



Revised 12/1/2024

Title: What They Left Behind: Types of Archaeological Sites in Montana

Grade Level: 4th-8th grades

Subject(s): Social Studies/Montana State History

Duration: Fifty minutes

Description: This PowerPoint lesson complements, but does not duplicate, information presented in Chapter 2: "People of the Dog Days" from the textbook Montana: Stories of the Land (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2008).

Goals: Student will learn how archaeological sites provide evidence of the lives lived by Montana's ancient peoples.

Content Standards:

- **SS.H.4.3.** Explain how Montana has changed over time given its cultural diversity and how this history impacts the present.
- **SS.H.6-8.4.** Identify how new archaeological and scientific information shapes historical understanding
- **SS.H.6-8.5.** Explain how Montana has changed over time and how this history impacts the present

Materials:

- PowerPoint (which you can download from the following link: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/textbook/Chapter2/WhatTheyLeftBehind.ppt> and script, below.)
- Laser pointer (optional)
- Laptop projector

Pre-lesson Preparation:

Print the Vocabulary List (page 7) and either the script or script with accompanying slides.

- To print the script only, print pages 4 through 6 of this document.

- To print the script with accompanying slides open the PowerPoint. Select "Print," making sure that "Notes Pages" is selected in the "Print What" dialogue box.
- Review the script and PowerPoint before presenting.
- Before beginning the PowerPoint, engage your class with the introductory exercise. Then present the PowerPoint.

Assessment: Completed vocabulary list.

Special Comments: This PowerPoint focuses on the different types of archaeological sites found in Montana. It does not discuss many important topics covered in Chapter 2—for example, the Bering Strait controversy, the different ages of the pre-contact period, the effects of the ice age on ancient people, and the importance of tribal oral traditions in understanding the lives of ancient Montanans. More information on these and other pre-contact-related topics can be found in *Montana: Stories of the Land* chapter 2, "People of the Dog Days."

Note also: This PowerPoint script uses the term "prehistory," the preferred term of archaeologists for the time before European contact. *Montana: Stories of the Land* uses the term "pre-contact" to designate this period, to reflect the idea that the history of this area predicated the arrival of Europeans.

Image credits: Slide 2 (family group processing deer) courtesy Montana Department of Transportation. Slide 23 (schematic of drive lines) courtesy Library and Archives Canada. All other images courtesy Montana State Historic Preservation Office.

Introduction: Ask your students, "What traces of the ancient past remain in Montana?"

(Possible answers: Pictographs, petroglyphs, buffalo jumps, tipi rings.)

Tell your students that there are many traces on the land of ancient peoples and that you are going to view a PowerPoint presentation that describes some of the things ancient people left behind. These sites and "features" on Montana's landscape help us better understand how early people lived.

Distribute the vocabulary list. Read through the list with your students. Can they guess what any of the terms mean? Tell them that they will need to listen closely for these terms during the PowerPoint and record their definitions. [Note: Vocabulary words have been placed in bold italics in the script.]

Present PowerPoint (script below).

Culminating Activity: Guide your students in a discussion of what they just saw, in a way that emphasizes the need to preserve and protect archaeological sites. Questions you might ask include the following:

- If you saw one of these sites in your travels how could you (or would you be able to) tell that it was a place of particular cultural significance?

- What can serious archaeological study of a culturally significant site reveal that casual “artifact collecting” or “pot hunting” cannot?
- What is lost if someone rearranges the rocks in a drive line? Or collects arrowheads without documenting their context?

For a grade appropriate reading and worksheet on this topic, see Lesson 6-“Why Do We Preserve and Protect Archaeological Sites,” in *Stones and Bones: Prehistoric Tools from Montana’s Past*, available for download at <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/Footlocker/StonesBones.pdf>.

Extension Activities: Order the *Stones and Bones* footlocker and/or download the user guide and conduct other lessons relating to archaeology. Information about the footlocker can be found here: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/HandsonHistory>. Teach about atlatls and the physics behind this ancient technology with the lesson plan Making an Atlatl (download here: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Textbook/Chapter2/AtlatlLessonPlan.pdf>).

