced in a southerly direction.

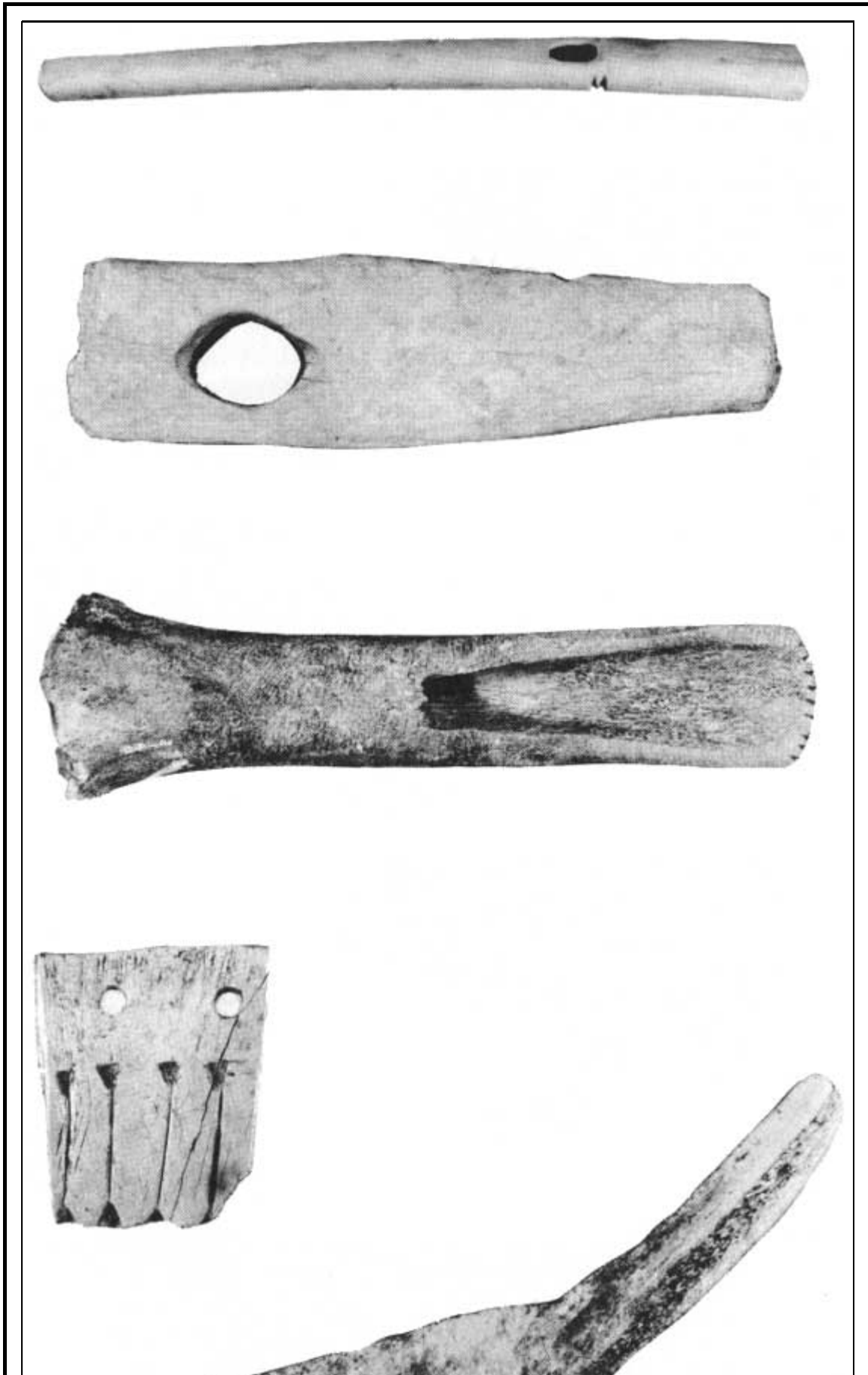
Fortifications were necessary at various times during the early village period. These defensive systems consisted of a deep, dry moat or ditch, sometimes with bastions, backed by a palisade of upright logs encircling three sides of the village. The eroded escarpment, adjacent to the river, provided sufficient natural protection so that villages were not always trenched on the side facing the river. Some village locations, such as that of the Thompson Site on the Big Bend, were apparently selected for their natural defensive characteristics. Villages built at these places occupied small, extremely steep-sided spurs or peninsulas that extended out from the main terrace edge; thus it was necessary to dig only a short trench across the base of the spur to insure adequate protection from attack.

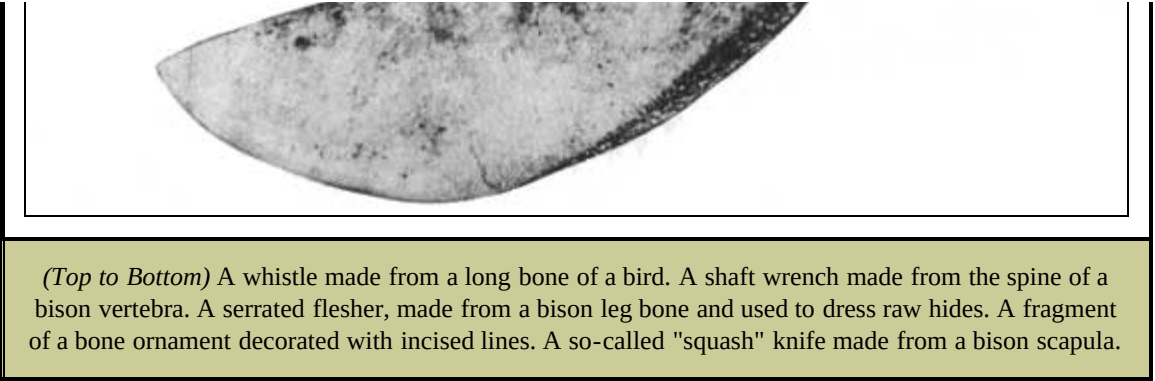


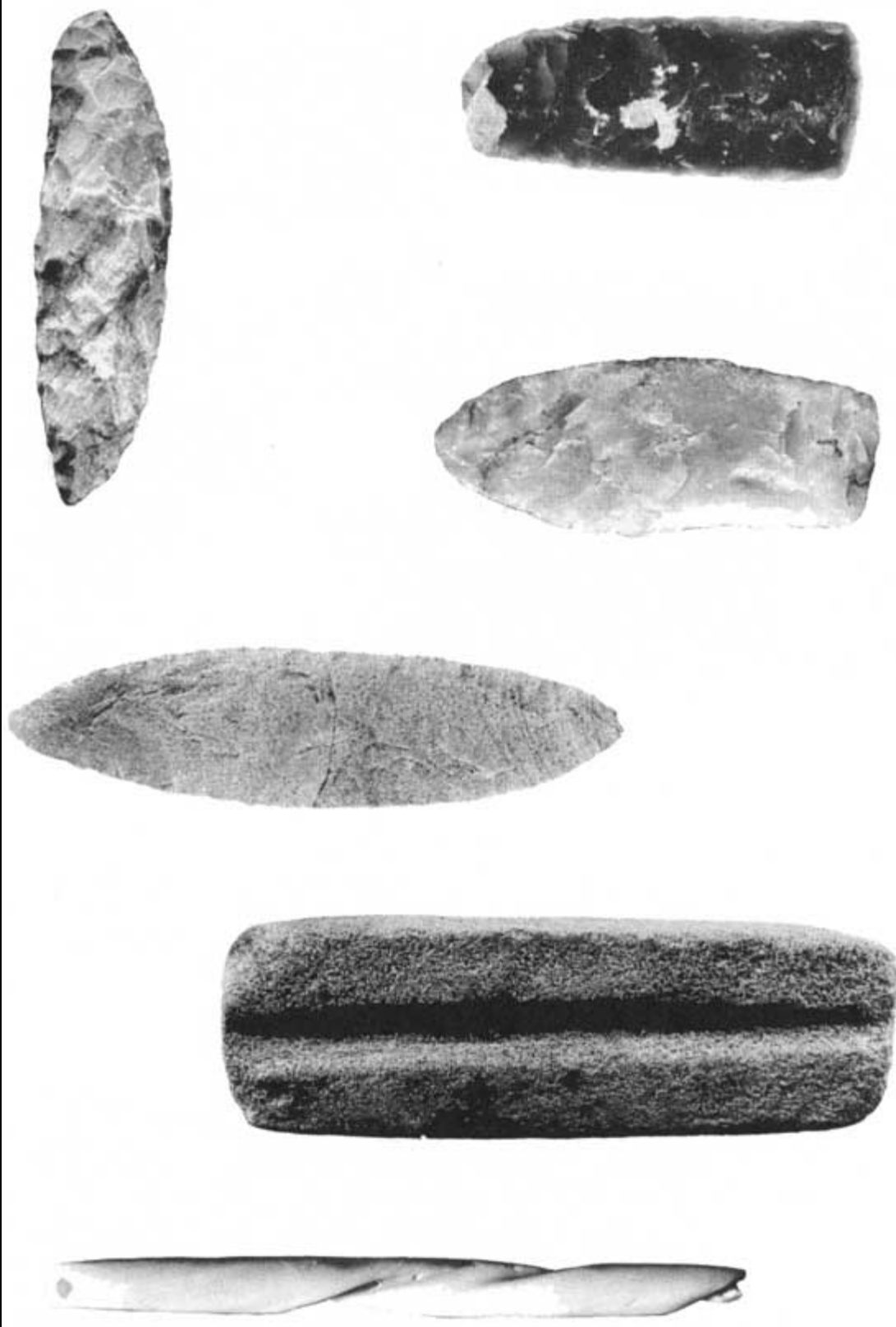


(Top to Bottom) A rim sherd decorated with horizontal rows of cord impression. A fragment of the rim and shoulder of a pottery vessel which has been marked with a cord wrapped paddle. A rim sherd with a

curved profile, common during the Middle Missouri Tradition. A rim fragment typical of the Middle Missouri Tradition.







(Top to Bottom) A chipped stone knife blade. *(top, left)*. Long, slender scraper typical of the Middle Missouri Tradition. *(top, right)* A chipped stone knife blade. A long knife blade made of quartzite. A shaft smoother or abrader made of coarse sandstone. A long pendant made from the central part of a conch shell.



Excavation underway in the Big Bend area of a long rectangular house typical of the Middle Missouri Tradition people. Side wall postholes may be seen at the rear of the excavation and various pit features are evident in the foreground. Photos: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project Smithsonian Institution.

The early villages in the area can be easily distinguished from the later occupations by their distinctive rectangular houses. The structures average 45 feet in length and 25 feet in width, although larger houses, measuring 65 by 45 feet, are occasionally found. The floor area was excavated as much as 3 feet below the ground surface. Closely spaced, vertical wall posts were set into the floor along the two long sides of the house. The rear or northern wall was "weak," supported only by the end wall posts and the massive, central king post which also supported one end of the ridge pole. The other (front) end of the ridge pole rested on a lintel fastened to the top of the two posts which formed the interior end of a narrow passageway which protruded several feet beyond the front or southern wall. The roof was probably gabled, constructed of light poles sloping from the ridge pole down to the tops of the wall posts.

