

Archaeology at Dinosaur Provincial Park

By Tom Head, Bison Historical Services Ltd.

Dinosaur Provincial Park is renowned for its dinosaurs and for almost 100 years has attracted visitors from around the world. But, people have visited and lived in this part of southern Alberta for many centuries. Beginning at least 11,000 years ago, First Nations peoples crossed from Siberia into the Americas and became the first visitors to the area. Come with us back in time as we examine some of the past human use.

In 1990, Bison Historical Services Ltd. and NOVA Corporation of Alberta conducted archaeological excavations at a site along a NOVA Corporation of Alberta pipeline. The site (EeOv-68) is on Little Sandhill Creek, just southwest of Dinosaur Provincial Park (Figure 1).

This highly significant site has been occupied by First Nations peoples on many occasions over the last 4,500 years. Its significance lies in the number of early occupations and the excellent preservation of cultural materials recovered from the site. With the co-operation of NOVA Corporation of Alberta, developmental impact to this site was minimized and most of it protected for future investigations.

Ninety-seven square metres were excavated in order to maximize our understanding of the past use of the site. During the excavations, cultural materials, including a variety of stone tools (spear or dart points, hide scrapers, knives), bones from animals that were hunted, and the remains of cooking fires were re-

covered. These materials were discarded by these early visitors and are buried as much as 90 centimetres (36 inches) below ground.

Spear and dart points, like our fashions today (for example mini skirts and bell bottomed pants), change through time and allow us to assign them to specific time periods (called occupations). At least six periods were found including three Oxbow occupations, one McKean occupation, one Pelican occupation and one occupation of unknown age.

(Figure 2) Associated with each occupation is a specific type of spear or dart point.

Oxbow points were generally used from about 5,000 to 3,000 years before present (B.P.). They are side-notched with a concave base and

"ear", or projections, between the base and the notches (Figure 3). Bone dates have confirmed that the earliest Oxbow occupations occurred about 4,300 years ago while the last Oxbow occupation occurred about 3,000 years ago.

McKean points are commonly associated with the period from about 4,000 to 3,000 years B.P. They are generally lanceolate in form, with concave bases (Figure 3).

Pelican Lake points date to the period from about 3,000 to 2,000 years B.P. Stylistically, they are characterized by corner notches and sharp shoulder tangs (Figure 3).

The research is not yet over! Between June 13 and August 14, 1994, further excavations will be conducted.

You are invited to participate in our discovery of Alberta's past and these early visitors. This important site (which is on the road into Dinosaur Provincial Park) will be open to visitors daily between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. During your visit, a professional archaeologist will be your guide. Ongoing excavations will provide a daily glimpse as new discoveries are uncovered over the summer.

Pre-registration is recommended for large group tours. On-site parking is available just a short distance from the excavations and you are welcome any time during visiting hours outlined above. For further information and booking, contact:

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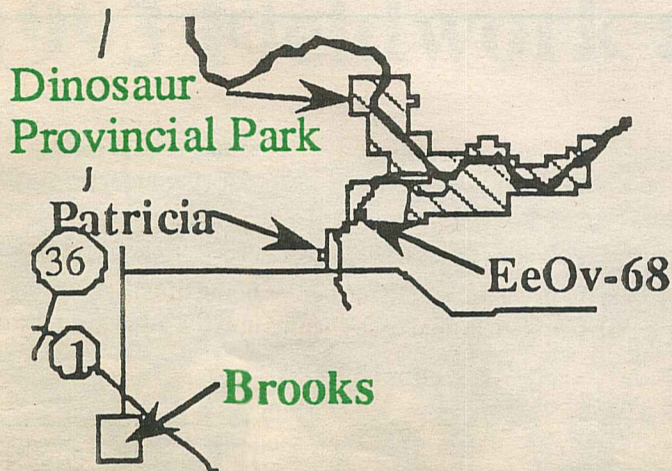
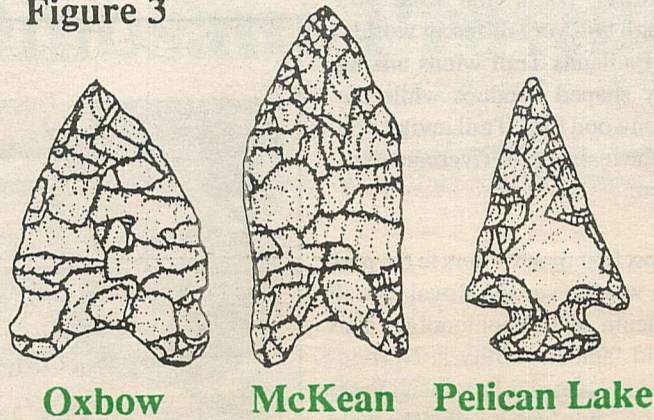


Figure 1

Figure 3



Oxbow

McKean

Pelican Lake

Figure 2 Occupations at EeOv-68

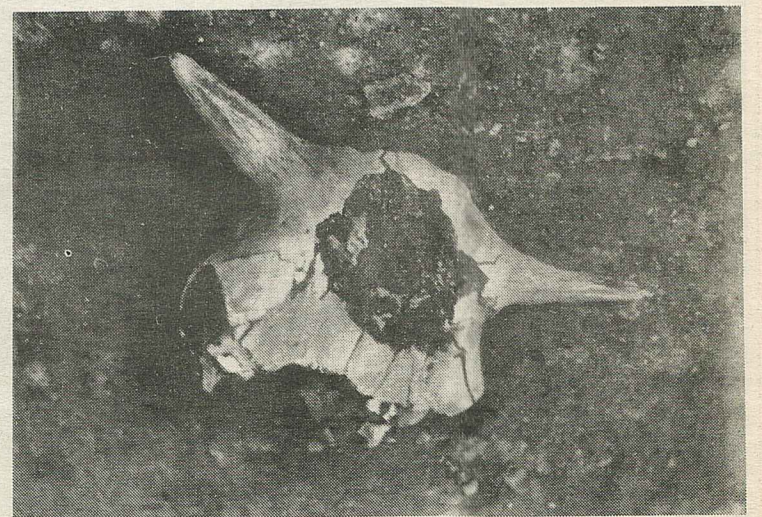
1. Unassigned (ca. 2000 years B.P. to Present)
2. Pelican Lake (ca. 3000 to 2000 years B.P.)
3. McKean Complex (ca. 4000 to 3000 years B.P.)
4. Oxbow (ca. 5000 to 3000 years B.P.)
5. Oxbow (ca. 5000 to 3000 years B.P.)
6. Oxbow (ca. 5000 to 3000 years B.P.)



Excavations of the site have revealed the remains of a boiling pit containing quantities of bison bone. It is believed these pits were used in the production of glue from the hooves.



Excavations started at Site EeOv-68 in the summer of 1990 and will continue this year. Access to the site will be signed on the park road about 10 km. west of the park entrance.



The upper part of this bison skull had been removed to allow entry into the brain cavity. The brains were often used as ingredients in tanning hides.