POWERPOINT SCRIPT

[SLIDE 1: TITLE SLIDE]

[SLIDE 2: ARTIST'S RENDERING, PROCESSING DEER] The ancestors of modern Native Americans were hunters and gatherers who moved across the landscape for over 12,000 years. They found everything they needed to survive. This presentation describes some of the things ancient people left behind. These sites and “features” on Montana’s landscape help us better understand how early people lived.

[SLIDE 3: TIPI RINGS, MEAGHER COUNTY] *Tipi rings* like these in Meagher County are the most common type of archaeological site in Montana. Campsites containing from one to over several hundred stone rings are found throughout Montana east of the continental divide. Most of these tipi ring campsites date anywhere from 5,000 years ago up to about 250 to 300 years ago.

[SLIDE 4: TIPI RINGS, HILL COUNTY] Tipi rings show up especially well from the air, like these on the Meisner Ranch in Hill County. Early people may have used these rock rings to hold down their tipis. They were probably used seasonally again and again as the people moved from one camp site to another.

[SLIDE 5: LITHIC SCATTER] Where *flint knappers* stopped to make tools, they left a scatter of waste flakes. To most of us, these flakes look like nothing more than rocks scattered around. But the trained archaeologist can see that the flakes were made deliberately by ancient tool makers. This common type of site is called a “*lithic scatter*.” “*Lithic*” is a word meaning “rock.”

[SLIDE 6: LITHIC SCATTER, CLOSEUP] Identifying lithic scatters requires knowledge of the types of stone prehistoric people used and an ability to identify the unique characteristics of human-made stone chips.

[SLIDE 7: LITHIC QUARRY, BEAVERHEAD COUNTY] A place where early tool makers collected rock for flint knapping is called a *lithic quarry*. At South Everson Creek in Beaverhead County, we can see today where ancient people dug material for tools.

[SLIDE 8: ROCK CAIRN, BEAVERHEAD COUNTY] Early people used *rock cairns*, or piles, like this one in Beaverhead County to mark special places or trails.

[SLIDE 9: ROCK CAIRN, PONDERA COUNTY] The upright stones in this rock cairn, or “feature,” in Pondera County is probably very old. The moss or lichen that has grown on it suggests its great age.

[SLIDE 10: ROCK BLIND, BIG HORN COUNTY] At the Cold Rattler Site in Big Horn County, you can see another type of “feature.” These are called forts, *blinds*, or pits and usually are on high ground or viewpoints like hilltops. There are different ideas about what purposes they served. Travelers

might have used them as a lookout point, hunters might have concealed themselves from passing game, or they might have been used for vision quests.

[SLIDE 11: FORT SMITH MEDICINE WHEEL, BIG HORN COUNTY] The Fort Smith Medicine Wheel in Big Horn County is an example of one of the most unique types of prehistoric stone features. **Medicine Wheels** are large stone ceremonial rock configurations. They range in size from 20 to over 100 feet in diameter.

[SLIDE 12: MEDICINE WHEEL DIAGRAM] Medicine wheels come in different shapes and sizes. Although they resemble tipi rings, they likely were used for religious ceremonies. The sacred nature of these features is still recognized today by modern Indian peoples.

[SLIDE 13: PICTOGRAPH CAVE] Early people used caves for shelter. Pictograph Cave in Yellowstone County near Billings is one of Montana's most important prehistoric sites because of its long use. People used this cave for several thousand years. It is a National Historic Landmark and very fragile because of natural deterioration caused by wind and water. This natural erosion is destroying the work early artists left behind.

[SLIDE 14: PICTOGRAPH] In some cave sites, the painted images called **pictographs**, left behind by the early inhabitants, are still visible on the cave walls.

[SLIDE 15: PICTOGRAPH, FERGUS COUNTY] Someone long ago left his handprint on this wall in Bear Canyon, Fergus County.

