

By Farr and Away the Best PalaeoIndian Site in Southern Saskatchewan

Tomasin Playford, Saskatchewan Archaeological Society; Karin Steuber, Saskatchewan Archaeological Society; Leo Pettipas, Manitoba Archaeological Society

Over 30 years ago, Biron Ebell reported the existence of a probable Cody complex site near Ogema, Saskatchewan, situated about 100km south of Regina. Since then, numerous artifacts have been recovered and a discrete scatter of bison remains (Fig. 1). Like most Palaeoindian loci in the region, the Farr site had originally been recorded as a surface collection, with artifacts and observed features exposed by cultivation and by wind and water erosion.

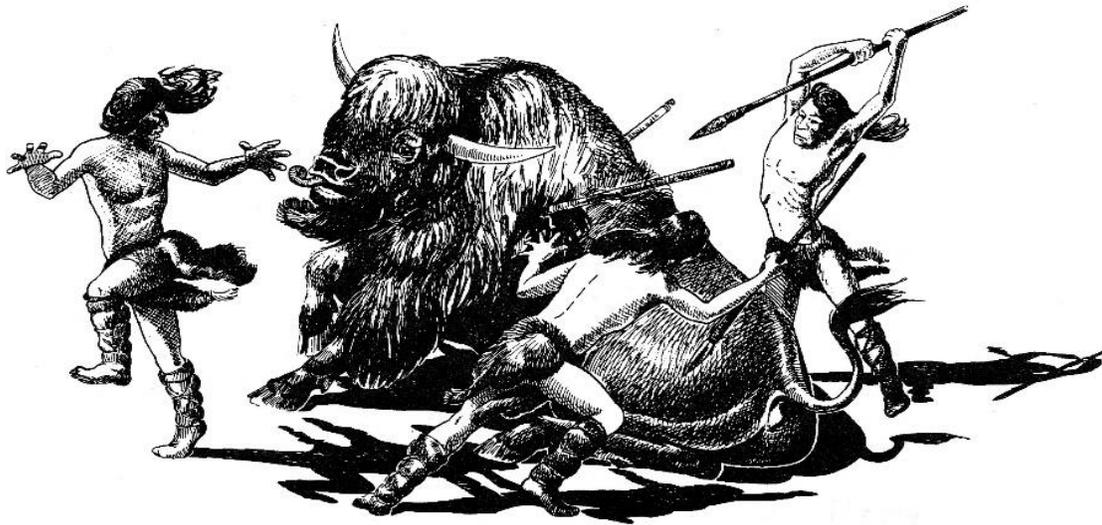


Figure 1. Bison were hunted by the Farr site people of long ago. Credit: Manitoba Parks Branch.

In 2014, the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society worked with Mr. Ebell to develop a community-based research program for the site. The goals of the project were to ascertain site boundaries, survey and map artifact and feature distributions, establish site integrity, confirm site age, and interpret the site within the context of Palaeoindian occupations on the northern plains. Local school groups, members of the local community, and the general public assisted with pedestrian surveys, shovel-testing, and full-scale excavations in 2015 and 2016.

Over the course of the two-year field program, 9m² were excavated as part of two block excavations along with nineteen shovel tests and two auger holes. The block excavations were placed in an area with large amounts of faunal material eroding out of the northern slope of the glacial kame on which the site resides. The shovel tests and auger holes were placed in both the cultivated and uncultivated portions of the site to determine any evidence of intact subsurface cultural occupation as well as site stratigraphy. The shovel tests did not produce any further archaeological evidence and a decision was made to concentrate on the bone exposure along the hillslope.

Area 1 produced over 4500 faunal remains and three *in-situ* Scottsbluff projectile points in what appears to be a bone dump feature (Figs. 2-4). The bone-breakage pattern in Area A is

clearly a result of human butchering. An additional two Scottsbluff points were recovered in both years from the ploughzone and a rodent burrow in Units 5 and 6, respectively. Additional lithic material in Area 1 included two secondary flakes, one retouched flake, and three pieces of shatter. One notable recovery from Unit 7 in Area 1 was a highly-fragmented mandible (Fig. 5) that was later reconstructed in the lab.

In 2016, a second excavation block was opened to the west of Area 1 where more bone was eroding. This area, Area 2, appeared to be archaeologically sterile until another bone dump feature was encountered at approximately 40cm below surface. Large quantities of faunal remains including a tibia from what appears to be a sub-adult were encountered in the final days of the 2016 field season (Fig. 6). Exposed bone was removed and these units were subsequently lined and backfilled at the end of the field season. It is felt that further investigations at the Farr site should reopen Area 2 and determine if it is contemporaneous with Area 1. Also, non-cultural taphonomic processes (weathering especially) are evident in Area 2, and this may be well worth looking into.



