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# ASSOCIATION OF ARTIFACTS AND EXTINCT MAMMALS IN NEBRASKA

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THE NEBRASKA STATE MUSEUM UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

ERWIN H. BARBOUR, *Director*ASSOCIATION OF ARTIFACTS AND EXTINCT  
MAMMALS IN NEBRASKA

BY BERTRAND SCHULTZ

During the past four years the Nebraska State Museum, under the directorship of Dr. Erwin Hinckley Barbour, has been making even more extensive palaeontological collections throughout Nebraska than heretofore. As work progresses, especially with fossil bison and mammoth, there is increasing evidence that man appeared in Nebraska much earlier than is generally believed. Two occurrences of artifacts associated with fossil bones will constitute the main theme of this paper.

## CUSTER COUNTY ARTIFACTS

In July 1929, Frank Crabill and the writer, members of the Museum field party, were removing fossil mammoth and bison bones from the Pleistocene marls of the South Loup Valley in Custer County, Nebraska, about seven miles southwest of Cumro. Many mammoth bones and a complete skull of *Bison cf. occidentalis* were secured here, (T. 13 N., R. 19 W., Sec. 35).

While exploring and developing this bone layer the skeletal parts of a second bison were found about seventy-five yards to the southwest. This latter specimen was in a stratum fifteen feet above the clay marls in a bank of yellow loess, and was sixteen feet below the present turf line. The bones were well fossilized and were in a one-foot vegetation layer of presumably late Pleistocene origin with loess both above and below.

After an hour of digging to determine whether or not the new find was worth collecting the writer found an artifact (specimen number 2-16-7-29), in association with a portion of bison rib about a foot back from the face of the bank. The artifact was of interest because of its association with the fossil bone, and because it differed greatly from the common arrow-heads of the Plains Indians. The artifact was sent to the museum, but the bones were left in situ in the bank of loess. The collecting season in that section of Nebraska had been completed, and, inasmuch as the party was due to make explorations in Northern Nebraska, the stratigraphy and age of the bison deposit were left to be re-checked.

Upon learning of this find Dr. W. D. Strong of the Smithsonian Institution, at that time Professor of Anthropology in the University of Nebraska, urged further investigation and excavation. On September 6, 1930, Frank Crabill and the writer drove to Custer County where they met Dr. and Mrs. Strong. The party immediately set to work measuring sections, mapping the region, and working out the general geology of the territory surrounding the bison deposit. A small dry creek has cut into the Pleistocene deposits and has exposed the Pleistocene clay marls, sands, gravels, and the yellow Peorian loess. At one place a short distance from the bison remains, the stream has exposed a vertical Pleistocene section of one hundred feet. It was by a comparison of these deposits with the loess at the bank where the bison bones were found that the party was able to decide definitely that the section fitted in with the general type section of that region. Peorian loess is of late Pleistocene origin, and was deposited, probably by wind, prior to the last glacial epoch, the Wisconsin.

The bones were uncovered with great care and it was hoped that other artifacts might be found. The bones were well fossilized, and were surrounded by calcareous concretions which made the work of cleaning them rather difficult. An area twenty by six feet was excavated without finding other artifacts. Furthermore the skull and jaw of this bison could not be found. The fact that the skull and jaw are wanting makes it difficult to determine the exact species of this fossil bison, but a detailed comparison of the bones found has been made with those of certain described species. The bones compare very favorably with those of *Bison occidentalis*, which was the most common bison found in the late Pleistocene and are very unlike those of *Bison bison*, the living species.

The artifact (No. 2-16-7-29) was chipped from black flint and suggests a small dart-point. The maximum length is 76 mm., the width 17 mm., and the thickness 5 mm. There are no notches for hafting, but on one side of the butt end there is a narrow, longitudinal groove 17 mm. long, and of slight depth. The point had been skillfully chipped by the removal of long flakes, and shows a grade of workmanship above the average Nebraska flint work. The significance of this dart-point, which adds much weight to the evidence compiled, lies in the close resemblance that it bears to points found associated with supposedly Pleistocene fossil remains in various other places in the Plains Region of North America.

The fact that the above mentioned artifact was found but a foot behind the face of the bank should not cast doubt upon its association with the fossil bison. It does not seem to be intrusive. An arrow shot by a modern Indian could not penetrate so far into loess as hard as this. It should be mentioned here that the loess bank has been eroding away at a rapid rate in recent times. The soil surrounding the dart-point and the bones was apparently undisturbed. The faint possibility that rodents might have carried it there by burrowing into the deposit seems, to the writer, to place a heavy strain on the theory of coincidence. The association appears definite, since the point was found in such close proximity, exactly on the same horizon where the fossil bones were deposited.

