

# **REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL, ETHNOHISTORIC, HISTORIC, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE RELEVANT TO THE CROW BUTTE REGION IN NORTHWEST NEBRASKA**

**(WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON THE AREA SURROUNDING THE CROW BUTTE  
RESOURCES, INC., IN SITU URANIUM RECOVERY FACILITY,  
DAWES COUNTY, NEBRASKA)**

**Prepared by:**

**Jerry D. Spangler, M.A., RPA  
SC&A, Inc.  
2200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201-3324**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Crow Butte Resources, Inc. (CBR), of Crawford, Dawes County, NE, currently operates an in situ uranium recovery (ISR) facility under U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Source Materials License SUA-1534. The licensee submitted a license renewal application to the NRC in 2008. The NRC staff issued an environmental assessment (EA) in 2014 to document its environmental review of the application. In August 2015, an Atomic Safety and Licensing Board held a hearing on several contentions, including a contention challenging the staff's review of cultural resources. Subsequently, on May 26, 2016, the Board issued a partial initial decision (LBP-16-7) which concluded that the NRC staff, in its EA, failed to meet its obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act to identify historic properties that are significant to the Oglala Sioux Tribe and to take a "hard look" at potential impacts of the license renewal on sites of significance to the Tribe within the CBR ISR license area. As part of its efforts to remedy these deficiencies, the NRC asked SC&A, Inc. (SC&A) to provide an updated literature review of relevant information on historic and cultural resources specific to the CBR ISR license area.

In performing this review, SC&A, applied guidance by the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (Nebraska SHPO 2006). Previous cultural resources investigations in this region have been minimal and none have been completed since an earlier cursory review (SC&A 2011a). Therefore, this review encompasses the 1,149-hectare (2,840-acre) CBR ISR facility license area and a surrounding buffer of (ca.) 8 kilometers (5 miles). This literature review offers a brief review of previous professional historic and archaeological research, publicly available documents found in a variety of libraries and on-line forums, and additional information gathered by the NRC staff's contractor. The review does not include confidential information held by the Tribes.

This literature review focuses on Native American cultural resources found in the Crow Butte area. For the purposes of this review, the term "Crow Butte area" refers to the general area within 8 kilometers of the CBR ISR license area, and the term "Crow Butte region" refers to a broader cultural landscape within 120 kilometers (75 miles) that includes Dawes County and contiguous portions of Sioux County, Box Butte County, and Sheridan County, all in Nebraska, portions of Fall River County and Shannon County in southwestern South Dakota, and portions of Niobrara County and Goshen County in southeastern Wyoming. Because published and unpublished sources specific to the Crow Butte area are limited, this review by necessity discusses Native American cultural resources within broader historic contexts. It is not intended to be a review of all cultural resources in western Nebraska, nor is it intended to be a comprehensive review of Native American histories on the Northern Plains.

The document is organized to address four different cultural-historic contexts specific to Native Americans who might have occupied western Nebraska: (1) the Prehistoric period, which summarizes the limited archaeological evidence that is reflective of Nomadic hunting in prehistory before about AD 1700, (2) the Protohistoric period, which includes the ethnohistoric evidence offered by the first Euro-American fur traders to the Northern Plains as it relates to the history of all Native American groups present in the Crow Butte region (about AD 1700 to 1800), (3) the Historic period, which began with written accounts of Euro-American traders in the region, including the establishment of the first trading posts in Dawes County in the 1830s and/or 1840s until the forced removal of Lakota from northwestern Nebraska in 1873, and (4) Native American perspectives derived from investigations of traditional cultural properties in the general area.

# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Geographic Scope.....	1
1.2 Scope of Literature Review .....	2
1.3 Historic Context.....	3
2. PREHISTORIC PERIOD .....	5
2.1 Paleo-Indian Big Game Hunters.....	5
2.2 Archaic Hunter-Foragers (8,000 to 2,000 BP).....	6
2.3 Plains Woodland (2,500 to 1,000 BP) .....	6
2.4 Plains Village (1,000 to 300 BP).....	6
2.5 Crow Butte Archaeological Record .....	8
2.5.1 Early Archaeological Research.....	8
2.5.2 Investigations of the CBR ISR License Area .....	8
2.5.3 Other Investigations.....	11
3. PROTOHISTORIC PERIOD .....	15
3.1 The Sedentary Tribes .....	17
3.1.1 The Arikara .....	17
3.1.2 The Hidatsa .....	18
3.1.3 The Mandan.....	18
3.1.4 The Pawnee.....	18
3.2 The Nomadic Tribes .....	19
3.2.1 The Arapaho .....	19
3.2.2 The Cheyenne .....	19
3.2.3 The Comanche .....	20
3.2.4 The Crow Nation.....	20
3.2.5 The Kiowa.....	20
3.2.6 The Plains Apache.....	21
3.2.7 Summary .....	21
4. HISTORIC PERIOD.....	22
4.1 Oceti Sakowin Origins .....	23
4.2 Western Expansionism.....	23
4.3 The Lakota in Western Nebraska 1830–1850.....	26
4.4 The Great Sioux Wars 1851–1877 .....	29
4.5 Sign or Starve Era .....	31

4.6 The Archaeological Evidence .....	34
5. PLACES OF TRIBAL SIGNIFICANCE .....	37
6. SUMMARY .....	40
7. REFERENCES .....	42



