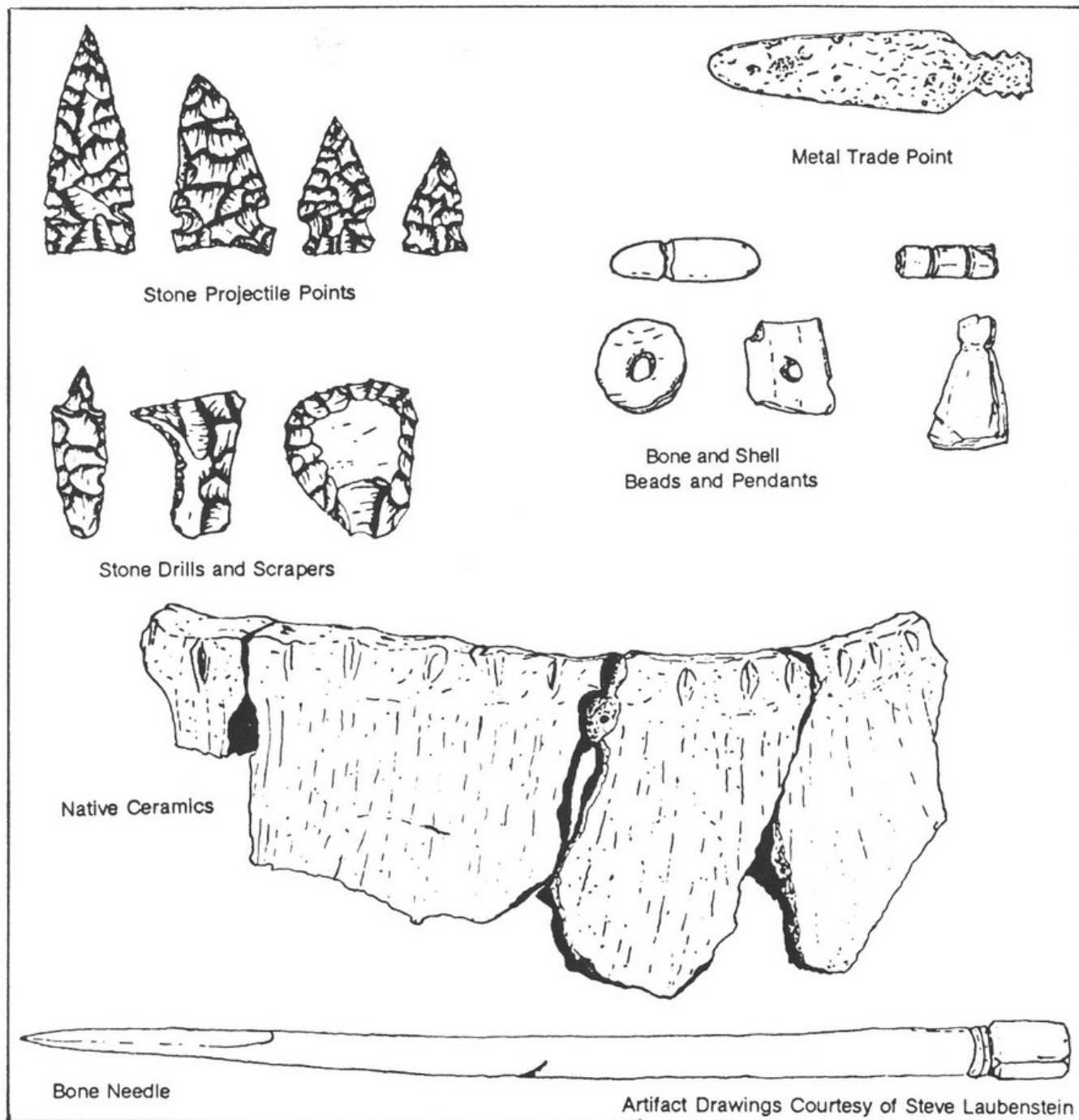


A SELF GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF THE



SAAMIS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AND THE VALLEY OF SEVEN PERSONS CREEK

WELCOME to the City of Medicine Hat and the Saamis Archaeological Site.