#### TWO HALL COUNTY ARTIFACTS

Further proof of the association of artifacts with extinct bison in Nebraska was made on July 25, 1931 about sixty miles south and east of the Custer County find, near Grand Island, Hall County, Nebraska. The Museum field party which made the find was composed of E. L. Blue, Eugene Vanderpool, Frank Crabill, and the writer, who was in charge. Dr. Erwin H. Barbour had sent the group to the vicinity of Grand Island to collect fossil bison bones in the Meserve bone quarry (T. 10 N., R. 9 W., NE $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec. 14). Eight years before this, Mr. F. G. Meserve, at that time Professor of Biology in Grand Island College, had obtained two skulls and some skeletal parts of *Bison occidentalis* from this same site. The party from the State Museum found many more bison bones and with these a dart-point (No. 1-25-7-31) in intimate association. Frank Crabill, a member of the collecting party, uncovered the point which, fortunately, was not dislodged from the matrix when discovered. It was found in a cluster of ribs and vertebrae. The artifact was photographed in situ and later removed, together with the impression, which was taken out in the form of a small block.

The history of the Meserve bone quarry deserves mention<sup>1</sup> here. In the spring of 1923 Charles Foster and Earl Foster of Doniphan, Nebraska, students in Grand Island High School, were fishing along the banks of the Platte River at the site of the bone bed. They noticed some bones exposed

<sup>1</sup> Meserve, F. G. and Barbour, Erwin H. Association of an Arrow-point with *Bison occidentalis*, Nebraska State Museum, Bull. 27, Vol. 1, 1932, pp. 239 to 243, 1 text figure.

Barbour, Erwin H. and Schultz, C. Bertrand. The Mounted Skeleton of *Bison occidentalis* and Associated Dart-points, Nebraska State Museum Bull. 32, Vol. I, 1932, pp. 263 to 271, 3 text figures.

in the side of the south bank, and dug out several, including a bison skull, which they gave to the museum at Grand Island College. Professor F. G. Meserve made definite plans to remove more of the fossil material the following summer. Professor Meserve and his wife, Charles Foster, Wayne Foster, Earl Foster, Ben Hites, and some others from the neighboring region were present the next summer when another skull was obtained for the college. On the same day, a partial skeleton of this bison was obtained. A dart-point (No. 10-12-13) was also found in the undisturbed matrix in association with the fossil bones. This artifact, long in the possession of Professor Meserve, now of Northwestern University, has been donated to the Nebraska State Museum and will be put on exhibition in connection with the bones from the Meserve quarry. The artifact (No. 10-12-31) is almost an exact duplicate of the one (No. 1-25-7-31) found by the State Museum field party in Fig. 166.

The artifact (No. 1-25-7-31) was chipped from a blue-gray flint. The greatest length is 47 mm., the width 30 mm., and the thickness 5 mm. There are no notches for hafting, but on one side of the base there is a rather wide longitudinal groove 15 mm. in length, 8 mm. wide, and 1½ mm. deep. The artifact shows about the average workmanship of a skilled flint worker and its most out-standing characteristics are the decidedly right beveled edges which run backward 30 mm. from the point and are 5 mm. high.

As mentioned before, the bone deposit is along the south bank of the Platte River. The river has greatly changed the topography of the land in the immediate vicinity of the deposit in recent times. Reports from farmers, whose word is not open to question, agree that the river has cut back as much as three rods into the deposit in the last fifteen years. The surface of the land at the quarry slopes away from the river towards a little gully, a rod and a half to the east. Erosion has removed much of the overhead which was above the deposit and now only about four feet remain.

A careful study of the deposit was made on November 14, 1931 by Professor A. L. Lugin, of the University of Nebraska, Department of Geology, Loren Eiseley, of the Department of Anthropology of the same institution, and the writer. Unfortunately the exact age could not be determined with finality, but the deposit plainly shows considerable antiquity. It might well be of Peorian age. The section of the deposit shows the Kansas sands and gravels as the basal member, and what

appears to be yellow Peorian loess resting on top. The latter becomes more limy about three feet above its contact with the Kansan, and, in places, is nearly a solid bed of lime, attaining a foot or so in thickness. Above this, the yellow, limy matrix finally grades into a dense, dark-gray, clay silt. It was in this dark-colored formation that the bones were found. The dark color of the matrix surrounding the bones shows, of course, evidences of vegetable matter and the lighter colored soils above and below show little or none. There is no evidence of recent reworking of the material above the deposit. However, a number of examples of recent filling of valleys are found a short distance to the east and west of the quarry, but these are very unlike the quarry deposits. In the recent valley deposits, the museum party encountered skulls and skeletal parts of the modern bison, *Bison bison*, buried at a depth of more than twenty feet.

An important feature was the finding of great numbers of fossilized hackberry seeds with the bones. There are no seeds in the yellow clay silt that overlies the deposit, and at present no hackberry trees are in the vicinity. Fossil hackberry seeds are already known from many localities in Nebraska and have been described.<sup>1</sup>

The occurrence itself of the skeletons of an extinct species of bison, *Bison occidentalis*, argues for the age of this deposit.

The Custer County and Hall County finds, together with similar ones which have been made in America, lead to the conclusion that man was contemporaneous with animals which are now extinct. This evidence has been accumulating for nearly a century and important finds have been made in California, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Details of these may be secured by referring to the publications listed in the bibliography of this paper.

