Adobe Walls: The History and Archeology of the 1874 Trading Post

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With the ever increasing public interest in archaeology, especially in historic archaeology, books such as this one are in great demand. Adobe Walls is a good example of how historic archaeology should be done and how it can be presented to the general public as well as to the academic community. The format of the book allows the general reader to become involved in the history of the Adobe Walls Trading Post as well as the actual archaeological work that took place at the site. At the same time the book provides concise information useful to other historians and archaeologists.

Aspects of the book that make it unique include focus on the common hide hunters' and merchants' daily lives as well as a two-sided account of the history of the post: from white frontiersmen and American Indians. This approach provides an enlightening contrast of concerns and problems for both groups.

The archaeological section provides an interesting, readable account of the work done at the site. This section is, of necessity, very descriptive, but the use of maps, drawings, and photographs of the excavations and materials recovered help make it more enjoyable. Harrison does an excellent job of discussing how the materials recovered could be interpreted to document the lives and activities of the occupants of Adobe Walls.

Though this book is a good effort in general, there are a few minor problems that are worth mentioning. This book is conspicuously lacking in a research design that would help the reader understand why the post was excavated. Obviously excavation helped answer many questions about the history of the post that could not be answered from written accounts. However, a simple list of questions or problems to be addressed by the excavation would help the reader understand the difference between professional excavation and casual or illegal collection of cultural materials.

There are also some inconsistencies between descriptions of buildings and the maps of the structures. More detailed maps of the structures showing the locations of features and some of the larger artifacts would have added to the descriptive sections.

In general the book is enjoyable, informative, and interesting. I hope that it will set an example for others to follow in future investigations.

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