The booklet you are holding has been designed to guide you on a walking tour of the valley of Seven Persons Creek and the Saamis Archaeological Site. The majority of your tour will take place along a series of paved trails developed and maintained by the Parks Department of the City of Medicine Hat. These trails travel throughout the City and provide both pedestrians and cyclists with access to the beautiful landscapes found along the floors and rims of the creek and river valleys within the City.

For many thousands of years, Native groups travelled to the vicinity of Medicine Hat during their seasonal round of activities. They congregated in this area to take advantage of the rich resources that are provided within and immediately adjacent to the valleys of Seven Persons Creek and the South Saskatchewan River. These resources included not only the large numbers of Bison present on the Alberta Plains but the incredible variety of smaller animals and plants in the region.

The Saamis Archaeological Site (EaOq-7) is one of the largest and most significant Native camps in southeastern Alberta. Its importance is such that in the 1980s the Province of Alberta designated the site as one of only a small number of Provincial Historic Sites. As a result, the site is well protected and will hopefully provide the public and archaeological researchers with valuable data well into the future.

The walk you are about to take begins in the center of the Saamis Tepee. The map on the following page shows the location of the six View Points along the tour. The first of these is situated on the edge of the valley of Seven Persons Creek due west of the Tepee. Please feel free to ask a tour guide how to reach the first View Point. If a tour guide is unavailable, the staff in the main office will be pleased to help you get started.

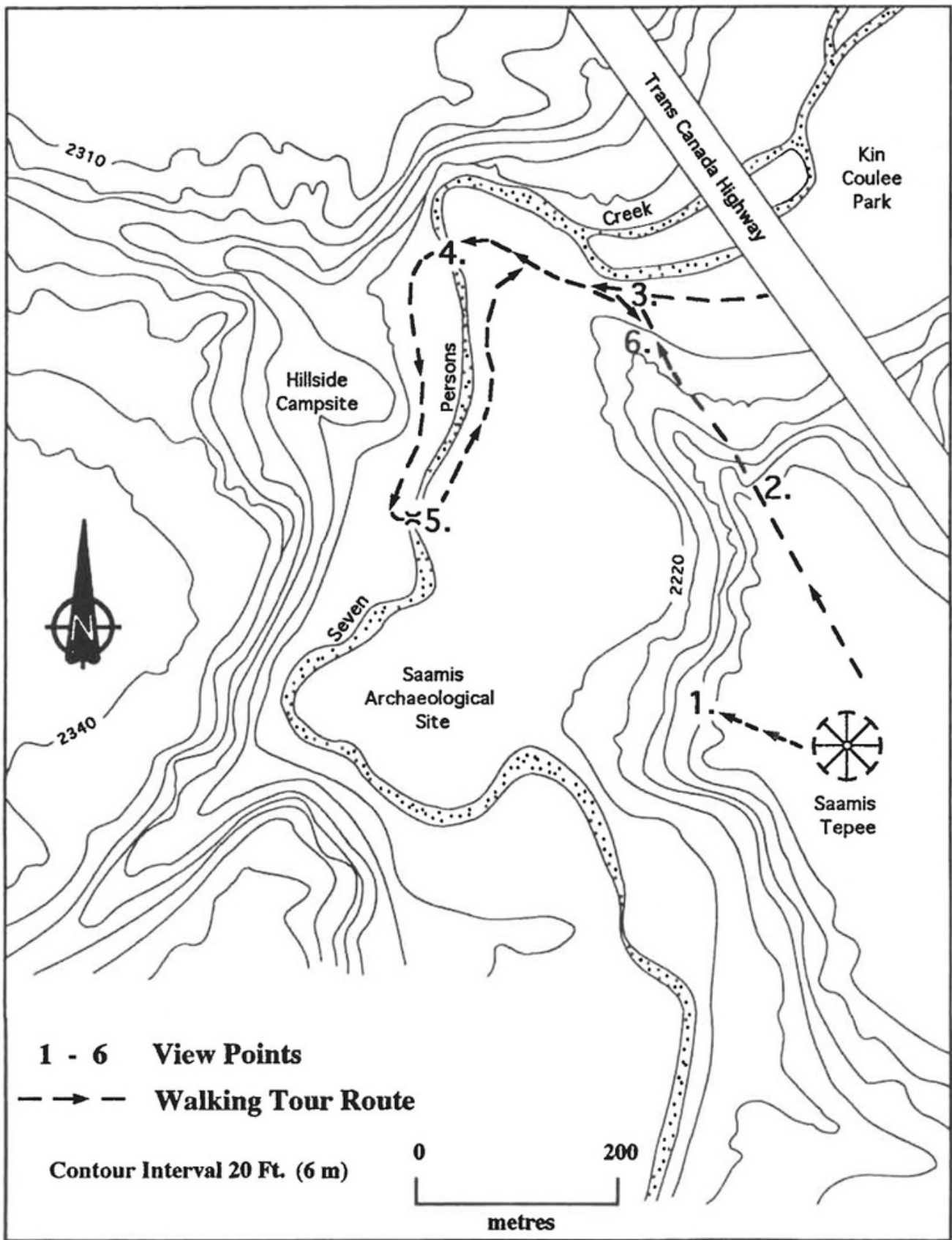
As you make your way to the first View Point don't forget to keep an eye out for the many types of plants present on the prairie. Although you are walking across a dry grassland an amazing variety other plants are present in great quantities. Remember not to step on the cactus!!