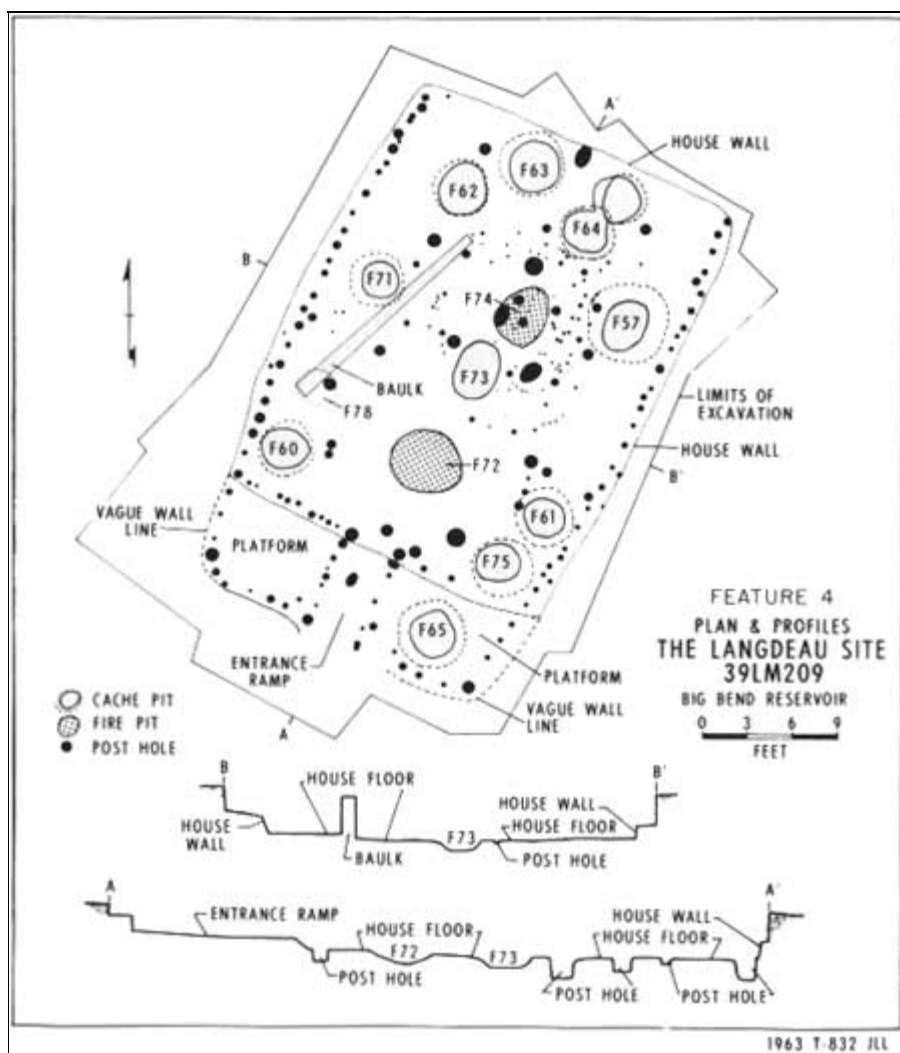
It is not known what materials were used to cover the house frame. Several burned houses have been excavated and the lack of significant amounts of burned earth suggests that these were not earth-covered lodges. Roof and siding materials were probably perishable materials such as bark, hides, grass or mats.

Although the general form of houses remained consistent throughout the early village period, variations have been found at several sites within the Lake Sharpe area. One distinctive house style has been discovered at three sites near the present community of Lower Brule. The side walls of these structures were found to extend beyond the excavated floor area for a distance equal to the length of the entrance passage (ca. 6 feet), forming a porch or bench across the front of the house. Another variation is seen in the construction of the rear wall. Although this wall is usually "weak," it was sometimes constructed with closely spaced posts in the same manner as the side walls.

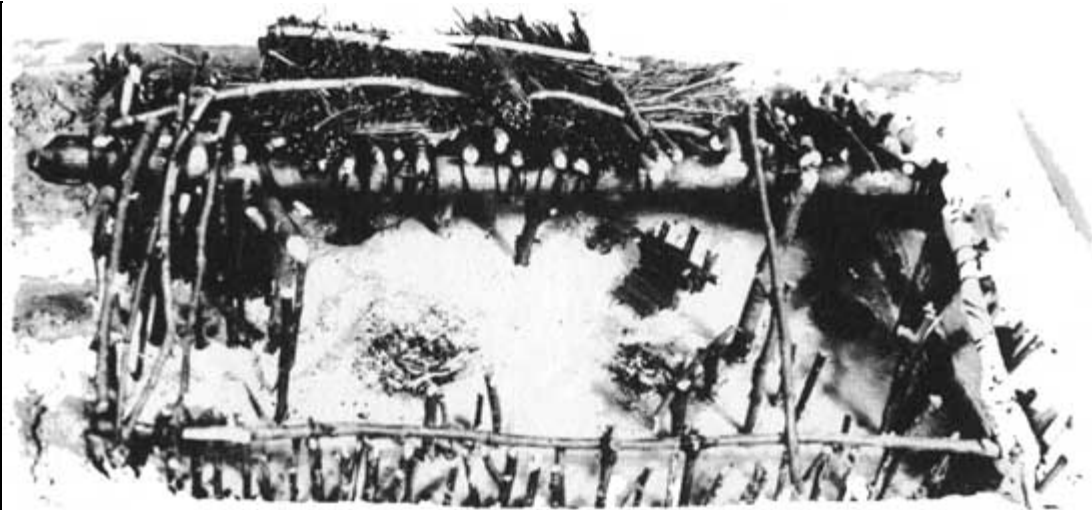
The interior features of all of the houses were quite similar. A large basin-shaped hearth was excavated in the floor about six feet inside of the entrance; smaller auxiliary hearths were sometimes dug near the rear wall. Large bell-shaped cache pits for the storage of grain and other belongings were dug into the floor near the side walls. The large numbers of broken artifacts and bone scraps found in them suggest that they were also used as convenient refuse pits, probably after having become infested with mice or otherwise spoiled for the storage of valuable items.

(omitted from the online edition)

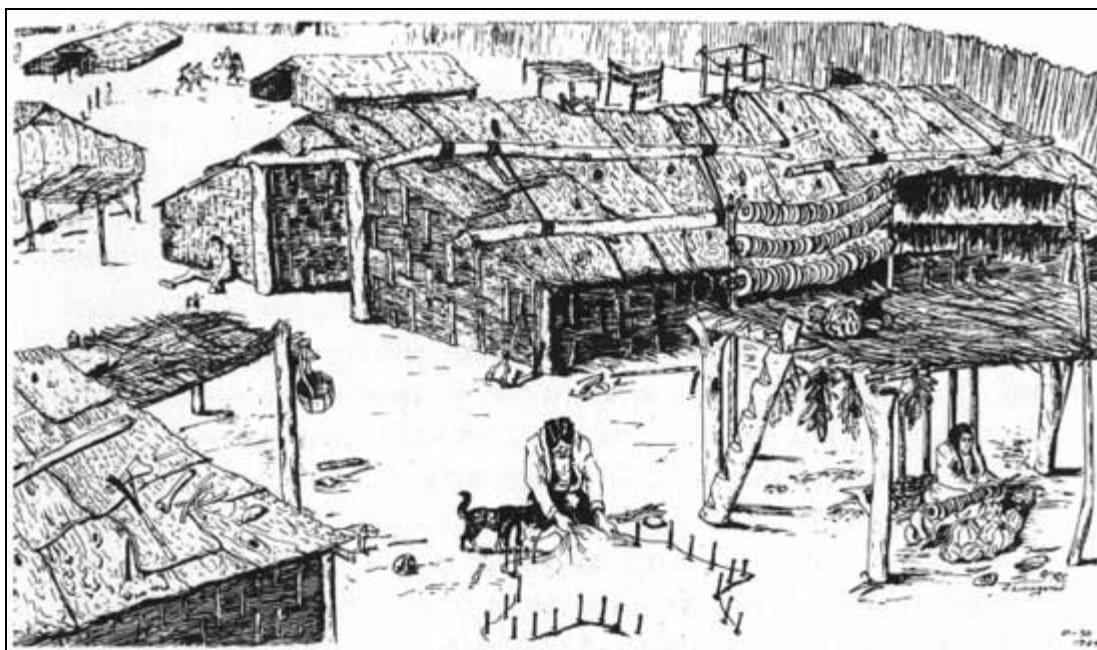
Burial of a dog found on the floor of a rectangular house at a site about midway between the dam and the Big Bend itself.



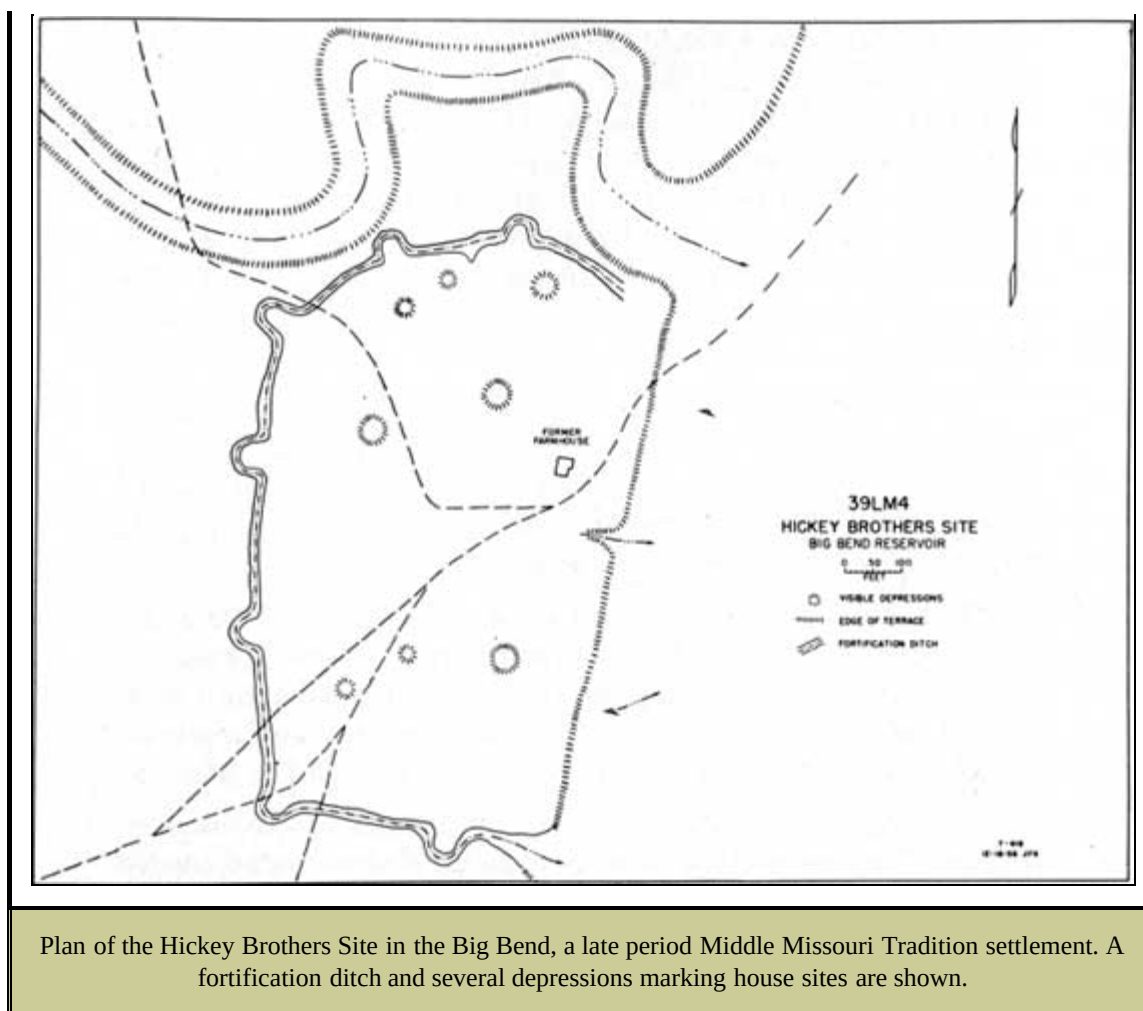
Floorplan map made by an archeologist of an excavated rectangular house in the neck of the Big Bend. This type of house was in use in the region before A.D. 1000 to about A.D. 1500. Sketches: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution



Cut-away model showing construction of the rectangular house using logs, poles and brush. Photo: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution



Artists reconstruction of a part of a Middle Missouri Tradition village with rectangular houses, a palisade, and, in the right foreground, a stand for drying and storing food.



The economy was based largely upon horticulture and hunting with lesser emphasis upon gathering and fishing. Corn, beans, and perhaps other crops were raised in small plots on the river flood plain. The gardens were tilled with bison scapula hoes lashed to wooden handles. The vegetable diet was supplemented by the gathering of wild food plants. Corn and other seeds were ground into flour on large grinding stones made from native granite cobbles. Bison were the most frequently hunted animals, but deer, other small game, and birds were also pursued. The bow and arrow was probably used in hunting to judge from the large number of small, triangular projectile points of chipped stone found during excavation. Skinning and cleaning of the carcasses was accomplished by the use of chipped stone blades hafted in a bison rib handle. Thumbnail scrapers, probably hafted in the end of a rib handle, were useful in cleaning hides and in a variety of other jobs requiring scraping. Sharp bone awls were used to perforate the edges of a hide prior to sewing them together. Fish, caught with a line and bone hook, were a relatively minor dietary supplement. River mussels were also eaten and the shells sometimes used as scrapers or shaped and perforated for pendants.