## FIGURES

Figure 1: View of Crow Butte looking northeast across the CBR ISR facility.....	2
Figure 2: Map of the Crow Butte area as used in this review. ....	3
Figure 3: The earliest hypothesized migration routes into the Northern Plains, beginning about AD 1200. (Image modified from Woodhead 1993:16.) .....	7
Figure 4: Migrations into the Northern Plains during the Protohistoric period (after AD 1600) prompted by the Iroquois displacing groups in the Ohio River Valley and Ojibwe-Cree groups displacing others around the Great Lakes. (Image from Woodhead 1993:24.) .....	16
Figure 5: Lower Brulé chief Swift Bear. (Image: NSHS RG1227.PH000010-000007.).....	23
Figure 6: Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota bands comprising the Seven Council Fires. (Image modified from Woodhead 1993:20.).....	24
Figure 7: Crow chief White Bear is named in historical documents as the leader of the Crow raiding party in 1849. (Image: Library of Congress.).....	27
Figure 8: Oglala Lakota chief Red Cloud. (Image: Library of Congress.) .....	28
Figure 9: Lower Brulé Lakota chief Spotted Tail. (Image: Library of Congress.) .....	28
Figure 10: Oglala chief Man Afraid of His Horses was among the greatest chiefs of the Historic period. (Image: Library of Congress.) .....	30
Figure 11: Historic photo (stereoscopic pair) depicting the location of Red Dog’s camp in about 1877 (Image: NSHS RG 2955-48.) .....	36
Figure 12: Lovers Leap is part of the Lakota oral traditions related to the Crow Butte region. ...	39

## TABLES

Table 1: Prehistoric Resources within 5 miles of the CBR ISR Facility .....	9
Table 2: Prehistoric Resources within the CBR ISR Facility License Area .....	13
Table 3: Historic Native American Resources within 5 miles of the CBR ISR Facility .....	35

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has requested a literature review specific to the Crow Butte region that is similar to a Class I survey. A formal Class I survey is, by traditional definition, a study of published and unpublished documents, records, files, registers, and other sources resulting in analysis and synthesis of all reasonably available data. Class I inventories encompass prehistoric, historic, and ethnological/sociological elements, as well as places of traditional cultural or religious importance to Native Americans or other cultural groups, and “are in large part chronicles of past land uses, and as such they should be relevant to current land use decisions” (BLM 2004: Section 2.2.1.A). The term “literature review” is commonly used by Federal agencies today to denote a more limited-scale review specific to smaller scale undertakings that is intended to familiarize the cultural resources specialists with the types of resources known or expected to occur within the project area, the nature of local land-use patterns, current research issues, and geomorphic factors that may affect site integrity or visibility (see for example Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 2020:14 and section C2 therein).

The depth of an official literature review varies by Federal agency and from State to State. Guidelines issued by the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) indicate that a “Records review...will include at a minimum the following: 1) National Register of Historic Places [National Register], 2) National Landmark Inventory, 3) Nebraska Master Archaeological Site File, and 4) pertinent published and unpublished archaeological literature. The record review should include names and addresses of any informants contacted and who contributed information on specific sites” (Nebraska SHPO 2006:18). For the purposes of this literature review, we also include ethnohistoric, ethnographic, historic, and traditional cultural property (TCP) reports relevant to the Crow Butte region.

The information in this report includes, but is not limited to, documents provided by the licensee or developed during the staff’s initial review of the license renewal application, for example, the Bozell & Pepperl Class III archaeological survey reports (1982, 1987), a tribal cultural property survey report (Santee Sioux Nation 2013), the NRC staff’s 2014 Environmental Assessment (EA), the license renewal application, and reports developed by the staff’s original contractor in support of the staff’s EA (Nickens 2018, Nickens et al. 2018). Additionally, this review considered other relevant existing information and literature related to other projects in this geographic region. This includes information from the Nebraska SHPO, other federal agencies, and any relevant State and Federal Government agency studies.

## 1.1 Geographic Scope

Crow Butte Resources, Inc. (CBR) is an NRC-licensed in situ uranium recovery (ISR) facility located on the west side of the Crow Butte geographic feature with a license area of 1,149 hectares (2,840 acres). In consultation with the NRC staff, the Crow Butte historical landscape is roughly defined for the purposes of this review as (ca.) an 8-kilometer (5 mile) radius from the center point of the CBR license area, but with the flexibility to include cultural resources and historic contexts from adjacent areas as needed. The Crow Butte area includes the Crow Butte and Little Crow Butte geographic features about 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) to the northeast of the license area (figure 1), the town of Crawford and the neighboring Lovers Leap geographic feature about 6.4 kilometers (4 miles) to the north, and the Fort Robinson and Red Cloud Agency National Historic Landmarks about 8 kilometers (5 miles) to the northwest.



