The Archeological Campaign of 1937: Indian Cave

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Article Summary: This is one of a series of 1937 archeological site reports that can be accessed individually. The series includes: Ashland Site, Pawnee Creek Site, Cornish Site, Fontenelle Forest Site, North Plattsouth Site, Majors Site, Williams Site, Heywood Site, Osborne Site, Whitten Site, Morehead Site, Indian Cave, McKissick Site, Conclusion.

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: Indian Cave site, petroglyphs on walls of Indian Cave (4 views)
practically unknown. While beads of this type have been found in Upper Republican burials, they occurred very rarely among large quantities of shell beads of an entirely distinct type, and are probably indicative of an influence from some other culture. As for armlets of this particular form, we are unaware of their occurrence elsewhere in sites thus far investigated. No village site was found in the immediate vicinity, although more careful search might reveal one. At the present time all that can be said is that here were buried the dead of some group whose identity we do not yet know.

PLATE XXIV—1

1. Indian Cave, Richardson County.

MOREHEAD SITE

A day was devoted to the investigation of a mound southeast of Nemaha. Situated on a point overlooking the Missouri River, the contours could not be exactly determined, but it had an elevation above the level surface to the south of about 10 inches and its diameter was probably not far from 35 feet. A trench was cut along the north-south axis for a distance of 18 feet, revealing the base of the moved earth to lie level at a depth of 32 inches beneath the highest point of the mound. Within
the disturbed zone bone fragments were sparsely distributed, nowhere in articulation or otherwise concentrated, and similarly scattered were rather numerous small shell disc beads and small unworked fragments of limestone, quartzite, and pumice. No pits or other disturbances appeared in our excavation below the general mound fill, and a pit put down to a depth of 5 feet showed only undisturbed soil. Although the area had been much disturbed by the activities of rodents, it hardly seems possible that the complete absence of individual burials can be thus accounted for, and the situation here apparently parallels that so frequently found in eastern Nebraska.

PLATE XXIV—2, 3
Petroglyphs on walls of Indian Cave.
Indian Cave

INDIAN CAVE

East of the old village of St. Deroin, the Missouri River is bordered for some distance by precipitous sandstone bluffs. At one point the cliff overhangs to create a large shelter, locally known as Indian Cave, about which many local legends center. Although lack of time prevented any excavation, no evidence of Indian occupancy appeared on the surface. On the sandstone walls, however, are to be found (among more recent artistic efforts) a number of representations of human and animal forms and a few geometrical forms which are probably of Indian authorship (Plates XXIV, XXV). In all cases the outlines and details are executed by means of incised lines, and if paint was ever used it has completely disappeared. The life forms include, besides a few rather crude human figures, fairly skillful outlines of deer, bison and smaller mammals, a bird, and a figure with the general form of a fish to which are attached on opposite sides, two leg-like appendages, terminating in three toes. Among the rest is the figure of a man astride a horse. Thus, if all of these are genuine, some at least post-date the white man’s arrival, although others might be much older. It is, of course, impossible to affirm the unquestionable authenticity of these petroglyphs, but the nature of the expression and the rather pronounced erosion affecting some of the incisions establish a rather strong presumption of the genuineness of part of them, at least.

PLATE XXV

Petroglyphs on Walls of Indian Cave

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