Wood-working tools have been found such as grooved sandstone slabs, suitable for smoothing a shaft, and ungrooved axes of pecked stone with a polished bit. Unfortunately, with the exception of an occasional badly decayed or charred house post, no artifacts of wood have been preserved.

Two items of "costume jewelry" found at some of the early village sites were undoubtedly trade goods. Copper, probably from the Great Lakes area, was hammered into sheets and bent into cylindrical beads. Another trade item is a pendant made of the ground columella of a conch shell from the Gulf of Mexico.

Cooking vessels were of a fired clay, tempered with crushed granite. They were globular with straight, slightly curved or S-shaped rims decorated with triangular or horizontal incised lines or cord impressions. The incised motifs were most popular during the early occupations, a style that was largely replaced by cord impressing in the latter part of the period. The vessels were formed by malleating the plastic clay with a cord wrapped paddle, just as among the Woodland peoples. It was not until almost all of the rectangular house people had left the Lake Sharpe area that the grooved paddle replaced the cord wrapped tool. Bowls and miniature vessels have been found at most of the sites but they are rare.

Comparisons of the excavated artifacts and architectural features, various statistical analyses, and radiocarbon dating has made it possible for archeologists to outline the movements of these peoples. It is thought that the Middle Missouri Tradition was well established throughout the entire reservoir area by the end of the 10th century. The ultimate origin of the culture is not known but other sites with close similarities have been found further downstream in northwestern Iowa and adjacent sections of South Dakota.

It is doubtful that the movement of the villagers into the Lake Sharpe region was opposed by earlier occupants. The dearth of sites earlier than the rectangular house villages suggests that this area was largely uninhabited or held only a scattering of Woodland peoples at most. The earlier, numerically inferior groups may have been absorbed into the new towns.

Once established, the rectangular house peoples controlled the area for 400 years or more. During this time, changes in their material culture were rare and consisted, for the most part, of shifting popularity of existing traits such as the gradual change in pottery design discussed above. Despite this apparent stability, there were times of strife. The lowest level at the Pretty Head Site, occupied about A.D. 1000 and the Anderson component at the Dodd Site, dated at A.D. 1150 $\pm$ 200, were fortified. If a foreign culture was invading the area, its presence certainly was not reflected to any degree, in changes of the culture of the rectangular house people. It seems more reasonable to view the fortified settlements as participants in a "civil war" in which one rectangular house village warred upon another.

By the 14th century, Central Plains peoples from Nebraska were filtering into the Lake Sharpe area and forcing the early villagers northward. This invasion marked the end of the Middle Missouri Tradition in the vicinity of Lake Sharpe. The fortified Thompson Site, dated at A.D. 1280 $\pm$ 120 is one of the last of the early period villages in this area. A few rather atypical early period villages remained after the end of the 13th century, but they lacked the efflorescence of the villages occupied prior to the Central Plains influx.

By the late years of the 15th century, the culture of indigenous peoples of the Big Bend area had been very much modified by influences from the Central Plains. The resulting Coalescent Tradition, and outgrowth of the Middle Missouri-Central Plains mixture, is well represented in the Big Bend area. In fact, the earliest such villages, those dating from the mid-15th century, are found here and nowhere else in the Dakotas. There are not many Initial Coalescent villages and they were heavily fortified. One gains the impression that they were frontier settlements, or perhaps more correctly, islands in a hostile no-man's land.

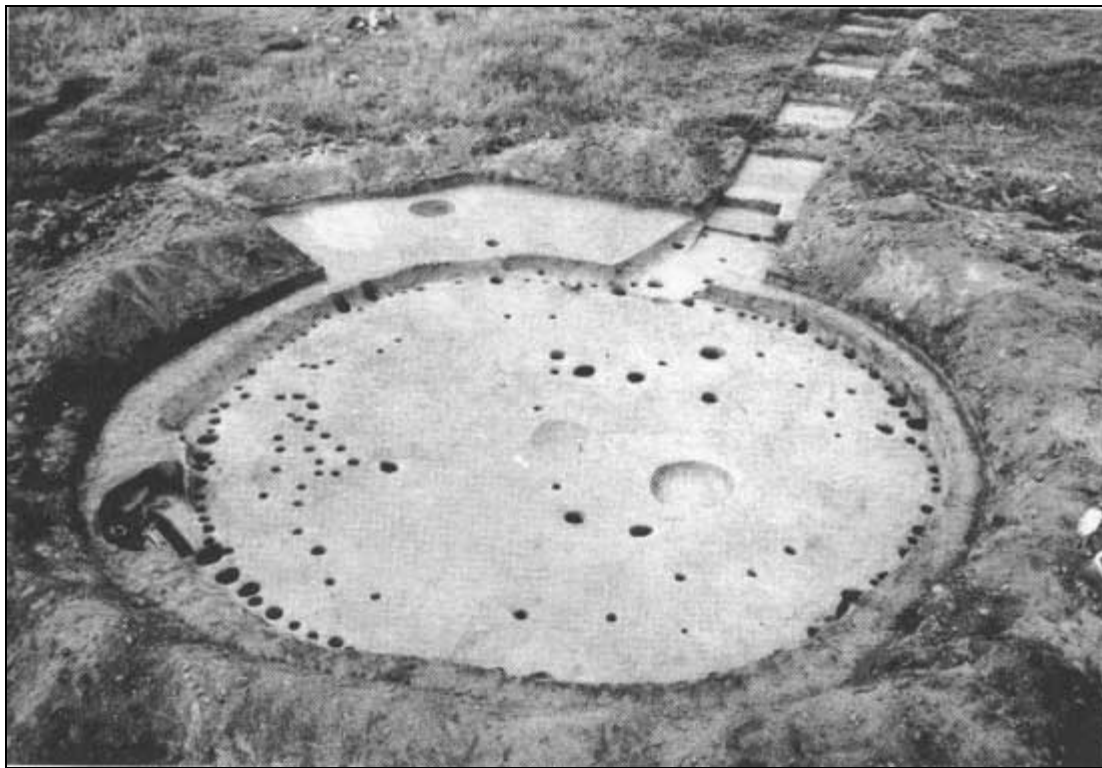
The Arzberger Site, near Pierre, the Black Partizan Site in the Lower Brule area, and the Crow Creek Site, a short distance below the Big Bend Dam, are the best examples. Each exhibits a curving fortification ditch with prominent bastions and it is probable that the defensive measures at all three sites included a high stockade.

By Coalescent Tradition times, the long-rectangular houses of the Middle Missouri Tradition had given way to rather indeterminate structures (tending toward a circular plan) that appear to have developed out of the typical square house of the Central Plains. These changes in

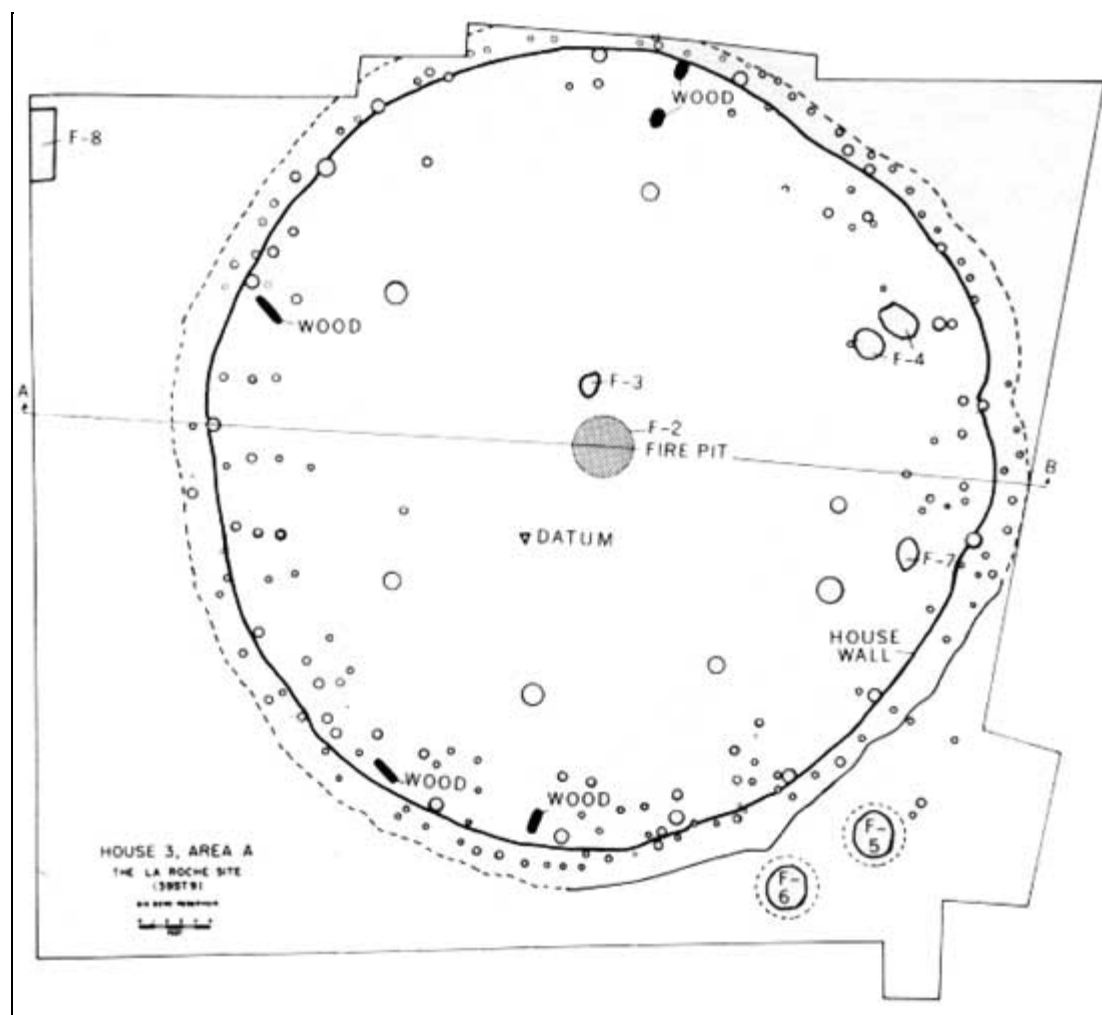
village plan and house style were accompanied by new emphases in pottery and other artifacts. Additions and alterations were to follow in subsequent years but the pattern known from historic sources was essentially set. While the circumstances cannot be documented, it is possible that the early Coalescent peoples were the ancestors of the modern Arikara or "Ree."

The Initial Coalescent period was of rather short duration. It was succeeded in the mid-16th century by the La Roche complex, one of the last prehistoric cultures to flourish in the Lake Sharpe area. It is so named because it was first reported from a site excavated at the little settlement of La Roche, South Dakota, now under the waters of the Big Bend reservoir.