**Figure 1: View of Crow Butte looking northeast across the CBR ISR facility.**

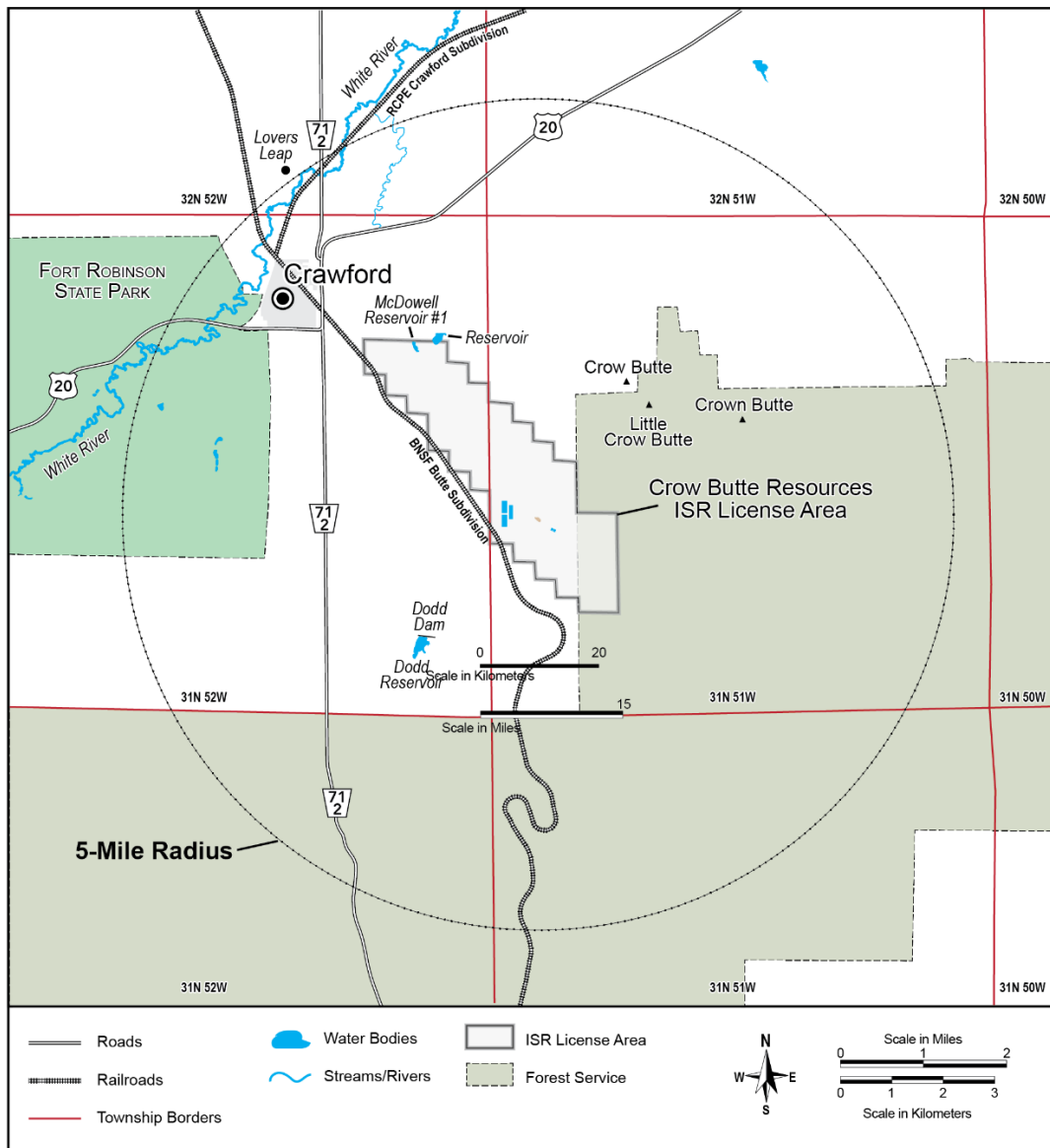
In the Crow Butte region, the Spotted Tail Agency and adjacent Camp Sheridan, both of which are listed in the National Register, are located 71 kilometers (44 miles) east of the license area on the Beaver Creek tributary to the White River; both of these sites are discussed hereafter because of their relevance to the Lower Brulé Lakota who used the Crow Butte region as a winter camp. Other nearby archaeological sites listed on the National Register include the Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site (25SX115) near Harrison and the Wind Springs Ranch Historic and Archaeological District (25SX600-665) north of Scottsbluff, both located in neighboring Sioux County and well outside the Crow Butte area. Portions of CBR's proposed Three Crow Expansion Area and proposed North Trend Expansion Area are within the 8-kilometer (5-mile) radius, and discussions of the cultural resource investigations conducted at these localities are included hereafter (figure 2).

## **1.2 Scope of Literature Review**

This literature review is an attempt to summarize reasonably available cultural resource data, both published and unpublished, from a variety of sources, but with a focus primarily on the region around Crow Butte and the current CBR ISR license area in western Dawes County, NE. This review is derived from primary and secondary sources, including previous archaeological inventory reports and published histories of the region. It does not include confidential historic and ethnographic information in the possession of the Tribes. In May 2021, SC&A visited the region to collect relevant materials from the Museum of the Fur Trade in Chadron, NE; Fort Robinson National Historic District Museum just outside of Crawford, NE; and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Sioux County, NE (U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission 2021).<sup>1</sup> Additional historical information was collected in November 2021 by the staff contractor to augment the May 2021 efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Attempts to visit other local museums were not successful due to closures related to COVID-19.



**Figure 2: Map of the Crow Butte area as used in this review.**

Archaeological, ethnographic, and historic sources specific to the Northern Plains are voluminous in quantity and scope, with literally thousands of published and unpublished reports, some of them more than 1,000 pages in length. The analysis of published and unpublished literature and other sources reviewed here is, however, judiciously focused on those materials and resources most relevant to the Crow Butte region (see Nickens 2018 for a more thorough discussion of the broader Black Hills cultural landscape).

