



# Cultural Resources

## Archeology

Most people who visit Glacier National Park stand in awe of the park's majestic scenery. Often, they pause at overlooks, such as those along the Going-to-the-Sun Road, and take in the magnificent views. Sometimes, they hike into the wilderness to enjoy an adventure just as park visitors have for over 100 years. Many people come to enjoy the beautiful, historic hotels and chalets which are so iconic of Glacier's railroad era. The roads, the trails and campsites, and the unique architecture, are all distinctive markers of our culture, which say much about our values and ways of life.

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Glacier National Park has provided a rich venue for researchers into the human past.

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Visitors to Glacier today may not realize as they stand at a favorite overlook or set up camp at a favorite campsite, that through these beautiful, special places, they are tied to those who lived on this landscape long ago. The peoples of the past were very similar to us. The places we like to travel, camp, and fish today are often the very same places that people of the past used. We know this because peoples of the past, whether they were here 3,000 years before present or just 50 years ago, left evidence of their values and ways of life behind - things such as trails along lakes and over mountain passes, campsites, mine tunnels and refuse. Park archeologists use these artifacts and features (portable and non-portable human



Mokowanis River Drainage- a popular hiking trail today-was used throughout history for travel across the Continental Divide.

creations) as clues to try to unravel the mystery of the human past in Glacier.

Archeological evidence to date implies that humans have used the area now known as Glacier National Park for 10,000 years. Because of glaciation and other extreme environmental factors, evidence is scant until the Middle Precontact Period of human occupation (ca 7750 to 1600 years ago). Identified archeological sites indicate the most extensive period of occupation of the Glacier National Park area occurred between ca 3,000 and 1,600 years ago. Sites from this time period include bison kill sites located near Glacier's foothills, where

bison were skillfully herded off cliffs to provide winter meat for families, to smaller mountain sheep drive lines which often consist of stone structures along cliff tops. Precontact (before written language evidence appeared in this area) campsites, known today by stone tools and fire blackened hearths, also dot Glacier's landscape. Today, Native groups such as the Blackfeet, Kootenai, Salish, and Pend d'Oreille retain close ties to Glacier National Park. Their oral histories reflect how deeply connected they are to this landscape.

Glacier National Park has provided a rich venue for researchers into



Archeologists dig excavation pit and screen sediment for cultural evidence.



Bowman chert projectile point found in Glacier National Park.



Human modified long bone of a Whitetail Deer. Note the cut marks, made by an edged tool.



Archeologists survey ice patch edge for cultural artifacts.

the human past. Over the years, many studies have been conducted here, each adding to our cumulative knowledge of the human history of this area. From 1993 to 1996, University of Calgary archeologist Dr. Brian O.K. Reeves led a crew of researchers who performed cultural surveys of the most likely locations for archeological sites in the park and nearly all of the parks 750 miles of trails. All in all, he and his crew identified 270 new archeological sites and revisited - providing additional information on about 18 others. These sites range from precontact scatters of human-created stone fragments known as lithic scatters to historic homesteads. Although many small scale archeological surveys had been done before, Reeves and his crew created the broadest spectrum of archeological work to date by more than doubling what was previously known about archeological resources in Glacier. This is how Reeves summarized the significance of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park archeological resources:

*“When viewed in the large regional perspective, (these resources) are, even though some component parts have been impacted, the most complete/ diverse cultural historical record of precontact resource harvesting, occupancy (and traditional sensitive places) in the Northern Rocky Mountains.”*

In addition, Reeves and Dr. Sandra Peacock produced a companion volume focusing on the ethnography of the native peoples who are most closely associated with Glacier National Park. This volume pulled together the living stories and histories of the Blackfeet and secondary source information on the Kootenai tribes. It documented the importance of many of these sites in the current cultural practices of these peoples. These two works stand together as the most complete work of the native or Precontact history of Glacier produced to date.

Currently, archeologists in Glacier

are carrying out a variety of research projects. One of these projects is investigating long term use human use of ice and snow patches. This is being done by traveling to remote ancient ice patches in the high mountains of the park to search the melting edges for clues to Precontact human occupation. In this way, Glacier is revealing information that adds to our knowledge of human history.

We also recognize that new archeological sites are being created every day. Anything over 50 years old could be archeologically significant and thus protected. Glacier’s story includes its Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) history, homesteading, and tourism. Archeologists study the physical remains of these activities to add to our knowledge of Glacier’s more recent past, and fill in the gaps left by written history. It is very important NOT TO DISTURB ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES. These are tangible and very valuable pieces of a physical narrative which stretches back into antiquity. When combined with oral histories, physical evidence reinforces information about human lifeways in Glacier. Removing even one artifact is like removing a page from a mystery novel and may mean the whole story can never be told. FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS TAMPERING WITH ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES AND ARTIFACTS.

When scientists evaluate evidence of past peoples, an important and detailed story emerges about the life ways of the people in the past. As the story emerges, it shows the amazing resilience and ingenuity of humans. The ability of earlier people to adapt and thrive in the harshest landscapes should give us hope for the future of humanity, as well as valuable lessons about survival and land use today. Glacier National Park is a beautiful place, and was established to protect not only the natural resources but the cultural resources as well. We should not forget, as we appreciate this area, that we stand in the footsteps of those who may have walked here as long as 10,000 years ago.