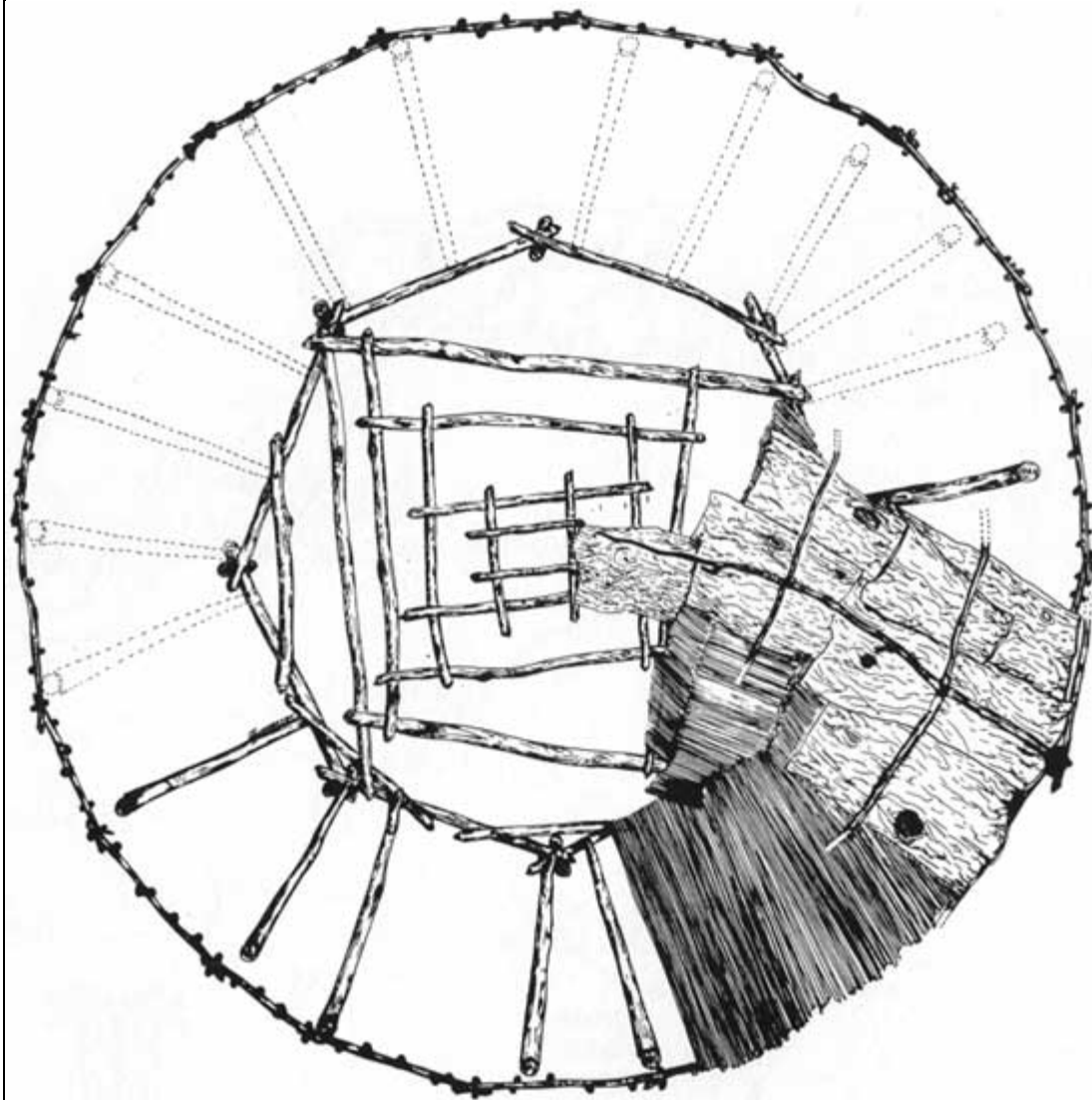
The people who built the La Roche villages were sedentary groups practicing both corn horticulture and big game hunting. Presumably, the exhaustion of the timber supply, fertile land or nearby game herds forced the people to move often, for their villages rarely show signs of lengthy occupation. The La Roche complex marked the florescence of a distinctive architectural and ceramic tradition on the Northern Plains. The prime architectural style was a circular or oval house that evolved into the historic, Plains earth lodge. Another aspect of the La Roche settlement pattern was the use of small, elaborate fortifications consisting of palisade, bastion and dry moat. However, not all of the La Roche villages were fortified and only a few had the full combination of dry moat, palisade, and bastion. Generally, the La Roche villages which were fortified are restricted to the Missouri trench area between the mouths of the Bad and Grand rivers in the Oahe Reservoir area. The La Roche villages of the Big Bend area are usually rambling, without apparent plan or defensive structures.



Completed excavation of a typical circular lodge characteristic of the Coalescent Tradition peoples.
Photo: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution



Archeologist's map of a large, circular house at the La Roche Site in the upper Big Bend area.
Reconstructed framework seen in photo #24 is based on this map.

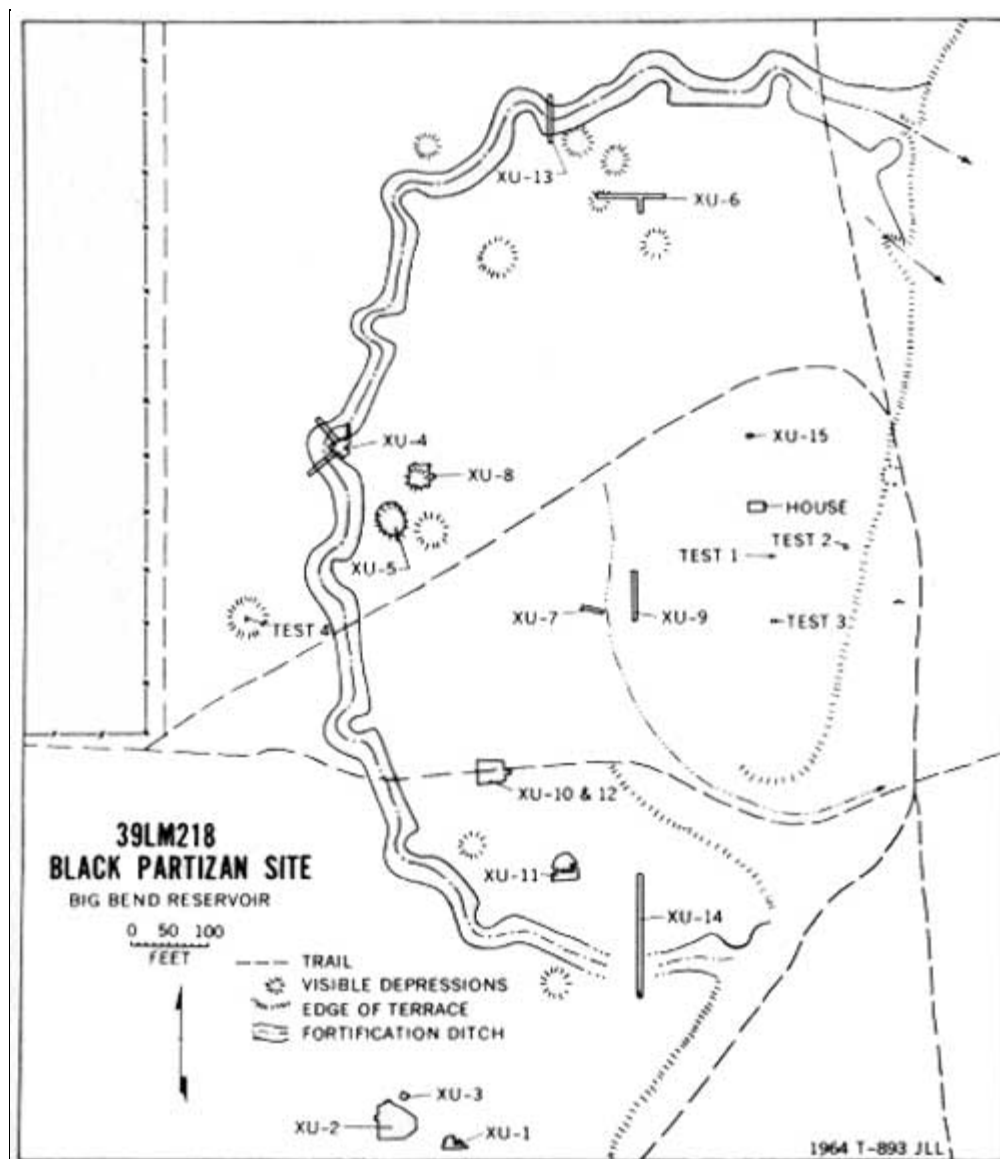


Reconstruction of framing and roof construction of a La Roche type house, based on archeologists findings shown in photo #23.

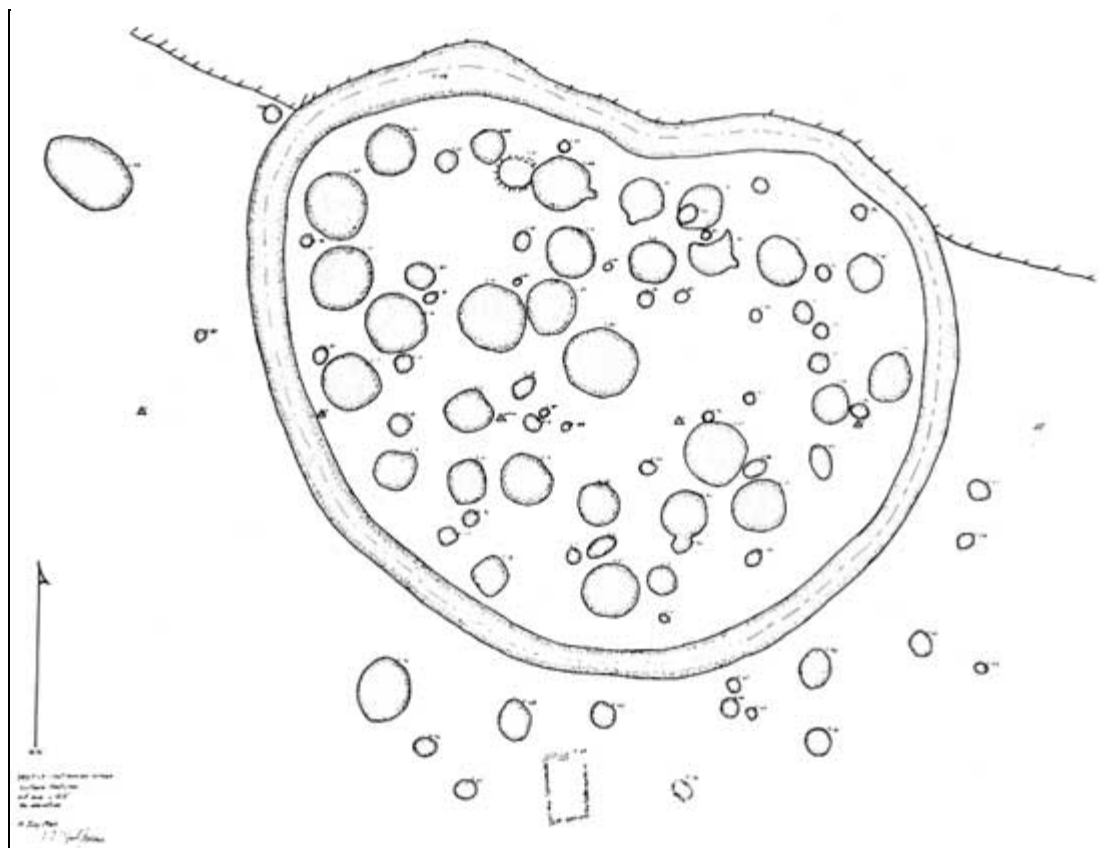
Like the historic Plains earth lodge, the La Roche house was built over a shallow pit or an area stripped of sod. Large posts were set into the floor and aligned vertically around the perimeter of the house. Four or more larger posts were erected nearer the center of the floor as the basic roof support. The space between the post tops was spanned with pole rafters and covered in turn with brush, grass and usually earth. The completed house resembled a large, earthen dome.

Not all of the La Roche houses were earth lodges. Some structures were so large and flimsy that they would not support an earthen mantle, and presumably were covered with only brush and bark. In fact, the many subtle variations of house styles in the earlier Initial Coalescent and in the subsequent La Roche complex have led some archeologists to believe that these structures were built during a period of architectural experimentation in the Missouri Valley.





Map of features at the Black Partizan Site in the Big Bend. This site was occupied during two periods, one early and one late in the Coalescent Tradition. Sketches: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution.



Ground plan showing circular houses and enclosing fortification ditch of a typical late Coalescent village.



An historic, Arikara earth lodge photographed in 1870 at Like-a-Fishhook Village in central North Dakota. This ceremonial lodge though larger than the ordinary house, is much like the circular lodges of the Coalescent Tradition uncovered by archeologists. (Photo courtesy of the State Historical Society of North Dakota).

Where entrances are found in the La Roche houses, they invariably face towards the Missouri River or the nearest stream course. The majority of the entrances were narrow, tunnel-like passages that projected outward from the house wall. An aberrant type has also been found that projects into the house.