### 1.3 Historic Context

This literature review follows guidelines published by the Nebraska SHPO that emphasize the use of historic contexts (Nebraska SHPO 2006:10 and appendix 2). A historic context is an organizational format that groups information about related historic properties in terms of three basic factors: (1) theme or topic, (2) time, and (3) place or space. A single historic context

describes one or more aspects of the historic development of an area and identifies the significant patterns that individual historic properties represent (Nebraska SHPO 2006:10; see also NPS 1997).

Historic contexts are intended to guide the survey, inventory, registration, and protection programs and form part of the comprehensive historic preservation planning process in each State. In addition, consideration of a property's eligibility for nomination to the National Register is evaluated within the framework of a historic context(s) (NPS 1997; Wyatt 2009). The Nebraska SHPO is responsible for defining historic contexts in the State of Nebraska.

For this review, four overarching historic contexts are applied, each of which can include subcontexts intended to organize cultural data by time and space. This review considers only Native American resources in western Nebraska. Relevant historic contexts considered here include the following:

- The Prehistoric period of time before about AD 1700 for which there are no supporting historic documents, and all cultural data are derived from archaeological research. This period has been organized into multiple time periods and complexes based on distinctive and temporally sensitive artifact types, settlement and land use patterns, and demographic shifts corresponding to environmental changes. Archaeological sites without temporally diagnostic artifacts are typically included as "unknown prehistoric."
- The Protohistoric period is that period of time when Euro-American trade goods begin to appear on the Northern Plains, but there is minimal or no historic documentation of interaction between Native Americans and (mostly) Canadian fur traders. These fur traders began making regular forays into the upper Missouri River country in the middle 1700s during a period of wide-scale western migrations of Siouan-speaking and Algonquian-speaking groups from the Great Lakes region. For the purposes of this review, the Protohistoric period extends from about AD 1700 to 1800; there is minimal evidence of this period in the Crow Butte region.
- The Historic period began about AD 1800 when regular interaction occurred between Native Americans and Euro-Americans across the Northern Plains, resulting in written accounts found in traders' journals, official government expedition reports, and the accounts of adventurers and artists published in eastern newspapers. In the Dawes County region, the historic record indicates a robust Lower Brulé Lakota presence was in place by the 1830s, centered on two trading posts that catered to local Lakota bands. As discussed later, the Historic period also includes the Great Sioux Wars and Reservation period from about 1850 to 1877.
- A fourth historic context is not found in the Nebraska SHPO guidelines but is one that has emerged across the Northern Plains in recent years. It consists of TCPs and other sites of historic, cultural, and religious significance to the Tribes. This section attempts to summarize these cultural resources using TCP studies in the general region.

## 2. PREHISTORIC PERIOD

The tangible remains of past human activities are commonly referred to as “archaeological sites,” a term applied to both prehistoric and historic resources. In western Nebraska, prehistoric sites are those attributed to indigenous peoples before the arrival of Euro-American trappers, traders, explorers, soldiers, and colonists, and the term “pre-contact” is commonly applied. Prehistoric sites are routinely organized by Plains archaeologists into phases, periods, and complexes based on the presence of distinctive and temporally sensitive artifacts and constructed features (Frison 1991; Schlesier 1994; Zimmerman 1985; see also Nebraska SHPO 2006: appendix 2).

The current archaeological nomenclature is merely a convenience created to organize archaeological evidence by time, activity, and place. This evidence might include relatively simple sites, such as tool maintenance locales and temporary camping hearths with limited spatial extent, or it could include large village complexes with dozens of earthen lodges, plazas, and ceremonial features. Most of the evidence reported from western Nebraska, where the CBR ISR facility is located, reflects a bison-hunting economy by nomadic groups who probably exploited the region on a seasonal basis (Bozell and Pepperl 1987; Carlson 1982; Späth 2006, 2007a, 2007b). The Prehistoric period is organized into four sequential developments, which are generally recognized as occurring over a large area of the Central and Northern Plains.

### 2.1 Paleo-Indian Big Game Hunters

The cultural tradition of Paleo-Indian big game hunters began as humans gradually entered the Great Plains during terminal Pleistocene times sometime after 14,000 years ago. On the Northern Plains, Paleo-Indian hunters are evident by at least 12,000 years before present (BP) and the period lasted to about 8000 BP. The economy was focused on the hunting of big game animals, most notably now-extinct late Pleistocene megafauna such as mammoth, camels, sloths, mastodons, and ancient forms of bison during the earliest part of the period (Clovis and Folsom Complexes). The hunting economy later shifted to modern forms of bison during early Holocene times. Archaeologists have assigned a number of names to different Paleo-Indian complexes that reflect changes in the stone tool technology found at kill sites. In Nebraska, these complexes include Clovis, Folsom, Midland, Agate Basin, Hell Gap, Alberta, Plainview, Cody, Frederick, Angostura, and Meserve (Nebraska SHPO 2006:26; see also Cassells and Agenbroad 1981 and Frison 1991).