This booklet was prepared jointly by:

The Saamis Tepee Association

and

Ethos Consultants Ltd.



Topographical map showing location of sites within the valley of Seven Persons Creek and the walking tour route.

VIEW POINT 1: SEVEN PERSONS CREEK VALLEY

The beautiful valley you see stretching to the right and left was not cut by the small stream meandering across its floor. At the end of the last Ice Age about 12,000 years ago enormous amounts of meltwater from the ice front flowed south cutting a deep channel across the landscape. Once the ice had completely melted and the South Saskatchewan River began flowing again, Seven Persons Creek crept its way along the deep channel and eventually found a route to the River.

Within a few thousand years of the end of the last Ice Age, Native groups began to occupy the open plains and river and creek valleys of Alberta. To date, more than 10,000 archaeological sites have been discovered in the southern part of the Province. The Saamis Site, which occupies most of the valley floor below you is only one of approximately 30 sites which are present within the boundaries of the City of Medicine Hat. Archaeological studies have shown that Native groups began to camp along the valley at least 4,000 years ago and perhaps much earlier. As you will learn later, the Saamis Site is considerably younger than that.

To find the next View Point, return to the center of the Saamis Tepee and then follow the paved Trail to the north. View Point 2, like View Point 1 is located on the rim of the creek valley.



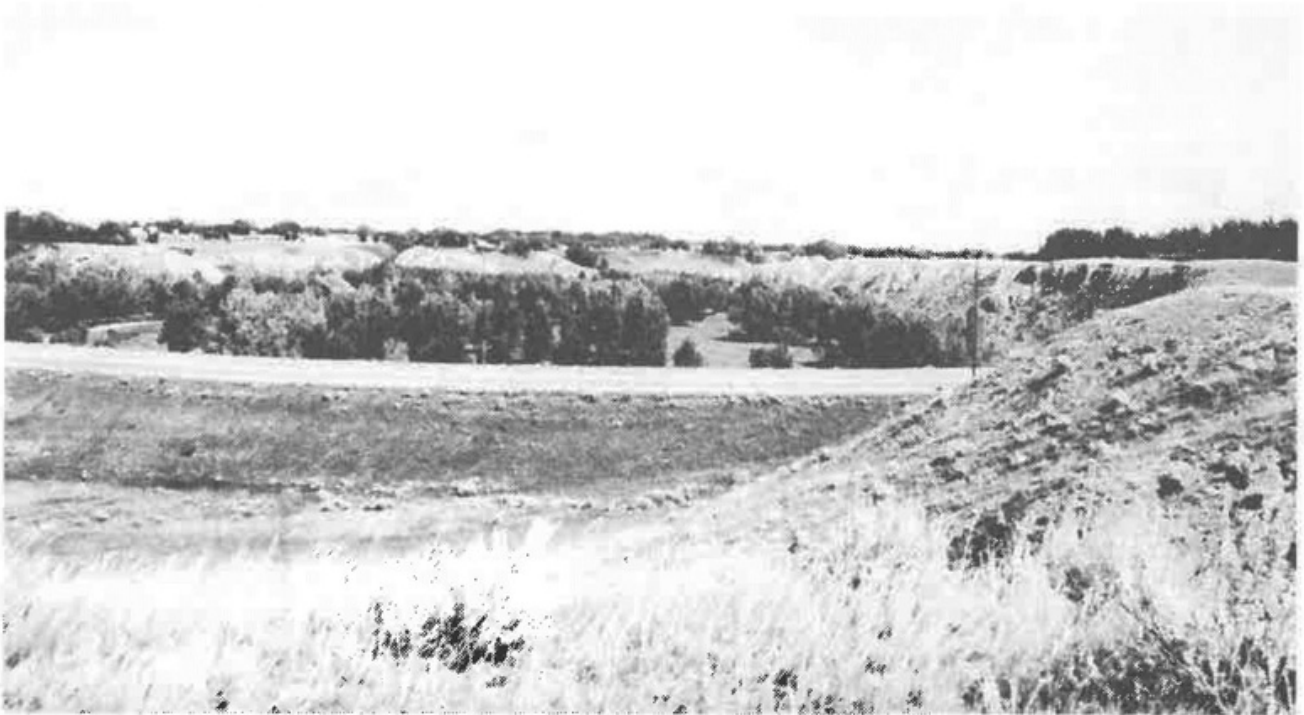
A view of the valley of Seven Persons Creek from View Point 1. The Saamis Archaeological Site occupies the entire valley floor from the bridge to the golf course.

