

ANCIENT INDIAN VILLAGE ON STINKING WATER

By R. E. Olmsted, Imperial, Nebraska

For some time I have been deeply interested in the old Texas Trail, and have studied its relation to the early history of western Nebraska. This interest and study has been shared by two friends of mine, Nelson Burham and Leland Peterson, who join with me in making this report on another project.

During the spring of 1931 we were engaged in retracing the route of this great highway of the past as its tortuous path route wound along the Stinking Water, in eastern Chase County. At the time this report begins, we were trying to locate the site of a certain cattle camp on the Texas Trail. There was a difference of opinion among us, as to the exact spot occupied by the log trading-post and saloon, so we sought further information from an old ranchman who had lived in this community for many years.

Yes, he knew the place—right at the north end of the old Indian camp, about a hundred yards east of the creek. And in this way we were directed to the most extensive Indian village site I have ever seen, from which we have already gathered a large and varied collection of Indian implements, weapons and ornaments. There is abundant evidence that much more material will be found and our only hope is that some of it will prove to be of value in determining the history of pre-historic peoples in Nebraska.

A Large Prehistoric Village

This village (or city) site is located on the North Fork of the Stinking Water, a beautiful, spring-fed creek of clear water, notwithstanding its name, which flows southeasterly between parallel files of high bluffs and joins the Republican River near Culbertson. The valley, at this point, spreads out to three times its normal width, forming a broad, level bench which seems to be surrounded by a circle of distant hills. The main village as occupied an area of about 150 acres on this bench but extensions to the principal site reach over three miles up and down the valley.

Nature provided an ideal setting for this settlement of native Americans. From a high bluff at the west one may survey the whole region—one lone sentinel could have guarded the entire village from the approach of enemies. Rich grazing lands of the bison and antelope lie in every direction from the camp. (I may state that we are only a few miles from the hunting grounds of Grand Duke Alexis and William F. Cody.) The bench land is well drained and its edge declines sharply to the bed of the Stinking Water, thus affording a most convenient water supply.

Much of our spare time this summer has been spent at the site of this village. Of course, only the most superficial exploration has been made as yet. The extent of the village has been pretty well outlined; the surface of the soil has been examined and all the material that has been exposed through cultivation was removed; a few test-holes have been dug and some material recovered from them, giving promise that burial grounds and other caches of relics will, very likely, be disclosed.

Evidence of Long Occupation

The soil upon which this village stood seems almost saturated with flint chips, bone fragments, broken pottery and clam-shells, and bright-colored stones to a depth of from twelve to twenty inches. In some places, the soil has been disturbed to a greater depth. Tons upon tons of material must have been packed into camp, for the manufacture of implements and weapons of every description, to have left so much debris. Broken pots and pans of clay give mute testimony to thousands of domestic battles, and whole herds of bison have contributed the bone dust that permeates

the soil. Though this site has been farmed for many years, the locations of scores of dwellings may plainly be seen and the ashy texture of the soil be noted.

Over Five Thousand Artifacts

Among the more than five thousand specimens already collected from this field are the rather rare and unusual articles illustrated herewith. We have not received a definite classification of these pieces which, as you see, are essentially small, beautifully worked shafts of flint. They are oval, triangular, lozenge or square of cross-section, and range from one to about three inches in length. They vary considerably in design. Some are pointed at both ends while others have a chisel-shaped tip on one end. Many pieces have from one to four knobs neatly executed along the edge. But all of them show evidences of wear and polish. Whether these articles are implements or weapons or ceremonial pieces I do not know but, until a better name is found, I have chosen to call them safety-pins.

No White Implements Found

It is a significant fact that no steel implements, or other evidence of contact with the white man, have been found. This territory was first settled by white men in the early seventies and the cowboys who rode the Texas Trail drove cattle over the site of this village a few years later. I have talked with several of these pioneers and not a one has any remembrance or knowledge of the period of its occupancy even though there were many Indians living in this territory at that time.

Judging from the preliminary work of the past summer, we feel that further exploration of this Indian village and the adjacent territory will add some new facts to the history of the early Indian tribes in Nebraska. We are even hopeful that we may find definite traces that a more ancient people once inhabited this same spot.

So we close our report in the confident expectation that another year's labor, and the cooperation of the Nebraska State Historical Society, will yield further knowledge from the West.



THE PICTURE ROCKS OF TABLE ROCK

The original "Table Rock" was on the hill about one-half mile east of present Table Rock Village. It was one of the "balancing rocks," frequently found where geological conditions favor—a large, smooth, flat rock, balanced horizontally on a round stone leg much smaller than the top. This rock caught the fancy of the white settlers and was adopted as the name of the first village laid out in 1855. At some date, not fixed with historical accuracy,