The most significant Paleo-Indian site in western Nebraska is the Hudson-Meng Site (25SX115), a bison kill site in Sioux County about 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of the CBR ISR license area with Alberta points that produced three uncalibrated radiocarbon dates ranging from 7040  $\pm$ 190 to 7870 BC  $\pm$ 100 (Frison 1991:26). The Alberta Complex was characterized by long, shouldered points that introduced a new hafting technology that would persist for millennia. Given the number of bison represented, this site might have been a bison jump site or natural bison trap used on several different occasions (Frison 1991:178–179; see also Cassells and Agenbroad 1981).

Sites attributable to all Paleo-Indian complexes are found in western Nebraska but rarely in controlled contexts. A private landowner collected an unspecified late Paleo-Indian point from 25DW114 in the CBR ISR license area (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:32), and a possible Paleo-Indian point was recovered by a private collector from 25DW144 a few miles north of the CBR ISR license area (Carlson 1982: Table 1). Paleo-Indian points are quite common in private collections throughout the region.



## **2.2 Archaic Hunter-Foragers (8,000 to 2,000 BP)**

The Plains Archaic period represents a continuation of the hunter-gatherer subsistence patterns that emerged in the latter part of the Paleo-Indian era as climates approached modern Holocene conditions. The diversity in food resources was more pronounced as plants assumed greater dietary importance and settlement patterns became more associated with highly productive food resource areas. Across North America, this period is characterized by the proliferation of ground stone tools to process seeds, nuts, and tubers. This is especially evident in the Northern Plains of Wyoming and Montana (Frison 1991).

In western Nebraska, bison hunting probably remained an important activity throughout the Archaic, although the relative rarity of Archaic sites generally suggests that increased aridity may have prompted a demographic shift of small groups of hunter-gatherers to the eastern Plains where there was greater biodiversity along the major river systems (Cassells and Agenbroad 1981; Zimmerman 1985) or west to the Rocky Mountain foothills with greater access to upland resources (Frison 1991, 2001). Frison suggested that the Black Hills might have been “an oasis” during periods of aridity on the Northern Plains (2001:135).

The reduced number of sites in the central plains during the Archaic is noteworthy (Dyck and Moreland 2001; Frison 2001), but there were certainly areas that afforded opportunities for nomadic bison hunting. The Crow Butte area might have been one such environmental refuge, although the archaeological evidence is minimal. Archaeologists recovered a Middle Archaic Duncan Point at 25DW114 in the CBR ISR license area, which is the same site where a private landowner had previously collected large numbers of McKean, Oxbow, Duncan, and Hanna points also attributed the Middle Archaic (ca. 5000 to 3500 BP) and Pelican Points attributed to the Late Archaic (3000 to 1500 BP). An unspecified Early Archaic point was also in the private collection (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:74). Another Archaic point was recovered from 25DW301 near the license area, but it was too fragmented to be assigned to a specific Archaic period of time (Späth 2007a).

## **2.3 Plains Woodland (2,500 to 1,000 BP)**

The Plains Woodland period is characterized by semi-sedentary lifestyles with a mixed economy based on hunting wild game animals, gathering wild plants, and limited maize and bean horticulture. Bow-and-arrow technology appeared at this time, eventually replacing the atlatl as the preferred hunting implement. The defining settlement pattern of this period consists of earth-lodge villages located along the larger drainages. This period also marked the appearance in the region of ceramic containers (Johnson 2001; Schlesier 1994).

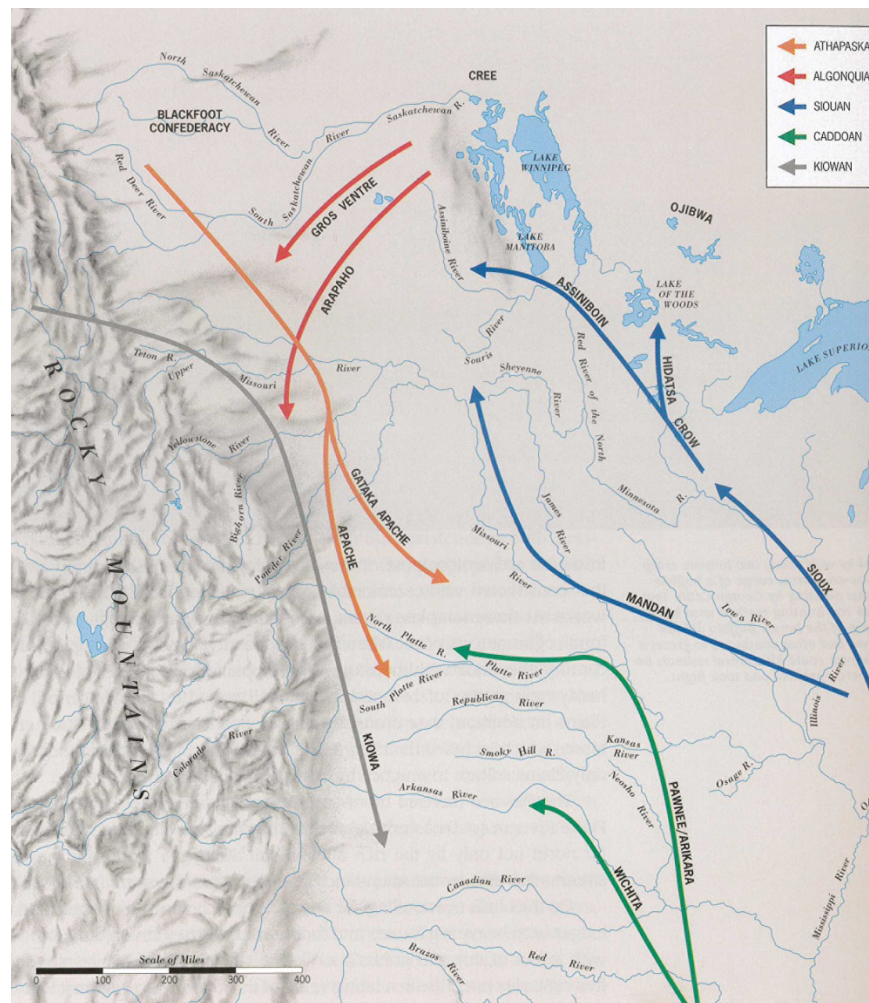
Plains Woodland sites are common along the Missouri River, but they are extremely rare on the Northern Plains. Some sites are found in western Nebraska in the upper Republican River country (Johnson 2001:160). No sites attributed to this period have been identified within the CBR ISR license area (see Bozell and Pepperl 1987), although one site (25DW59) about 8.9 kilometers (5.5 miles) north of the CBR ISR license area was assigned a possible Plains Woodland affiliation (Bozell and Pepperl 1982).