VIEW POINT 2: THE SEARCH FOR A BISON KILL

One of the most intriguing aspects of the archaeological studies along the valley of Seven Persons Creek has been the search for a Bison Kill associated with the Saamis Archaeological Site. Excavation at the Saamis site in the early 1970s recovered a large amount of Bison bone. The camp was very large and it was clear that the Natives captured and processed a substantial number of animals. It has always been assumed that some form of Bison Kill would have to be located near to the camp. In order to capture a relatively large number of Bison, Native groups would often operate a communal kill. Exactly what type of kill was used in association with the Saamis Site is not known. It might have been a Buffalo Jump where animals were driven over a steep portion of the valley wall to fall to their deaths. It might also have been what is known as a "Trap" or "Pound" where Bison were driven into a natural enclosure or an area created by a brush fence to be killed with bows and arrows.

During the fall of 1992 a search was made for the killsite. The search was focussed on relatively undisturbed portions of the valley downstream from the Saamis Site. (see photograph below). Unfortunately, the kill was not found. Its location remains a mystery.

To find View Point 3 continue along the trail to the valley floor. The View Point is situated at the junction of the trails.



A view looking downstream along Seven Persons Creek from View Point 2. It is possible that the killsite was destroyed by construction of the Highway. Hopefully this was not the case and the kill is still present in the valley.

VIEW POINT 3: SEVEN PERSONS CREEK VALLEY AND THE HILLSIDE CAMPSITE (EaOq-8)

The floor of the valley of Seven Persons Creek is typical of small valley systems throughout southern Alberta. Even though it is situated within an immense dry grassland the shelter provided by the valley walls and the presence of water allows and incredible variety of plants to flourish. The creek itself is flowing to the north of the View Point. You may be able to hear it, but a dense thicket of Willow and other types of brush blocks it from view.

To your left, on a small terrace along the far wall of the valley (see photograph below) is the Hillside Campsite. Although somewhat smaller than the Saamis Archaeological Site, the Hillside Campsite is no less significant. It is a buried camp containing the remains of at least four separate Native occupations. Excavation at the site in 1975 and 1976 revealed artifacts buried to depths of up to one metre. The uppermost occupation is considered to be of the same relatively young age as the Saamis Site. One of the lower occupations, however, is known to be approximately 3000 years old ! A possibly older occupation is also present, but its age has yet to be determined.

To find View Point 4, walk along the trail which goes into the valley. Keep to the right and you will find the next View Point on the bridge which crosses Seven Persons Creek.



A view along the floor of Seven Persons Creek Valley from View Point 3. The Hillside Campsite occupies the small terrace noted by the arrow.

VIEW POINT 4: SEVEN PERSONS CREEK

With the exception of one important factor, Seven Persons Creek is typical of the majority of small streams in southern Alberta. These streams often meander widely through deep valleys and always wind their way eventually to a major river. Seven Persons Creek flows roughly northeast from your position for only a few more kilometers. It then empties into the South Saskatchewan River within the boundaries of the City of Medicine Hat.