Houses range from about 30 feet in diameter to about 75 feet in diameter, with 40 to 50 feet the most common dimension. The larger structures do not seem to differ functionally from the smaller ones; that is, they are not "ceremonial" houses but true, domiciliary structures to

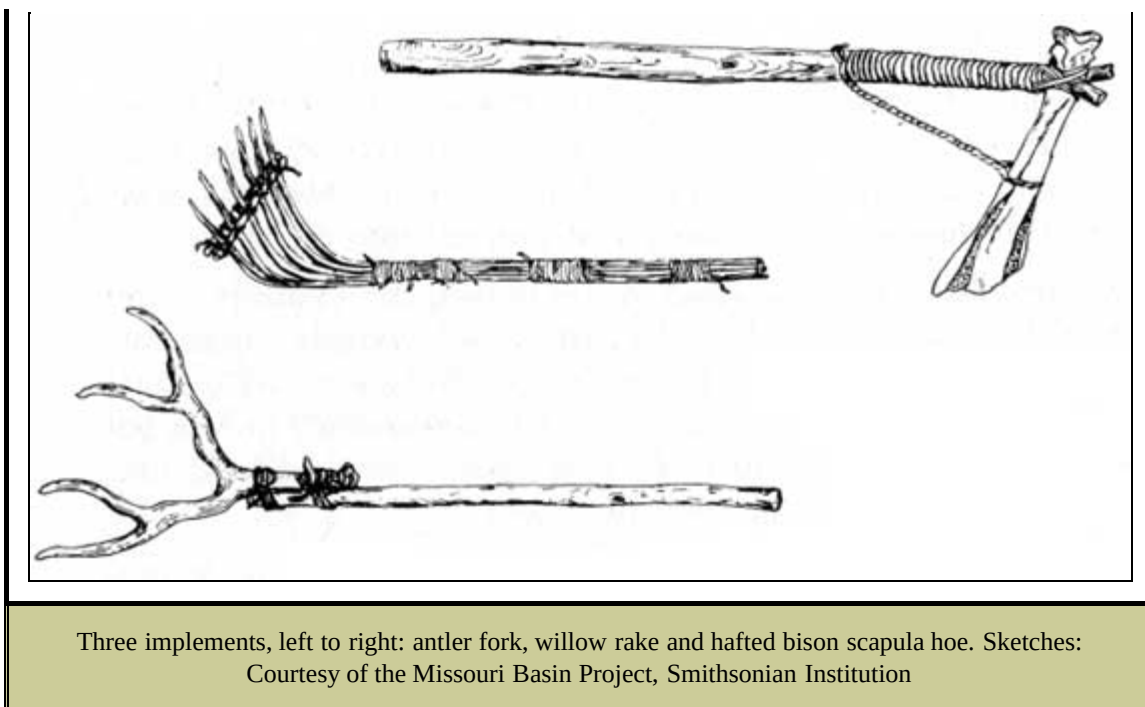
judge from the household rubbish scattered. in and around the houses.



Artist's conception of horticulturalists use of a bison scapula hoe mounted on a handle.

La Roche pottery is distinctive in its combination of decorative elements, construction, form and surface finish. The typical pot has very thin walls, is globular in shape, and has an elaborately decorated rim. The globular vessel bodies bear markings which indicate malleation with a paddle into which grooves had been carved. The construction and decoration of these vessels is remarkably consistent and show only minor differences from one area to the next. Decoration was done by incising or cutting the damp clay with a pointed bone or wooden tool prior to firing. The result was a repeated series of simple, geometric figures, usually bands of parallel lines or triangles filled with lines. Small circular impressions occasionally augmented the incised lines. The same designs were often used to ornament the upper bodies of the pots as well as the rims.





Three implements, left to right: antler fork, willow rake and hafted bison scapula hoe. Sketches:
Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution

Most of the La Roche vessels were for cooking and the carbonized remains of many a burnt dinner have been found sticking to broken sherds.

The La Roche people also made many tools of stone and bone. Local varieties of sedimentary and metamorphic rocks were carefully chipped into knives, scrapers, and arrow points for the killing and processing of game. Bison was the favored game although deer and antelope were also used. They furnished not only food but clothing, footwear, shelter, tool materials and numerous items of daily use. The shoulder bone or scapula of the bison was a useful item; hoes, knives, scrapers, cleavers and fish hooks were fashioned from it. The ribs and certain leg bones of the bison and deer were fashioned into awls and needles. Many of the bone tools were shaped by grinding with sandstone blocks or chunks of porous scoria or clinker. Mauls and grinding stones used for the preparation of meats and vegetables were made from large, water-worn cobbles.

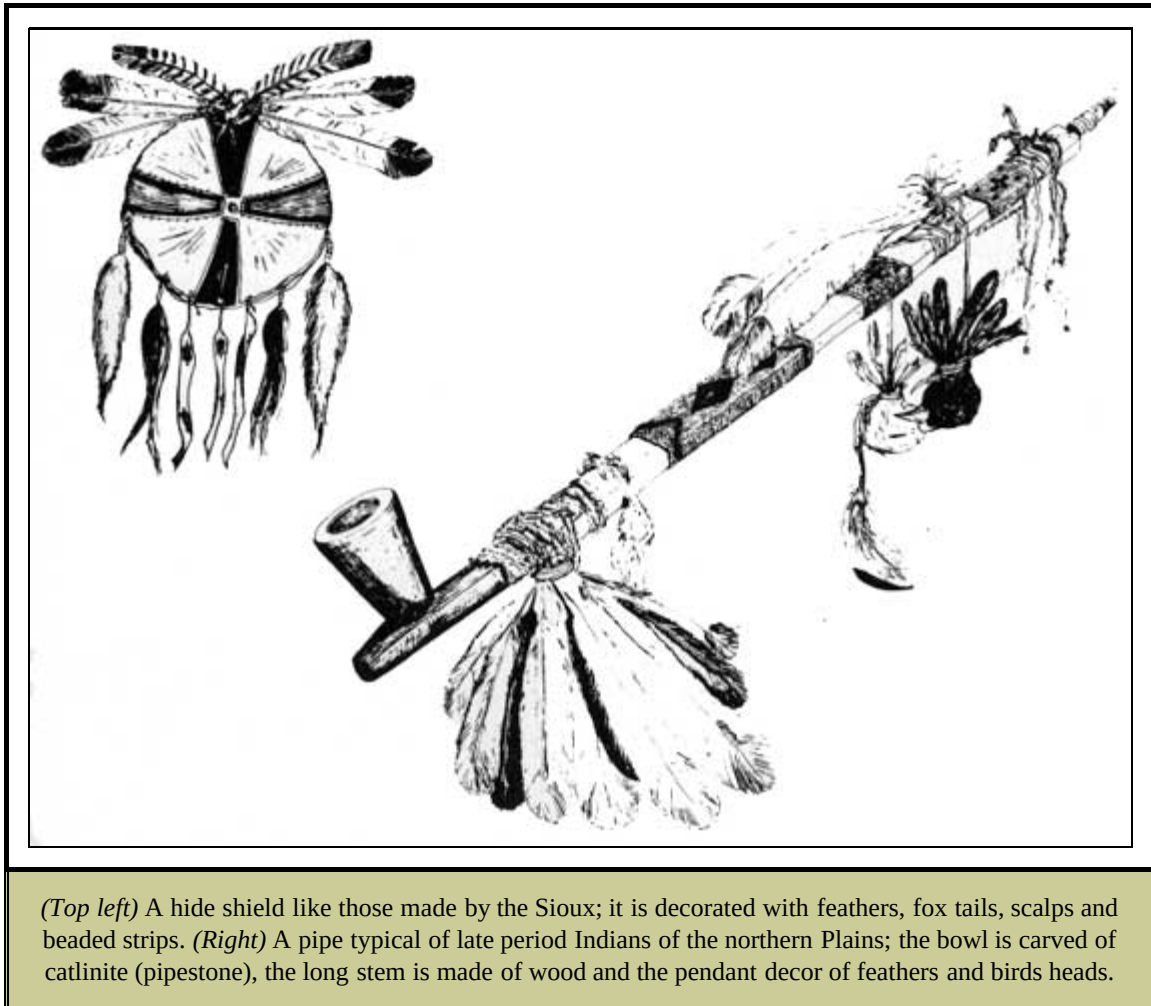
La Roche villages were usually built on terraces overlooking the Missouri River or the mouths of its larger tributaries. As noted before, some villages were fortified; others consisted of houses scattered along the terrace in a rather loose, open settlement. Almost invariably, the site of the village was adjacent to a section of bottom land suitable for horticulture. Gardening was done by hoe and soft, fertile ground was necessary.

Besides corn, the people probably raised beans, squash and pumpkins and gathered the local wild plums and berries. In addition to big game, fish and river mussels, the La Roche people were quite fond of dog meat and the remains of many a "puppy stew" have been found in the villages. In fact, the diet of these people was almost the same as that of historic village tribes of the area, notably the Arikara.

By late prehistoric and early historic times, the La Roche ceramic tradition had given way to what archeologists call Stanley Ware, a distinctive, heavier pottery. Occupations at the Chapelle Creek and Fort George Village sites in the upper reaches of Lake Sharpe are characterized by this type of pottery. Both of these settlements were small, fortified by a simple encircling ditch and palisade, and contained circular earth lodges like those reported by early explorers and travelers. Both villages produced trade materials; and on this basis Fort George village is judged to be the most recent although it was surely abandoned before A.D. 1750. It may well have been the last substantial, and presumably Arikara, village

occupied within the Big Bend country.

After about 1750, the area was left to wandering bands of Siouan (Dakota) hunters, the ancestors of the modern Dakota who still live in the region on reservations set aside for them by the Federal Government.

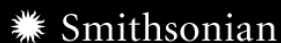


(Top left) A hide shield like those made by the Sioux; it is decorated with feathers, fox tails, scalps and beaded strips. (Right) A pipe typical of late period Indians of the northern Plains; the bowl is carved of catlinite (pipestone), the long stem is made of wood and the pendant decor of feathers and birds heads.

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Lake Sharpe—Big Bend Dam

Archeology, History, Geology

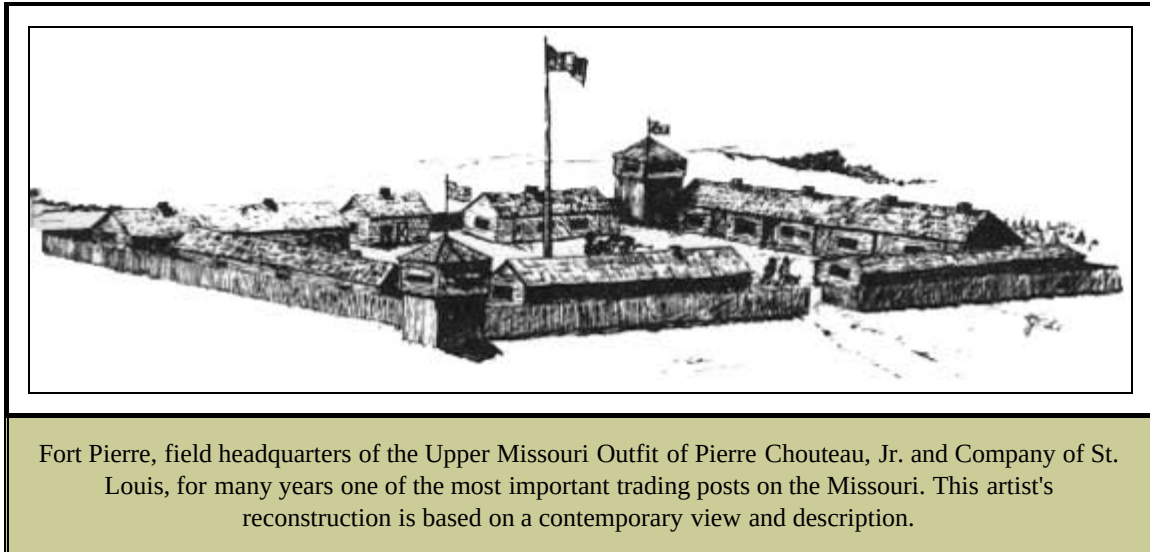


INDIANS OF HISTORIC TIMES, WHITE EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT

During the closing decades of the 18th century, the historical record of the Missouri River trench in the vicinity of Lake Sharpe indicates that it was the territory of two markedly different Indian groups. The Arikara (and the Mandan and Hidatsa to the north) were old residents, or so the long archeological record implies. These people lived a sedentary life in fortified towns and, despite frequent hunting forays into the open plains, their livelihood depended largely upon riverside fields of corn, squash and beans. The various groups of Dakota Sioux, on the other hand, were nomadic bison hunters who only recently had arrived in the area from their former homeland in the Minnesota woodlands to the east. The Dakota were predatory and more or less constantly in conflict with the sedentary villagers, notably the Arikara. It was not a question of political domination or territorial gain but of raiding for food or simply for scalps and glory.