Figure 2. Close-up of first *in situ* Scottsbluff point in Unit 5 (2015).



Figure 3. 2015 *in situ* Scottsbluff points from Unit 5.



Figure 4. 2016 *in situ* Scottsbluff point from Unit 6.



Figure 5: Fragmented mandible (reconstructed) found in Unit 7 in 2016.



Figure 6: Fragmented tibia (reconstructed) found in Area 2 in 2016.

The results of the 2015 and 2016 field seasons have indicated that intact portions of this Cody complex site still do exist and additional study is warranted here. Currently, final cataloguing and analysis are being undertaken at the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society office in Saskatoon.

A Manitoba Perspective on the Farr Site

The Farr site excavations produced not only additional Cody diagnostics and further evidence of bison-hunting - the latter fully in keeping with the grassland environment that typified the locality in Cody times - but also a pair of C-14 dates that place the site squarely in the middle of the tenth millennium BCE. These results are fully consistent with other Cody radiometric dates from other sites in adjacent areas. But in addition, they also affirm that the Farr site occupation was coeval with the Campbell stage of Glacial Lake Agassiz, and this fact makes it of particular interest to the Manitoba archaeologist. It was for most of this Campbell period that the lake was at or near its maximum extent in this province, forming a massive, impenetrable barrier to human habitation of a sizeable portion of central Saskatchewan and most of the southern half of Manitoba (Figs. 7, 8). Predictably, Cody-style artifact finds are very rare within the Agassiz basin of both provinces (Meyer and Pettipas 2017).

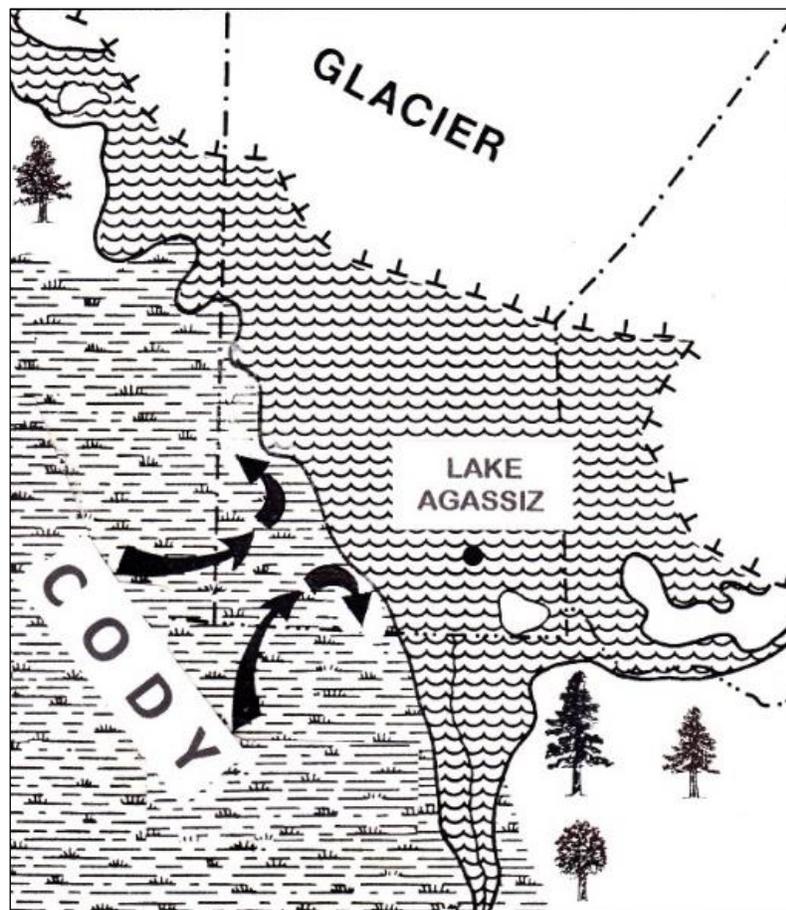


Figure 7. Movements of people from the west were halted and deflected by the presence of Lake Agassiz. This map helps us understand why the Farr site isn't located in the place where Winnipeg (dot) stands today.

The Second Prairie Level has provided abundant evidence of the Cody complex, particularly the southern Saskatchewan portion of it which contains several large Cody sites (Splawinski 2014). The immediate environs of Lake Agassiz have proven to be somewhat less productive of substantial Cody loci, which is in keeping with Dr Matthew Boyd's prediction that "environmental productivity would have decreased significantly as you approached Lake Agassiz, and increased as you moved away from it" (M. Boyd, personal communication to L. Pettipas, 2006).