## **2.4 Plains Village (1,000 to 300 BP)**

This period continued the trend toward increasing sedentism and increasing reliance on domesticated plant foods. Villages were primarily located along major river systems and larger tributaries, and many of them were fortified. By the end of this period, the basic tribal structure of the Protohistoric and Historic periods on the Northern Plains was in place with some groups

becoming agriculturalists who seasonally hunted bison and other groups retaining their full-time nomadic bison hunting practices (Gunnerson 2001; Schlesier 1994; Wedel 2001). This period is well represented in eastern Nebraska from AD 1100 to 1450 (Wedel 2001); clusters of sites are also found in western Nebraska, western South Dakota, and eastern Colorado (Gunnerson 2001).

The first migrations of Caddoan-speaking farming groups from east Texas into the Arkansas and Platte River areas probably occurred about 800 years ago, at the same time the first Siouan-speaking groups were migrating from the Ohio River valley into the Great Lakes area of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota (Woodhead 1993; see figure 3). By the end of this period, Athapaskan-speaking groups had moved into western Nebraska where they developed their own farming and hunting economy referred to as the Dismal River Complex or Dismal River Phase (Gunnerson 2001:239–241)



**Figure 3: The earliest hypothesized migration routes into the Northern Plains, beginning about AD 1200. (Image modified from Woodhead 1993:16.)**

Signal Butte (25SF1) along the North Platte River, located 125 kilometers (78 miles) south of the CBR ISR facility, is the most notable Plains Village site in the Nebraska Panhandle region (Gunnerson 2001:235). There is only limited evidence of this period in the Crow Butte area. A



number of small triangular arrow points privately collected from 25DW114 were considered consistent with the Plains Village Tradition (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:74).

## **2.5 Crow Butte Archaeological Record**

This discussion is predicated on an extremely limited archaeological database specific to the Crow Butte area. Only a handful of archaeological investigations have been reported from within the license area (Bozell and Pepperl 1982, 1987; Späth and Walth 2003), and from three larger scale surveys from areas to the west, south, and north of the license area associated with CBR ISR expansion areas (Graves et al. 2011; Späth 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Twenty-two locations within 5 miles of the CBR ISR facility have prehistoric Native American artifacts, and eight sites are associated with historic Native American use of the region.

### **2.5.1 Early Archaeological Research**

The earliest archaeological observations in the area occurred in 1891 when paleontological research by the University of Nebraska State Museum identified weathered hearths and Yuma and Folsom projectile points (Barbour and Schultz 1936:432, 444; cited in Bozell and Pepperl 1982:13). The site was assigned the number 25DW1 even though the exact location was uncertain. The first formal research in the region occurred in 1935, when researchers investigated numerous Paleo-Indian, Archaic, ceramic, and historic sites along the Pleistocene terraces of the White River northeast of Crawford and well outside the 5-mile buffer used here (see Bozell and Pepperl 1982:14 for a list of minor reports resulting from this early research). Systematic investigations were initiated in the 1970s by the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), mostly associated with highway construction projects. Larger scale investigations were initiated by the University of Nebraska in northern Dawes County in the White River, Hat Creek, Big Cottonwood Creek, Sand Creek, and the Oglala National Grassland Preserve areas, all far north of the CBR ISR facility (Meston 1976)

Previous investigations within a 5-mile radius of the CBR ISR facility were quite limited before uranium exploration in the 1980s. Sites 25DW59 and 25DW60, both identified in 1956 by the NSHS, are lithic scatters with no diagnostic artifacts; 25DW74, identified in 1959 by the NSHS, consisted of a cache of almost 60 stone scrapers, lithic flakes, and a hearth on foothill spur near the base of the east side of Crow Butte; and 25DW105, identified in 1976 by Chadron State College, featured abundant lithic detritus, stone tools, bone, and ceramics attributed to Dismal River and/or Upper Republican types (Bozell and Pepperl 1982:17; see Table 1 here). Five additional lithic scatters 25DW144 to 25DW149 were documented in 1982 within 3 to 5 miles of the CBR ISR facility, one of which (25DW144) had a possible Paleo-Indian Component. Numerous other sites were documented along the White River northeast of Crawford, but these are likely outside the 5-mile buffer used here (Carlson 1982: Table 1).