All evidence points to a northward exodus of the village farmers out of the Big Bend area, leaving it to the Sioux (particularly the Yankton, Yanktonai and Teton groups), during the latter half of the 18th century, at about the same time the first Europeans reached the area. The earliest historical record is that of the La Verendrye brothers who led a party of explorers southward in 1742 from Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River in what is now Manitoba. In the spring of the following year they met what are thought to be Arikara in the vicinity of the present city of Fort Pierre, South Dakota, and there, on March 30, 1743, buried an inscribed lead plate on a high point overlooking the mouth of the Bad (Teton) River. The plate was found there in 1913 and is today on exhibit at the South Dakota State Historical Society Museum in Pierre. By the end of the 18th century all of the village-farmers had moved or been driven upriver; in 1795 they were reported living in two villages on the Missouri just below the Cheyenne River some 30 to 40 miles above the Lake Sharpe region. The French fur trader Jean-Baptiste Truteau, on an expedition up the river, reported Sioux wandering on both sides of the Missouri at this time. In fact, while proceeding up the river in 1794, Truteau was waylaid near modern Fort Thompson by a party of Teton Sioux who relieved him of his goods, an experience many another trader would suffer in the ensuing years. Regis Loisel was another early trader who in 1802: in partnership with Jacques Clamorgan, the same merchant who had backed Truteau, built a fortified post (a "cedar fort") on an island in the river slightly more than 50 miles upstream from the Big Bend Dam in the La Roche vicinity. Loisel was accompanied by Pierre-Antoine Tabeau whose account of trading in the Dakotas stands as one of the best surviving records of the geography, wildlife and peoples of the region as they were in the opening years of the 19th century. But no single document has more historical importance than the detailed journal of the Lewis and Clark Expedition that records the journey up the river through the Big Bend area in 1804 and the passage downstream on the return trip in 1806. The story of the "Corps of Discovery" is one of the great epics of the American frontier, a part of which is related in the following section. By the time of Lewis and Clark, the Arikara had moved far to the north, settling in three villages a short distance above modern Mobridge, South Dakota; the Dakota Sioux held sway in the Big Bend.

During the first half of the 19th century the history of the Big Bend country, like that of the whole Missouri River and its tributaries, is very largely the history of the fur trade. It was a time when the trader, trapper, entrepreneur and mountain man opened the region for the later settler, cattleman and farmer. The trading economy was based upon the demand for furs and skins in the eastern United States and Europe. Beaver pelts were especially valued for the making of elegant hats but ermine, muskrat, deer, otter, fox and mink were also much in demand. The market for beaver peltries remained strong until the end of the 1830's when the increasing scarcity of these animals and changes of fashion led to a marked slackening of demand and consequent drop of the price of pelts. But the fur business continued into the 1860's, supplying in later years the demand for buffalo robes, hides and the furs of smaller animals. By the 1870's the vast herds of buffalo were much reduced; the next decade saw the virtual extinction of these once countless animals.



The first large scale fur expedition to ascend the river was promoted and organized by an aggressive St. Louis trader, Manuel Lisa. In 1807 he led a group of fifty to sixty men, in two keelboats with some \$16,000 worth of trade goods, into present south-central Montana where, at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Big Horn rivers, he established a post called Fort Raymond. From this station, his hunters, trappers, and traders ranged widely over the country-side. In later years there was considerable competition among a number of companies for the upper Missouri fur trade and John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company emerged as the strongest on the river. Fort Pierre, near the city of that name at the upper end of the Big Bend reservoir area, was established in 1831 by the American Fur Company with the support of the powerful Chouteaus of St. Louis. This post, known as the Upper Missouri Outfit, became a center of operations, a supply point and storage depot for the company's activities on all the upper Missouri.

Typically, such isolated posts were protected with a stockade built of upright logs inside of which were log buildings or cabins to house the men, store the goods and other supplies as well as workrooms for blacksmiths, etc. Each trading-trapping outfit was in the charge of an agent or "bourgeois," such as Manuel Lisa, who directed the activities of all the men and was responsible to: and sometimes a partner with, the financial backers—the company. Under the bourgeois were the clerks who carried out various duties in the supervision of day to day operations. The main establishments, such as Fort Pierre, were self-sufficient and served as the headquarters for individual traders and trappers or small parties assigned to outlying posts. In 1833 the company at Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River, one of the larger, more important posts, had 12 clerks and 129 men on the payroll. They included tailors, tanners, coopers, blacksmiths, teamsters, boatmen, gunsmiths, hunters, and trappers. A

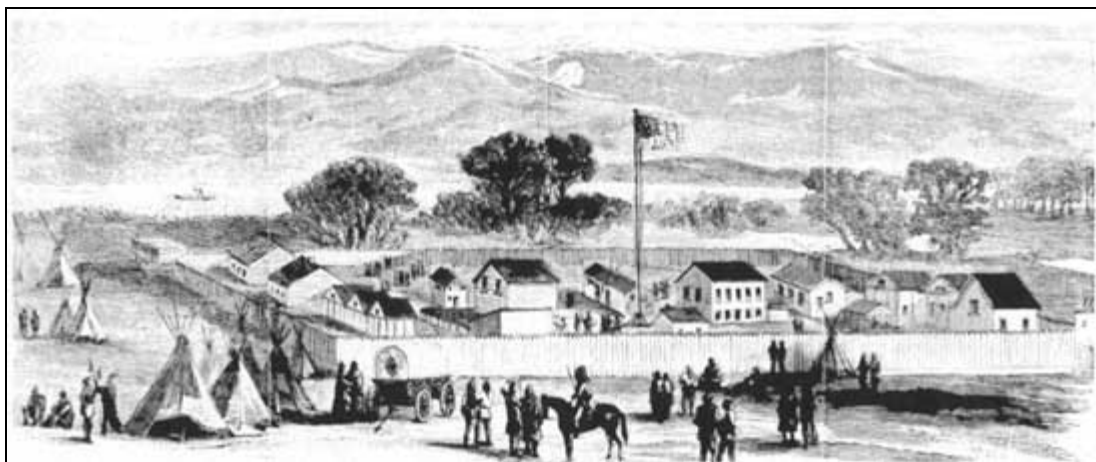
few posts had cattle, hogs or even chickens and some maintained gardens; the name of Farm Island in upper Lake Sharpe derives from its use between 1831 and 1855 by the fur company at Fort Pierre. The company employees, called *engages*, were usually hired for a term of two or three years for a flat sum varying between one and five hundred dollars a year—room and board, such as it was, and equipment were furnished. The business of accumulating furs was in the hands of the trappers who ranged hundreds of miles from the post and the traders who dealt with the Indians at the post or elsewhere. A considerable variety of goods were kept on hand for trade and some items were stockpiled in large quantities at the main posts—tons of powder, lead and tobacco for instance. Other standard items included muskets and balls, gun flints, gun worms, powder horns, awls, axes, knives, files, shears, brass tacks, bar iron, kettles, tin cups, dippers, crockery, bowls, mugs, beads, ribbon, hawk bells, coat buttons, mirrors, combs, clay pipes, vermilion, blankets of various sizes and kinds, linens, calico, ticking, shirts, caps, sugar, coffee, tea and, almost always; illicit liquor. The price of these and other goods was not set in dollars but reckoned in terms of pelts, buffalo robes or the equivalent in some other item. Thus a horse might be valued at 30 robes or four cups of sugar worth one robe, etc.

Without question, the fur trading era was a boisterous one, enacted by men who lived a rugged, colorful, and often dangerous life. It lasted until the middle of the 19th century when the diminished market for furs and the much reduced buffalo herds led to a decline of the once flourishing trade. Both the Civil War and trouble with the Sioux adversely affected the Indian trade and during the late 1860's and 1870's much of the business fell to army sutlers (civilian suppliers under contract to the army) or to licensed traders at Indian agencies. And by the early 1880's the effective annihilation of the remaining bison herds signalled an end to the fur trade as an important industry on the upper Missouri.

The earliest major trading post in the Lake Sharpe region was Fort Pierre (also known as Fort Pierre I or Fort Pierre Chouteau) which was established by the American Fur Company in 1831 at a point just upriver from the present town of the same name. Here the so-called Upper Missouri Outfit prospered throughout the active fur-trading period; when the trade began to decline the post was sold, in 1855, to the Federal Government for use as a military fort. By that time the Sioux had become such a problem that troops were moved into the area under the command of the veteran Indian fighter, General William S. Harney. As part of his aggressive campaigning, he posted a garrison at Fort Pierre, but it proved unsatisfactory and only two years later the troops and movable stores were taken downstream by steamboat to Fort Randall. The period of steamboating on the Missouri corresponded approximately to that of the flourishing fur trade, each supporting the other. As well, the steamboat played a vital role in other development of the river; the American Fur Company steamer *Yellowstone* was the first to ascend as far as Fort Pierre, in 1831, the same year the post was established. The steamboat era reached its peak in the 1860's and 1870's when many thousands of tons of freight were moved but it did not survive the 1880's when rail transportation replaced river traffic. As a consequence of the demise of the steamer, a number of small but thriving villages along the river, which were dependent upon the steamboat trade, became ghost towns. The prominent St. Louis businessman Pierre Chouteau, Jr., came up the river by steamer in 1832 to examine the newly-built Fort Pierre, his name sake. That same year the famous American Indian artist Catlin arrived on the upper Missouri by steamer where he confronted many of the subjects recorded in his portraits. In 1833 the artist Bodmer in the company of Prince Maximilian came up the river on the American Fur Company steamer *Assiniboine* and in 1843 the steamer carrying the naturalist Audubon stopped at a number of well-known establishments on the upper Missouri.

The upper Big Bend region was also the site of Fort George, a fur trading post of typical stockaded form erected in 1842 by Bolton, Fox, Livingston and Company to compete with the Chouteau outfit at Fort Pierre. The enterprise survived for only three years, after which

the post was acquired by the Chouteau interests, the fate of most who attempted to compete with the Upper Missouri Outfit. Apparently Fort George was occupied by Indians for some years after it was abandoned by traders and to this day the surrounding neighborhood is known as Fort George.



A view of Fort Thompson as sketched by John Nairn, published in HARPER'S WEEKLY, October 28, 1865. The original site was immediately downstream from the Big Bend Dam.

During the 1840's and 1850's a trading post was evidently in operation at the mouth of Medicine Creek, just above the Big Bend of the Missouri. However, the historical record is confused; the post was established either by rivals in *defiance* of Chouteau's Upper Missouri Outfit or by a trader named *Bouis* on behalf of Chouteau's company. The elusive post is therefore referred to as Fort Defiance or Fort Bouis. In either case, it may have been built in opposition to Fort George some 20 or more miles upstream.

Old Fort Thompson, just below the Big Bend Dam, was a stockaded establishment set up by the Federal Government in 1863 for the incarceration of the Santee (Eastern) Sioux and Winnebago Indians as an aftermath of the Sioux Outbreak in Minnesota the year before. Here these peoples were reduced to a wretched condition, which the Winnebago no doubt found especially demoralizing as they had no part in the Minnesota uprising. Within a few years, however, most of the Santee and Winnebago had left for or were removed to reservations elsewhere and Fort Thompson became the headquarters for the Lower Yanktonai Sioux established on the neighboring Crow Creek Reservation. Present-day Fort Thompson is in a new location on the uplands adjacent to the Big Bend Dam.



Photograph of Fort Thompson (Crow Creek Indian Agency) about 1870. Note the tipis in the right foreground. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service from an original in the National Archives).

In response to hostile Sioux activities, General Alfred Sully was ordered to central South Dakota in 1863; this was the first of several years of campaigning through the region for the purpose of chastising the Sioux. Just east of present-day Pierre, on the mainland opposite Farm Island, he established a post named Fort Sully which was in use for three years until the garrison was moved some twenty-five miles upstream into the Oahe area. During its brief existence, the post served as a base for military operations, winter quarters and as a supply depot. Important councils with the Sioux took place at Fort Sully in 1865 and 1866 shortly before it was dismantled. The site of Fort Sully is marked today by a stone monument which may be seen south of Highway 34 as one approaches Pierre from the east.

The Red Cloud Agency at the mouth of Medicine Creek was a temporary establishment for the administration of the Oglala Sioux band led by Red Cloud. This group had been removed from northwest Nebraska in 1877 and was located on the Pine Ridge reservation in southwestern South Dakota the next year. During the intervening winter the Indians camped on the White River southwest of the agency at Medicine Creek.