A casual consideration of these American finds is bound to impress even the most conservative reader of the possibility of Pleistocene human remains in America. It seems to the writer that the rapidly growing list of these discoveries, many of which are well authenticated, strongly indicate that man existed in North America in Pleistocene times. The reality of his existence, however, will be settled only by careful cooperation in the field on the part of Geologists, Palaeontologists, and Anthropologists.

<sup>1</sup> Barbour, Erwin H., Hackberry Conglomerate: A new Nebraska rock. The Nebraska State Museum Bulletin 8, Vol. I, August, 1925.

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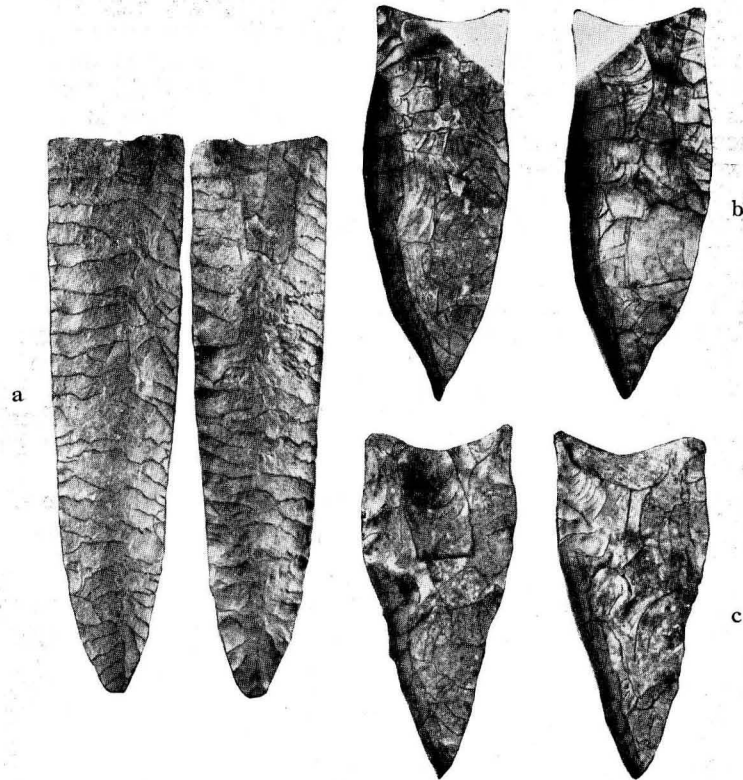


Fig. 166.—Nebraska artifacts found in association with fossil bison. All natural size.

- a. The Custer County artifact No. 2-16-7-29. Obverse and reverse.  
 b. The Meserve, or the first Hall County artifact, No. 10-12-31. Obverse and reverse.  
 c. The second Hall County artifact, No. 1-25-7-31. Obverse and reverse.

Barbour, Erwin Hinckley, and Schultz, C. Bertrand

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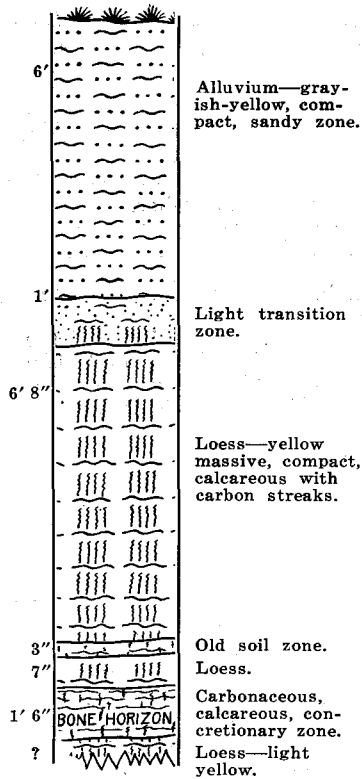


Fig. 167  
Section, Custer  
County, Bison  
quarry.

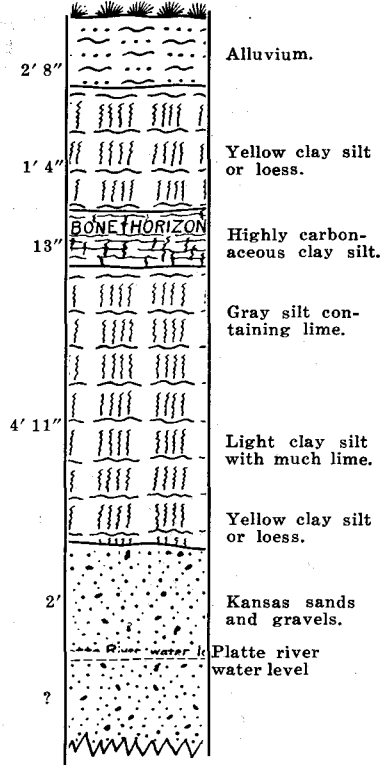


Fig. 168  
Section, The Me-  
serve or Hall  
County Bison  
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