Seven Persons Creek differs from the majority of other streams in southern Alberta for the simple reason that it contains water year round. The water you see below you comes from one of the major irrigation systems in the region and flows into the creek several kilometres upstream. For the Native occupants of the Saamis Archaeological Site and the other archaeological sites in the area, Seven Persons Creek probably contained large amounts of water only during the spring and early summer. By late summer it would have been almost completely dry!

As has been mentioned earlier, there is a rich diversity of plant life within the valley. The Native occupants were well aware of these plants and developed many uses for them. The following page provides a brief list of some of the plants you can see around you and a description of how they were used by Native groups.

To find the next View Point continue along the trail until it once again crosses the creek. View Point 5 is situated on the far side of the next bridge.



A view along Seven Persons Creek from View Point 4. The water level in the creek is artificially maintained from a large irrigation system.

A Brief List of Plants and Their Uses by Native Groups

Plant Type

Native Uses

Green algae scum from stagnant water

- A pigment for paint

Various mushrooms and fungi

- Some could be eaten while others were used as a purgative

Pincushion Cactus

- The flesh of the plant could be used to clear dirty water or could be used to cure diarrhea (primarily in children).

Prickly Pear Cactus

- The flesh could be eaten. In addition the spines were used to cure rheumatism and muscle pains. The spines were inserted in the flesh of the patient and set on fire. By the time they had burnt into the flesh, the patient had forgotten all about his other discomforts!!

Death Camas

- The bulbs and sprouts were used as dressings for sprains and bruises.

Sweet Grass

- Used as an incense for all ceremonies.
- Used as a treatment for sore eyes.

Horsetail Rushes

- The entire plant was used as fall and winter forage for horses, as a horse medicine and as a sandpaper for polishing arrows and other wooden objects.

Creeping Juniper

- The needles were used to help facial troubles and treat hemorrhages.
- The plant was also used in ceremonies designed to get rid of ghosts.

Wild Onion

- The bulbs could be eaten raw or cooked.
- The entire plant was used as a sore throat remedy.

Cow Parsnip

- The roots were used in the treatment of rheumatism, arthritis, boils and intestinal pains.

Willow

- The branches were used in the construction of arrow shafts and small dwellings.
- The bark contains a large amount of tannin which was used to tan hides.
- Burned bark was powdered and applied to fresh wounds and ulcers.

VIEW POINT 5: THE SAAMIS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (EaOq-7)

The Saamis Archaeological Site is one of the most important sites in southeastern Alberta. It covers almost all of the floor of the valley in front of you, on both sides of Seven Persons Creek, from the bridge you just crossed to the golf course in the distance. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of the site on the surface. The vast quantities of cultural material that it contains are protected just below the surface.

The Saamis Site was first discovered in the late 1960s. In 1971 it was brought to the attention of Dr. Laurie Milne of the Medicine Hat College who undertook excavations at the site in 1971, 1972 and 1973. The majority of this work was funded by the National Museum of Man (now the Museum of Civilization). Over a period of three years more than 300 square metres of excavation took place with thousands of artifacts, mostly fragments of Bison bone, recovered. Dr. Milne was surprised at the amount of cultural material present and the intact nature of the site as this portion of the floor of Seven Persons Creek Valley had been a small homestead in the 1920s and the location of a feedlot in the 1950s.

The excavations revealed a large Native camp and meat processing locale buried at depths of about 20 centimetres. It appeared to represent a single occupation. On a lower terrace (adjacent to the creek to your right) a dense layer of bone at about 75 centimetres indicated an earlier butchering locale.



A view of the floor of Seven Persons Creek valley from View Point 5. The Saamis Site occupies almost all of the terrain within view.

The living floors of the camp that were exposed during excavation revealed dense concentrations of bone mixed with fragments of stone tools including numerous stone projectile points (arrow heads). There were also a large number of hearths and pits associated with the processing of meat.

By far the most significant aspect of the Saamis Site was its age. Dr. Milne was confident that the site was quite young, given the fact that it was not deeply buried. An examination of the size and shape of the projectile points and a study of the kinds of ceramics recovered from excavation indicated that the campsite probably dated to the period from 1600-1800 AD. Native camps of this age are extremely rare in southern Alberta. Most have been destroyed over the last century by farming and the development of towns and cities.