### **2.5.2 Investigations of the CBR ISR License Area**

Investigations of the CBR ISR license area initially conducted on behalf of Wyoming Fuel Company (predecessor of CBR), began in 1982 when the University of Nebraska surveyed 259 hectares (640 acres) of a proposed 3,237-hectare (8,000-acre) permit area (see map in Bozell and Pepperl 1982:2). Two prehistoric sites and two isolated finds were identified along a creek. These included 25DW114, an extensive scatter of chipped-stone tools, flaking debris, and animal bone; 25DW116, a lithic scatter with three flakes; a charcoal layer exposed in a creek cut bank associated with bison (or cow) bones; and an isolated stone flake (Bozell and Pepperl 1982:27; these are also described in Bozell and Pepperl 1987).

**Table 1: Prehistoric Resources within 5 miles of the CBR ISR Facility**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Site No.</b>	<b>Site Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Size m<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Cultural Affiliation</b>	<b>NRHP Eligible</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Citation</b>	<b>Distance from CBR Facility</b>
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW59	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Archaic-Woodland	Unknown	Unknown	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	5.5 mi.
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW60	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Plains Village	Unknown	Unknown	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	4.5 mi
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW74	Cache/Camp	Cache of about 60 stone scrapers associated with lithic scatter and hearth	Unknown	Unknown Native American	Unknown	Unknown	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	5.0 mi
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW105	Camp	Scatter of lithics, stone tools, ceramics, and animal bone	Unknown	Dismal River Complex	Unknown	Unknown	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:16	4.5 mi
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW144	Lithic Scatter	Scatter of lithics with possible Paleo-Indian component	Unknown	Paleo-Indian(?)	Unknown	Unknown	Carlson n.d.	5.0 mi.
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW145	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Unknown Native American	Unknown	Unknown	Carlson n.d.	3.0 mi
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW147	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Unknown Native American	Unknown	Unknown	Carlson n.d.	5.0 mi.

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Site No.</b>	<b>Site Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Size m<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Cultural Affiliation</b>	<b>NRHP Eligible</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Citation</b>	<b>Distance from CBR Facility</b>
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW148	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Unknown Native American	Unknown	Unknown	Carlson n.d.	5.0 mi.
Prior to CBR ISR	25DW149	Lithic Scatter	Lithic scatter of unspecified size and complexity	Unknown	Unknown Native American	Unknown	Unknown	Carlson n.d.	5.0 mi.
North Trend Expansion (2004)	25DW300	Isolated Find	Isolated maroon chert core	<1	Unknown Native American	No	Agriculture	Spath 2006:9, 2007a: n.p.	4–5 mi
North Trend Expansion (2004)	25DW301	Isolated Find	Isolated fragment of an Archaic point	<1	Archaic	No	Agriculture	Spath 2006:9, 2007a: n.p.	4–5 mi
Three Crow Expansion (2006)	25DW302	Isolated Find	Isolated piece of chert shatter	<1	Unknown Native American	No	Agriculture	Spath 2007b:5	4–5 mi
Three Crow Expansion (2006)	25DW304	Isolated Find	Isolated piece of tan chert	<1	Unknown Native American	No	Agriculture	Spath 2007b:6	4–5 mi

The NSHS returned to the CBR ISR location in 1987 to investigate about 283 hectares (700 acres), mostly in a 4.5-mile-long linear configuration. The project proposal had by this time been reduced from the initial 3,237 hectares to 1,133 hectares (2,800 acres). Five additional Native American sites were identified (25DW194 to 25DW198), all of which were lithic scatters of varying complexity, some associated with animal bones. None of the sites had temporally diagnostic artifacts, and all were identified in plowed agricultural fields (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:18; see Table 2).

In summary, seven Native American sites and two isolated artifact locations (potential sites) were identified within the CBR ISR license area (Bozell and Pepperl 1982, 1987), only one of which (25DW114) had artifacts that could be assigned to specific periods of time. All of the localities consisted of artifact scatters with chipped-stone flakes from tool maintenance; some had bifacially flaked stone tools, expedient scrapers, animal bones, and burned stone. One isolated occurrence was a 50-meter-long (164 feet) charcoal lens with animal bones, but no other artifacts. Bozell and Pepperl (1987) indicated three of the sites were potentially eligible for listing in the National Register, but later testing of one of those, 25DW198, found that subsurface deposition had been severely impacted by agriculture and it was re-evaluated as not eligible for listing (Späth and Walth 2003).

### **2.5.3 Other Investigations**

Other uranium projects by Wyoming Fuel Company and its subsequent iterations have occurred elsewhere in Dawes County since 1982. It should be noted that the originally proposed Wyoming Fuel Company project area initially extended about 9.7 kilometers (6 miles) north of Crawford and well outside the Crow Butte area. In 1984, Nickens & Associates investigated 44 proposed drill sites and 13,300 feet of access roads and identified one prehistoric site and two prehistoric isolated finds (Tucker 1984:12). Site 25DW155 was described as an expansive quarry site where chert nodules were tested for tool-stone suitability. It was described as similar to 25DW4 about 400 meters south. Nickens & Associates returned in 1985 to investigate 21 additional drill sites and 2.1 kilometers of access roads on the Oglala National Grasslands (Tucker 1985:7). Two prehistoric isolated artifacts were documented. These areas had been dropped from the proposed development by 1987.