Dr Boyd's perception brings to mind the (very) preliminary hypothesis framed over 50 years ago by Matt Hill, Field Director of the Glacial Lake Agassiz Survey, when he attempted to explain the seeming absence of artifacts within the gravels and sands of the Campbell shoreline: "During the period at which the Campbell beach formed the shore of Lake Agassiz it was an exposed shore fronting on a cold lake, with shallow margins, and probably a swampy hinterland. Such an environment would provide little in the way of resources" (Hill 1965:5).

In the time since Hill made that comment, library research and further archaeological fieldwork have turned up evidence of two flintknapping stations, in all probability of Cody origin, within Campbell beach deposits (Pettipas 2016). So people did indeed frequent the active Campbell shoreline and its environs.

Nor has the "resource-poor" idea seem to have stood the test of time. When Matt Hill did his fieldwork back in 1965, he had the opportunity to compare notes with Dr John Elson, a geologist who was doing his own thing in Hill's study area at the same time. Elson told him that only very small mollusks seem to occur in the beach deposits, and it is highly unlikely that this would have provided a

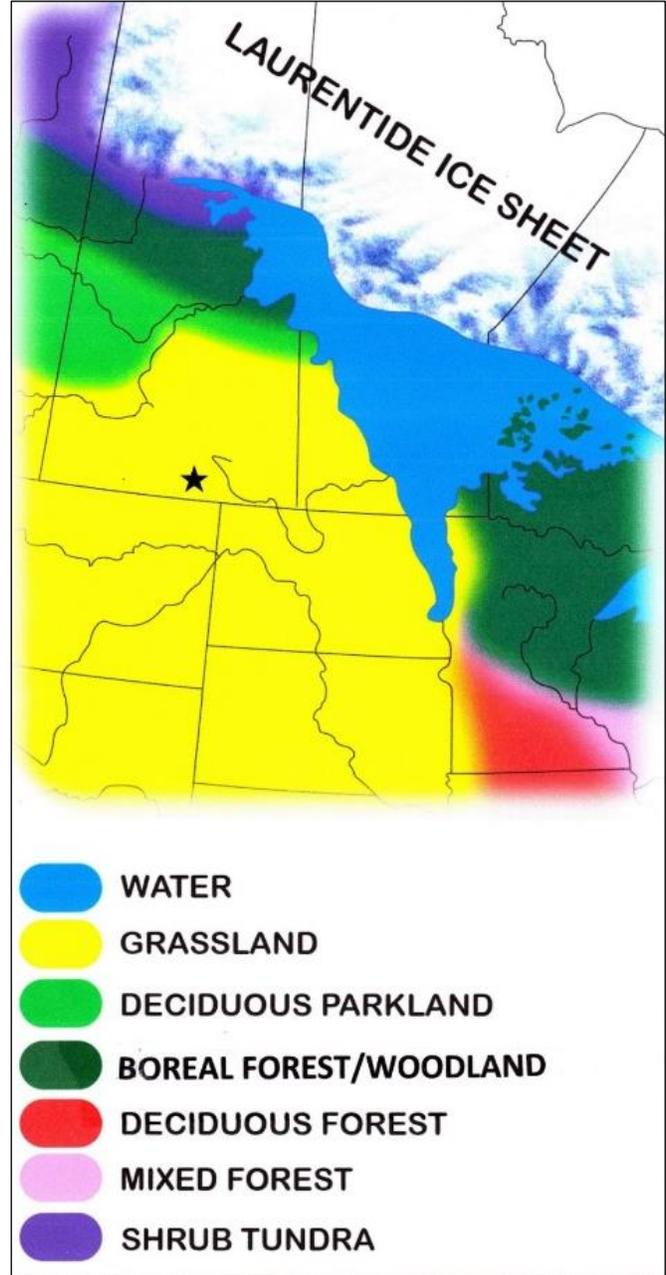


Figure 8. Major environmental macro-features of the continental interior of North America at the time that the Farr site was occupied. Star indicates the site location. Credit: Enbridge Pipelines Inc; artwork by Andrew McCausland, after A. Dyke, D. Giroux, and L. Robertson, 2004.

habitat for any but the most culturally specialized groups, not for the people who might have been available to inhabit it (Hill 1965:6).

We now know that bison, moose, and fish had all lived within the precincts of Lake Agassiz when it was at its height (Hay 1924:200; Coleman 1941:171; Kenyon and Churcher 1965; Nielsen *et al* 1984). In particular, the recovery of bone specimens in the relict strandline features seems to bear out that bison inhabited the shores (at least occasionally) and the landscapes upslope behind them. Relatively speaking, however, the margins of Lake Agassiz and its immediate hinterlands are unlikely to have possessed the biomass that was available on the grasslands of the Second Prairie Level in Saskatchewan. The difference was one of degree.

All things considered, then, the Farr site, located as it is at a higher elevation than the Lake Agassiz basin and well to the west of it (and in prime “buffalo pasture” to boot) is exactly where it should be.

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