The recent age of the Saamis Site was also confirmed in two other ways. Samples of Bison bone were submitted for Radio carbon dating. Dates from the site pointed toward an age of only about 150-300 years. In addition to this a small number of artifacts found during excavation indicated recent Native occupation. They consisted of four glass trade beads and a portion of a metal trade point. As Native



The camp shown in the photograph above was occupied in the early 1900s by Native groups near Gleichen, Alberta. It is possible that when the Saamis Site was used, it looked much the same way. Photograph courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Alberta. From the Ernest Brown Collection (Number B. 980)

groups in southern Alberta did not manufacture glass or had access to iron, it was clear that these items had to come from Europeans. The Saamis site was, however, too old to have been occupied when European explorers arrived in southern Alberta (about 1800 AD). The trade goods in the site suggested that it was occupied during what is known as the Protohistoric Period, a time when European trade goods were present in southern Alberta but few Natives had yet seen a white man.

An examination of seasonally sensitive bone from the Saamis Site notes that while the terrace was used by various Native groups throughout the year, the site appears to have been primarily a winter camp. Natives probably arrived at the site in November or December and remained until April or May. Based upon the artifacts recovered from excavation, the primary activity at the camp was the processing of meat. More than 95% of all of the artifacts consist of fragments of bone and virtually all of this came from Bison. The kinds of Bison bone present in the camp suggest that a killsite was located close to, but not within, camp boundaries. As has already been noted, the killsite has yet to be identified.

Most of the meat processed at the camp would have been eaten relatively quickly. Some, however, would have been cooked and left outside to be frozen. It would then have been eaten later in the winter when fresh meat was not easy to find. The initial butchering of a Bison was probably undertaken by the men in the camp. The women would then undertake all of the secondary butchering and cooking activities.

The dependence of Native groups upon Bison is shown by the fact that few other kinds of animals were identified in the artifact sample. Remains of only one deer and two antelope were found. Both of these animals are present throughout the winter in southern Alberta and can provide small amounts of meat. The only other kinds of animal bones present in the artifacts from the site consist of wolf and red fox. Both of these were probably scavengers, lurking around the edges of the camp in search of scraps of meat.

Although the lifestyle of Native groups in southern Alberta was certainly harder than we are used to, it was by no means an unbearable existence. The lodges with their Bison hide covers were warm and comfortable. A Bison hide robe was much warmer than the winter coats we wear today. There was also a considerable amount of leisure time in a winter camp. Women would mend and make clothes and ornaments such as beads. Men would repair their hunting tools. Both men and women also spent much time around their campfires gossiping and either creating or passing on stories of the past and future to the children of the camp. Without a written language, the Natives relied on word-of-mouth to pass on their amazing knowledge of the natural world and their rich cultural heritage.

There is one more View Point to reach on your tour. Continue along the trail back to View Point 3. View Point 6 is located just up the wall of the valley before the steep climb back to the Saamis Tepee.

VIEW POINT 6: SEVEN PERSONS CREEK VALLEY AND THE FUTURE

As you stop to catch your breath and prepare for the climb back to the Saamis Tepee, it is important to take a last look at the valley of Seven Persons Creek and consider what the future holds for this beautiful landscape. All of the valley from the highway to the golf course is within the designated boundaries of the Saamis Archaeological Site. It is likely that it will be protected as a natural area in the future. The City of Medicine Hat is anxious to provide natural areas within its boundaries for use by local residents and visitors. At present it is hard to find easily accessible natural areas within major population centers. The well maintained trail system which you have just travelled along allows anyone to enjoy the amazing scenery of the region.

In terms of the Saamis Archaeological Site and the other known sites within the valley, much still needs to be done. Although archaeological research has provided some information on how the Native occupants of southern Alberta utilized the rich resources of Seven Persons Creek valley, further work is possible. The question of the location of the killsite still needs to be resolved and additional excavation at the Saamis site could provide new insights into Native lifestyles. Portions of the sites must also be left undisturbed for future generations of archaeologists to study.



A view looking along the floor of Seven Persons Creek valley from View Point 6.

WHILE IN MEDICINE HAT WHY NOT VISIT

- Downtown Historic Walking Tour
- Echo Dale Farm and Regional Park
- Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery
- Police Point Park and Interpretive Centre
- South East Alberta Travel & Convention Association
- Clay Products Interpretive Centre (Great Wall of China)

Hours of Operation

9:00 am - 9:00 pm
7 days a week, seasonal

Inquiries

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