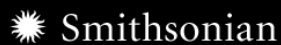
The present towns of Pierre and Fort Pierre came into being at a fairly late date. It is said that one Joseph LaFramboise settled at the site of the city of Fort Pierre in 1817 but the town as we know it was not established until the 1870's. It is located at the mouth of the Bad River, known earlier as the Little Missouri or the Teton River, the scene of many important events in the history of the upper Missouri. In earlier years the settlement served as an outfitting and transshipping point for freighters destined for the Black Hills and other points west.

The town of Pierre came into being in 1880 as a railhead and frontier trade center. In its early years it could be characterized as a boom town and was a mecca for "ranchers, settlers, prospectors, gamblers, bull-whackers and outlaws." It was a thriving settlement when incorporated in 1883 and became the state capital six years later when South Dakota was admitted to the union.

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Lake Sharpe—Big Bend Dam

Archeology, History, Geology



THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

The story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition—the tedious trip up the Missouri to its sources, the hazardous passage across the Rockies and the long descent of the Columbia River to the Pacific—has become an important part of our American heritage. After many months of preparation, the "Corps of Discovery" left Wood River, near St. Louis, on May 4, 1804. By early autumn, they had reached present-day South Dakota and were pushing upstream to winter among the Mandan villages, a short distance north of modern Bismarck, North Dakota. The journey had been eventful, horses had been lost and there were contacts with the Sioux but all had been well-managed and the expedition proceeded smoothly.

On September 19, 1804, the travelers entered the area that 150 years later was to become the Big Bend Reservoir. After passing "Les trois rivières des Sioux," Campbell Creek, Crow Creek and Wolf Creek on modern maps, and threading through a channel blocked by many sand bars and islands, the expedition camped for the night at the foot of the Grand Detour, the great horseshoe loop that forms the downstream limit of the Big Bend of the Missouri.

The following morning the expedition journal reports that, "... we despatched two men with our only horse across the neck, to hunt there and await our arrival at the first creek beyond it. We then set out with fair weather and the wind from S. E. to make the circuit of the bend," camping for the night after a journey of twenty-seven miles.

Here they were joined by "Captain Clark, who early this morning had crossed the neck of the bend ... at the narrowest part the gorge (the neck) is composed of high and irregular hills of about 180 or 190 feet in elevation; from this descends an unbroken plain over the whole of the bend ... Great numbers of buffaloe, elk, and goats (antelope) are wandering over these plains, accompanied by grouse and larks. Captain Clark saw a hare also, on the Great Bend. Of the goats killed to-day, one is a female differing from the male in being smaller in size; its horns too are smaller and straighter, having one sharp prong, and there is no black about the neck. None of these goats have any beard, but are delicately formed, and very beautiful."

During the night, "Between one and two o'clock the sergeant on guard alarmed us, by crying that the sandbar on which we lay was sinking. We jumped up, and found that both above and below our camp the sand was undermined and falling in very fast. We had scarcely got into the boats and pushed off, when the bank under which they had been lying fell in, and would certainly have sunk the two periogues (canoes) if they had remained there. By the time we reached the opposite shore the ground of our encampment sunk also. We formed a second camp for the rest of the night, and at daylight proceeded on to the gorge or throat of the Great Bend, where we breakfasted. A man, whom we had despatched to step off the distance across the bend, made it 2000 yards; the circuit is 30 miles. During the whole course, the land of the bend (north of the Missouri) is low, with occasional bluffs; that on the opposite side, high prairie ground and long ridges of dark bluffs."

The following morning, September 22, the expedition was detained by thick fog. After a late start, they continued upstream, passing Cedar Island "... deriving its name from the quantity

of the timber. On the south side of this island is a fort and a large trading-house built by a Mr. Loisel who wintered here during the last year in order to trade with the Sioux, the remains of whose camps are in great numbers about this place. The establishment is 60 or 70 feet square, built with red cedar and picketed in with the same materials."

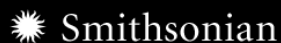
On Sunday, September 23, the travelers moved on upstream around timbered islands and sand bars as they passed into the upper reaches of the Big Bend. "The country, generally consists of low, rich, timbered ground on the north, and high barren lands on the south; on both sides great numbers of buffaloe are feeding. In the evening three boys of the Sioux nation swam across the river and informed us that two parties of Sioux were encamped on the next river, one consisting of 80 and the second of 60 lodges, at some distance above. After treating them kindly we sent them back with a present of two carrots of tabacco to their chiefs..."

The following day brought the expedition to the mouth of the Teton or Bad River at the modern city of Fort Pierre, the northern end of the Big Bend Reservoir. As they approached the Bad River, the Sioux stole a horse from one of the expedition hunters, the first incident of their troubled visit to the Sioux in this neighborhood.

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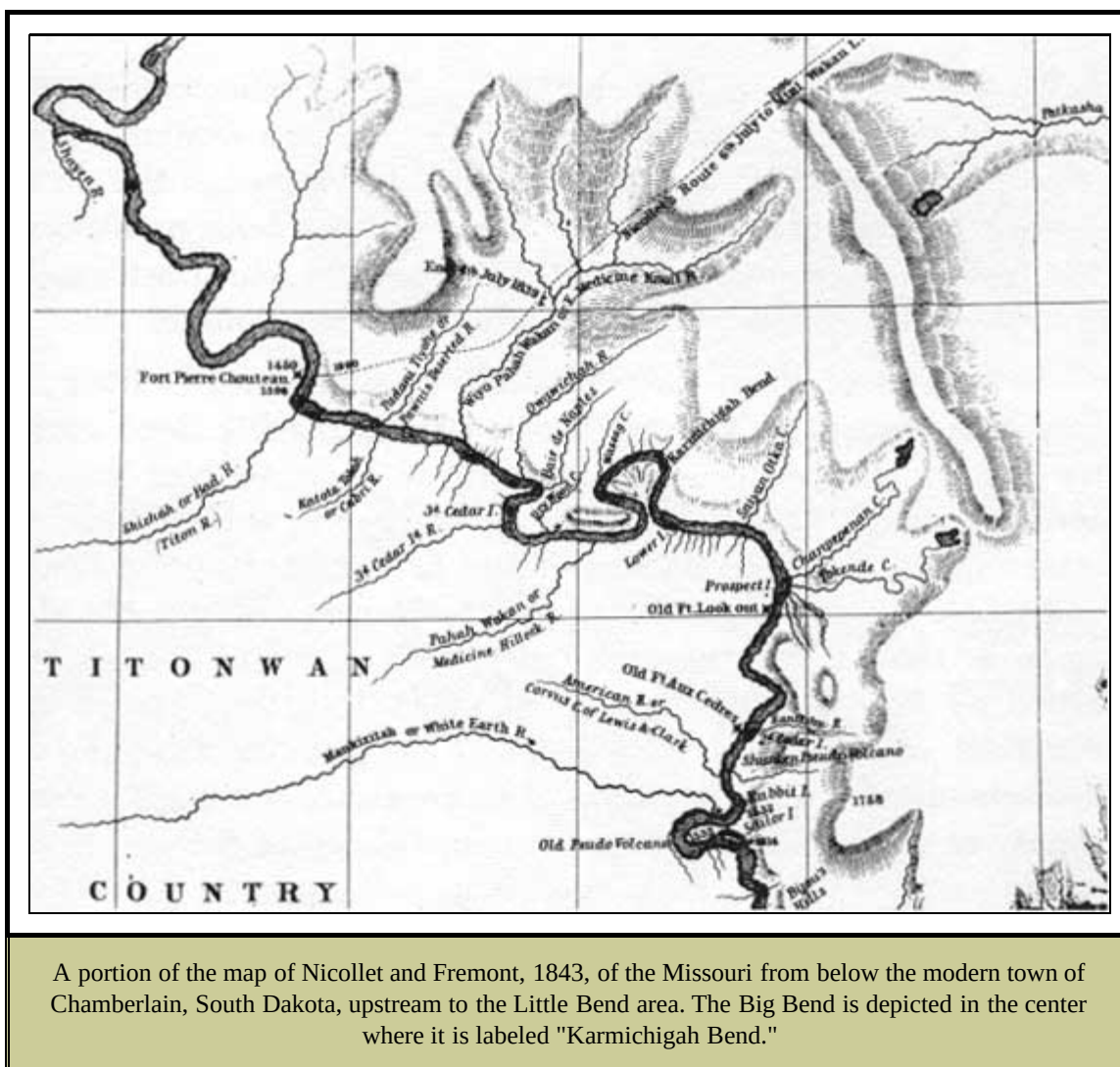
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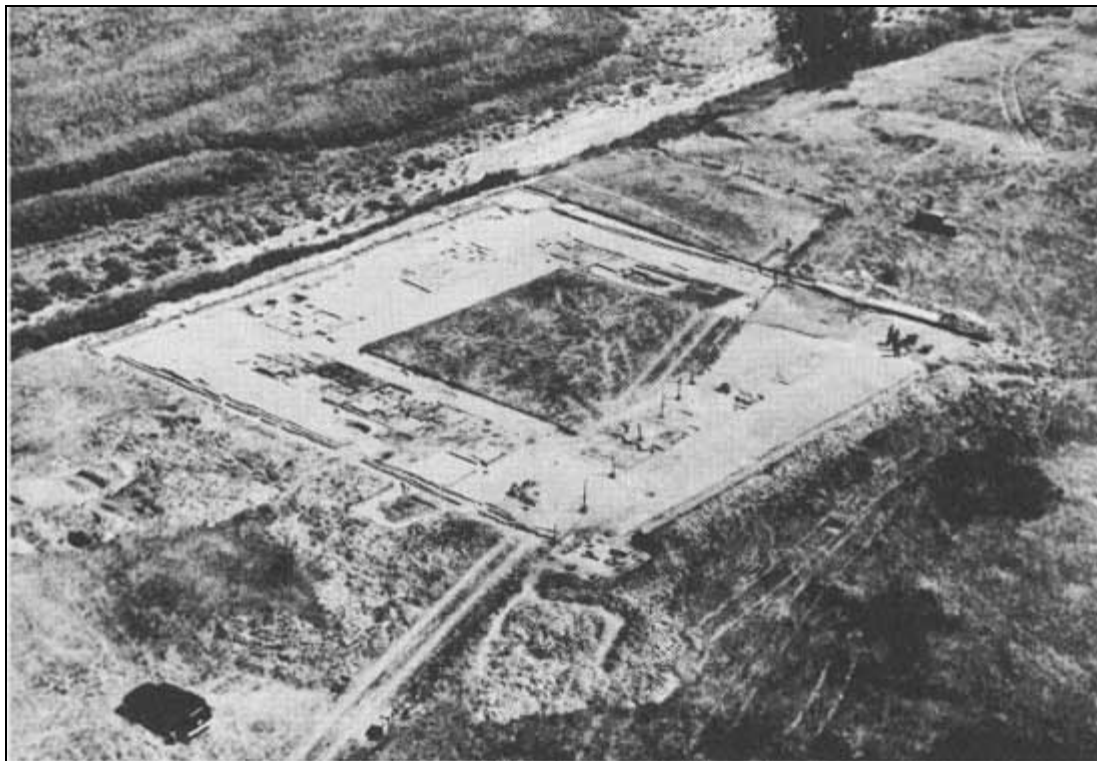
HISTORIC SITES INVESTIGATIONS IN THE BIG BEND AREA

In the Big Bend Reservoir area, archeological investigations have been made at several historic period sites used by both Indians and Whites. The excavations have produced an array of somewhat novel historical materials, the first of their kind for the area.