[SLIDE 16: PICTOGRAPHS, BROADWATER COUNTY] Erosion is not the only enemy of these fragile cave and canyon sites. Vandals here have chipped away at these ancient Hellgate Pictographs at Canyon Ferry, Broadwater County. Once they are gone, what we can learn from them is gone forever.

[SLIDE 17 PETROGLYPH] In the south central and southeastern part of Montana in sandstone country, images called **petroglyphs** are commonly pecked or carved into the soft rock surfaces. While we can often identify the images, like this human, we can only guess what the artist wanted to tell us.

[SLIDE 18 FIRST PEOPLE'S BUFFALO JUMP STATE PARK] **Buffalo jumps** are one of Montana's most celebrated and complex prehistoric sites. They are common in Montana and were one effective way hunters had of killing many buffalo at one time. First People's Buffalo Jump State Park (formerly Ulm Pishkun) in Cascade County was probably used several times every year from 900 A.D. to 1500 A.D.

[SLIDE 19: BUFFALO JUMP DIORAMA] This diorama at the Montana Historical Society's Homeland Exhibit shows how buffalo stampeded over the jump. A successful buffalo jump required careful planning and organization. It was dangerous business. Prehistoric hunter-gatherers were very knowledgeable and very skilled.

[SLIDE 20: CAMERON BUFFALO JUMP, MEAGHER COUNTY] At the bottom the Cameron Buffalo Jump in Meagher County, you can see the remains of ancient buffalo bones.

[SLIDE 21: BUFFALO POUND] Not all buffalo kill sites are jumps. Surrounding or corralling buffalo were also common group hunting techniques. The *corral pound* illustrated here was also used in Montana. Wooden corrals or simple fences made of fallen timber and brush were placed at the base of steep hills to trap bison herds.

[SLIDE 22: DRIVE LINE, HILL COUNTY] Prehistoric hunters placed *drive lines*, or alignments, for several miles leading up to a jump or corral. Skilled medicine men made the buffalo stampede. When buffalo stampeded, they did not cross the alignments, and the entire herd would fall over the cliff or run down the hill into the corrals. It was a very powerful and mysterious process. These drive lines are at Fresno Reservoir in Hill County.

[SLIDE 23: 1854 SCHEMATIC OF A DRIVE LINE] This drawing, from 1854, shows how hunters used drive lanes to funnel the buffalo over a cliff.

[SLIDE 24: WICKIUP, MADISON COUNTY] Timber shelters like this one in Madison County are called *wickiups*. Hunters likely used these timber shelters when passing through. Montana's dry climate has preserved some wickiups. You can tell the great age of this one by the moss, or lichen, that has grown on it.

[SLIDE 25: SCARRED TREES, POWELL COUNTY] *Scarred trees* are another type of feature that early people have left. The bark on this tree has been carefully removed to serve as a marker along a trail in Powell County.

[SLIDE 26: LOLO TRAIL] Animal trails often were used by early humans, and some of these were then later used by miners and early settlers. The Lolo Trail in western Montana is one example.

[SLIDE 27: HAGAN SITE] The *Hagan Site* near Glendive, discovered when a farmer plowed this field, is important to Montana's history because it is the only archaeological site with evidence of agriculture. Most early people moved with the seasons, but people at the Hagan Site grew some crops like corn and tobacco. This site is so special that it is a National Historic Landmark.

[SLIDE 28: TIPI RING SITE, TOOLE COUNTY] Archaeologists must be very respectful of Montana's special places because they are especially important to the heritage of modern Native Americans. Here archaeologists and tribal members gather together to honor tipi rings at the Benjamin Ranch Tipi Ring Site in Toole County. From tipi rings to stone tools, the archaeological resources of Montana are fragile and need to be preserved. They connect us with 12,000 years of human history. These ancient places and objects give us a window into the past so that we can better understand Montana today.

Term	Definition
Tipi rings	
Flint knappers	
Lithic	
Lithic scatter	
Lithic quarry	
Cairn	
Blind	
Medicine wheel	
Pictograph	
Petroglyph	
Buffalo jump	
Corral pound	
Drive line	
Wickiup	
Scarred trees	
Hagan Site	