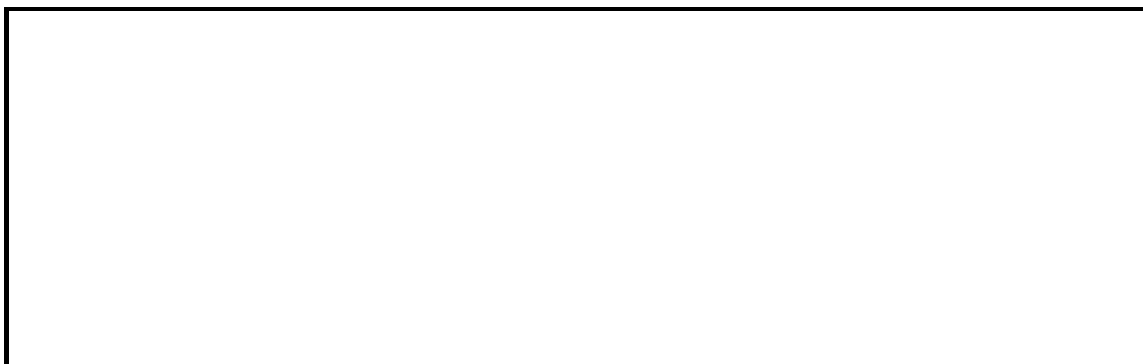
Though less numerous than prehistoric sites in the Big Bend area, the historic sites of the region have yielded fresh information on frontier uses of the region. Some of the sites have afforded material evidence not recorded in any of the usual documentary sources (libraries, archives, etc.), especially regarding the physical appearance, plan, and style of construction of buildings and other structures abandoned and forgotten long ago. A study of the archeological remains of such historic sites may help to correct, or to interpret more fully and

accurately, collateral contemporary records and traditional accounts, inasmuch as those more familiar sources of history often preserve but scant evidence on physical and material matters, even for otherwise well remembered and important sites. Such archeological evidence from historic sites of the area has not been available previously and constitutes new information not found in the usual history. Furthermore: remains of this sort, from both prehistoric and historic sites, are non-renewable resources which are available in limited quantity like any other natural resources.



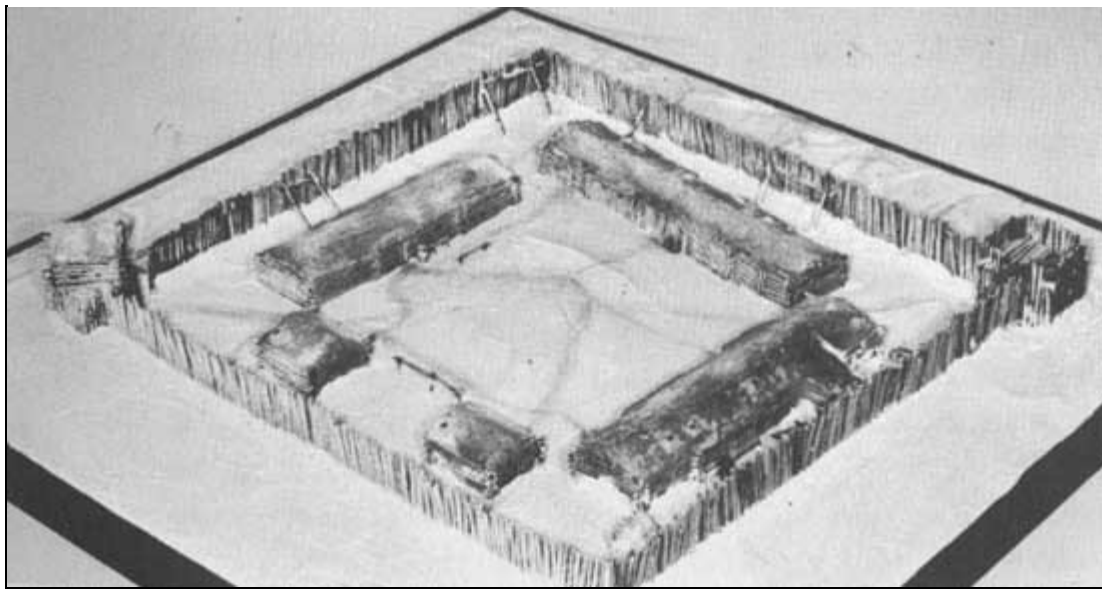
Aerial view of the site of Fort George trading post during excavation in 1962. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Corps of Engineers).Aerial view of the site of Fort George trading post during excavation in 1962. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Corps of Engineers).

The post of Regis Loisel, dating from the early 19th century, was among the known historic sites of the Big Bend country for which special search was made: Loisel's post was of special interest because it was the earliest of which there is record in the area and because it had been visited by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804 while en route to the Pacific and again in 1806 during the return trip. This post had been established by Loisel, of St. Louis, late in 1802 (shortly before the Purchase of Louisiana from France) on what became known as Cedar Island, one of a group of three islands notable for their stands of junipers some 25 miles upstream from the Big Bend itself.





Archeologists uncovered the remains of log buildings and adobe brick masonry fireplaces at Fort George. Photos: Courtesy of the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution



Scale model of Fort George trading post, based on evidence obtained during archeological excavation.

Though probably extant for several years after the visit of the famous American "Corps of Discovery," little was known of the physical structure of Loisel's post beyond what had been recorded in diaries of two sergeants of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Patrick Gass and John Ordway. Both of these men were carpenters who soon after their visit here, were to be placed in charge of building winter quarters for the expedition in central North Dakota. It is reasonable to suppose that they examined the Cedar Island post with special attention. Their notes, though brief, were made on the spot—perhaps with a tape—and record the plan, dimensions, and type of construction.

Cedar Island in recent years was covered with a heavy stand of cedar and a luxuriant growth of underbrush and grasses. But a thorough search of the island by archeologists revealed no hint of the location of Loisel's post. It is thought that remains of the post in the past century and a half have been destroyed by erosion or completely hidden under silt deposits and the heavy vegetative cover. Thus the record made by sergeants Gass and Ordway remains the only source of knowledge of the physical nature of the lost trading post of Regis Loisel.

In the course of the search of Cedar Island for the site of Loisel's post, another historic site was found and partially excavated. These investigations exposed remains of a group of small timber buildings that had been provided with masonry chimneys made of field boulders, brought from the mainland and laid up in clay. Artifacts and occupational debris associated with these remains suggest a farmstead, perhaps maintained by land squatters and wood-hawks supplying fuel for the occasional steamboat on the Missouri during the 1860's and 1870's. Of special interest among the objects recovered was a datable fragment of marked stoneware which had been made in Nebraska Territory sometime prior to March, 1867, when the state was admitted to the union.

The site of another trading post, Fort George, in use briefly in the 1840's, was more easily located because the abandoned site had been used in 1890 as the starting point of a boundary survey of the Lower Brule (Sioux) Indian Reservation. Built and used by a group of traders who attempted to compete with the well-established Fort Pierre Chouteau, about 25 miles upstream, Fort George was probably a financial failure. It was visited in 1843 by a famous traveler and his party, the naturalist John James Audubon, but little was recorded concerning the fort itself or its use in the trade. Since the site was about to be destroyed by wave action on the reservoir, archeological study of the surviving physical remains was imperative.

Excavations at Fort George produced specific details of its plan, construction, and use in spite of the fact that the post was dismantled and the salvagable remains carried off. Supplementing the evidence on the arrangement and actual construction of Fort George were the varied artifacts and other objects discovered. This material, as well as the structural evidence, was of special interest in view of the paucity of excavated collections of this period from comparable trading sites elsewhere. These objects, sometimes fragmentary and quite commonplace in their own time, included samples of actual construction materials, among them hand-made, sun-dried, adobe-clay fireplace bricks, rare historical specimens for the region. The many smaller objects in the collection—complete or fragmentary household articles, tools and implements, weapons, personal articles, and items of merchandise once traded to the Indians—illustrate little-known aspects of the era of the fur trade.

Elsewhere in the reservoir, a search was made for the remains of another post, the trading establishment known as Fort Defiance or Fort Bouis. Despite virtually ideal conditions for the search—all timber had been stripped from the area near the mouth of Medicine Creek—no trace of the post was found. Here also, it may be assumed that river silts had covered any physical remains or that they were long ago cut away by the river itself.

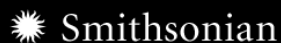
Test excavations were made at the site of the short-lived Red Cloud Indian Agency at the mouth of Medicine Creek. It was in use during the winter of 1877-78 for the numerous and powerful Oglala Teton (Sioux) under their famous Chief Red Cloud. The buildings of the agency are known to have been systematically removed to the Pine Ridge Agency, in southwestern South Dakota, and the original site afterwards subjected to years of cultivation. Nonetheless, the location and certain structural details of former buildings were established by the excavations, verifying the scant historical record. In addition, a small but revealing collection of objects was recovered representative of a winter's use of the site by representatives of the Indian Office.

These examples of archeological investigations at historic sites in the Big Bend area illustrate one part of the Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program. Americans may take pride in the fact that scientific investigations of this kind are being carried out in reservoir areas and that such cultural resources are not being heedlessly destroyed without regard for their significance to history.

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Lake Sharpe—Big Bend Dam

Archeology, History, Geology



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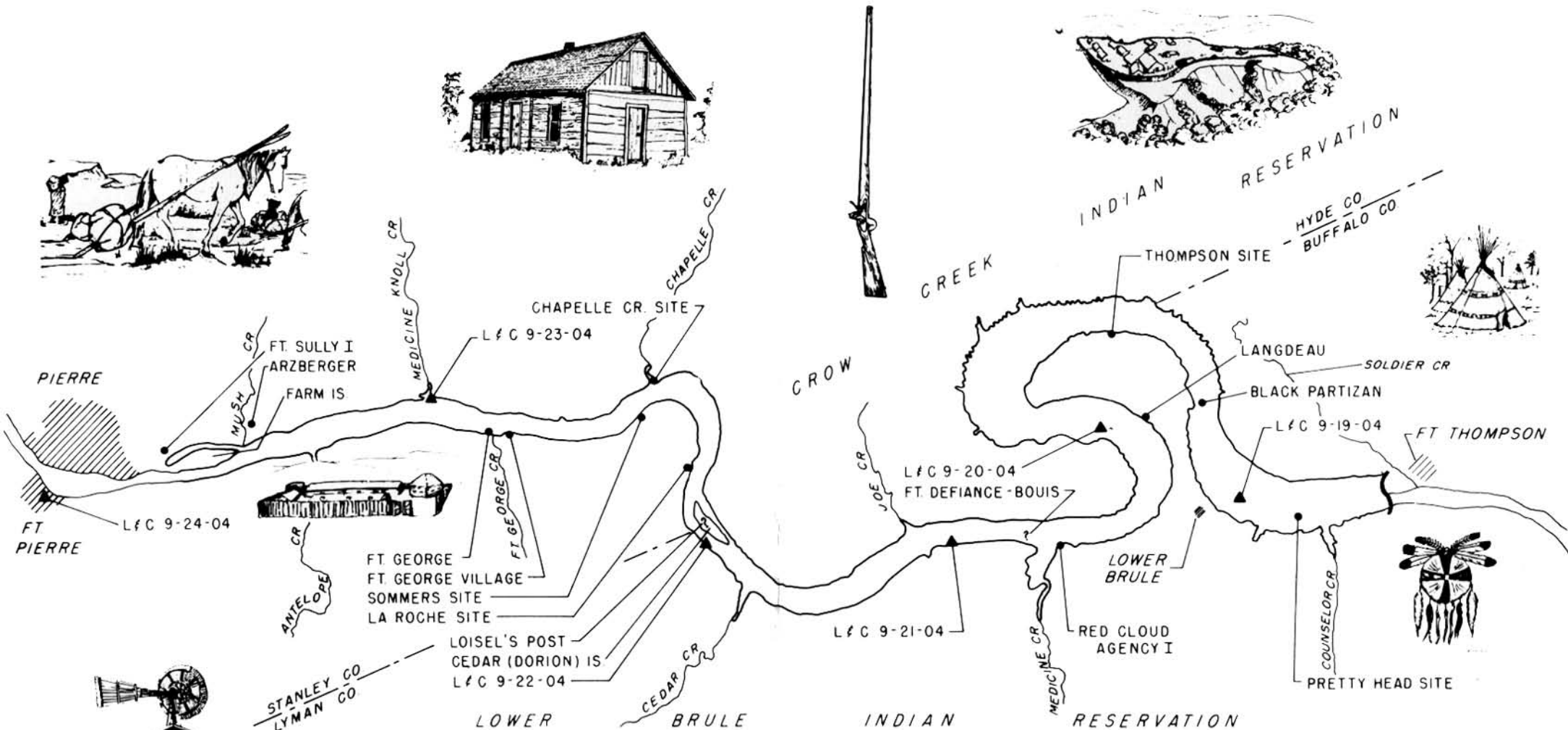
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BIG BEND RESERVOIR AREA

MISSOURI RIVER, SOUTH DAKOTA

L & C = LEWIS AND CLARK IN 1804