Investigations of three other CBR ISR proposed expansion areas in the general area failed to demonstrate a robust Native American presence, although these areas had been severely impacted by modern agricultural activities (SC&A 2011a). In 2004, Greystone Environmental (Späth 2006, 2007a) conducted a Class III inventory on 482 hectares (1,190 acres) of a 1,085-hectare (2,680-acre) permit area as part of the proposed North Trend Expansion Area north of Crawford. Three Native American sites (25DW299 to 25DW301) were documented, although all three sites were comprised of single artifacts. Site 42DW298 consisted of a single metal arrow point found in a plowed alfalfa field (discussed below under the Historic period); 25DW300 consisted of a single maroon chert core found in a plowed wheat field; and 25DW301 consisted of a fragment of a Plains Archaic projectile point found in a plowed wheat field. None of the sites was deemed eligible for listing in the National Register. (Note that Späth 2006 and 2007a are identical to one another but they have different dates a year apart.)

A second investigation in 2006 of 850 hectares (2,100 acres) southwest of Crawford, part of the proposed Three Crow Expansion Area, identified a single piece of chert shatter (25DW302) and a single piece of tan chert with minimal retouching to one edge (25DW304) (Späth 2007b). Neither site was deemed eligible for listing in the National Register. The third major block inventory related to the Marsland Expansion Area, located 19 kilometers (12 miles) south of

Crawford and outside the 8-kilometer (5-mile) buffer used in this review, failed to identify any Native American resources whatsoever (Graves et al. 2011). It is mentioned here because of the size of the Class III survey (1,821 hectares or 4,500 acres) and similar environmental setting to the CBR ISR license area. As discussed below in Section 4, Crow Nation and Santee Sioux Nation representatives identified numerous cultural sites in the Marsland Expansion Area (Santee Sioux Nation 2013) not identified during the archaeological survey (Graves et al. 2011).

**Table 2: Prehistoric Resources within the CBR ISR Facility License Area**

Source	Site No.	Site Type	Description	Size m <sup>2</sup>	Cultural Affiliation	NHPA Eligible	Impacts	Citation
1982 Survey	25DW114	Artifact Scatter	28 concentrations of lithic artifacts, chipped-stone tools, animal bone; abundant Middle Archaic points but all periods represented	150,000	Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Plains Village Tradition, Historic	Criterion D	Plowing and Private Artifact Collection	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:43–47; Bozell and Pepperl 1987:32–36
1982 Survey	25DW116	Lithic Scatter	A single chipped-stone tool and two lithic flakes	2	Unknown Native American	No	Not Specified	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:49; Bozell and Pepperl 1987:37
1982 Survey	FN-1	Isolated Find	A single lithic flake; located near 25DW116	<1	Unknown Native American	No	Not Specified	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:51
1982 Survey	FN-2	Isolated Find	Charcoal lense 50m long in a creek cutbank associated with animal bone, either cow or bison	50	Unknown	No	Creek Erosion	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:51–52
1987 Survey	25DW194	Artifact Scatter	Sparse scatter of lithic flakes and animal bone; testing revealed additional flakes and bone	1,600	Unknown Native American	Criterion D	Plowing	Bozell and Pepperl 1987:47–48
1987 Survey	25DW195	Artifact Scatter	Three lithic flakes, three animal bone fragments, to chipped-stone tools, a hammerstone, and heat-altered stones; testing revealed additional lithic and bone artifacts	1,000	Unknown Native American	No	Plowing and Terracing	Bozell and Pepperl 1987:47–49
1987 Survey	25DW196	Artifact Scatter	Lithic flakes, animal bone fragments, six chipped-stone tools; testing revealed more artifacts in disturbed contexts	80,000	Unknown Native American	No	Plowing and Terracing	Bozell and Pepperl 1987:52–54

Source	Site No.	Site Type	Description	Size m <sup>2</sup>	Cultural Affiliation	NHPA Eligible	Impacts	Citation
1987 Survey	25DW197	Artifact Scatter	Four clusters of chipped-stone tools, lithic flakes, and animal bone	150,000	Unknown Native American	No	Plowing	Bozell and Pepperl 1987:52–55
1987 Survey	25DW198	Lithic Scatter	Chipped-stone tools and lithic flakes located on and around a knoll; testing revealed additional flakes and tools	30,000	Unknown Native American	No	Plowing	Bozell and Pepperl 1987:56–59; Spath and Walth 2003

### 3. PROTOHISTORIC PERIOD

The term “Protohistoric” is commonly applied to indigenous sites when Euro-American influences are evident, but there is minimal or no corroborative historic record of those activities. The earliest archaeological evidence of European trade goods in the upper Missouri River country was found at an Arikara village site in the Bad River area of central South Dakota, dated to about AD 1675 (Zimmerman 1985:15). The Historic period, which is demarcated by the written accounts found in Euro-American journals and official expedition reports, begins in the mid-1700s in the upper Missouri River country with the accounts written by Canadian fur traders, primarily with Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company, who found that trading with the Mandan-Hidatsa alliance of middlemen could be extremely profitable (Wood and Thiessen 1985). At this time, there is no publicly available historical record that Euro-American traders ventured into western Nebraska until sometime after AD 1800, at which time the Crow Butte region was occupied by southern Lakota bands (Lower Brulé and Oglala).

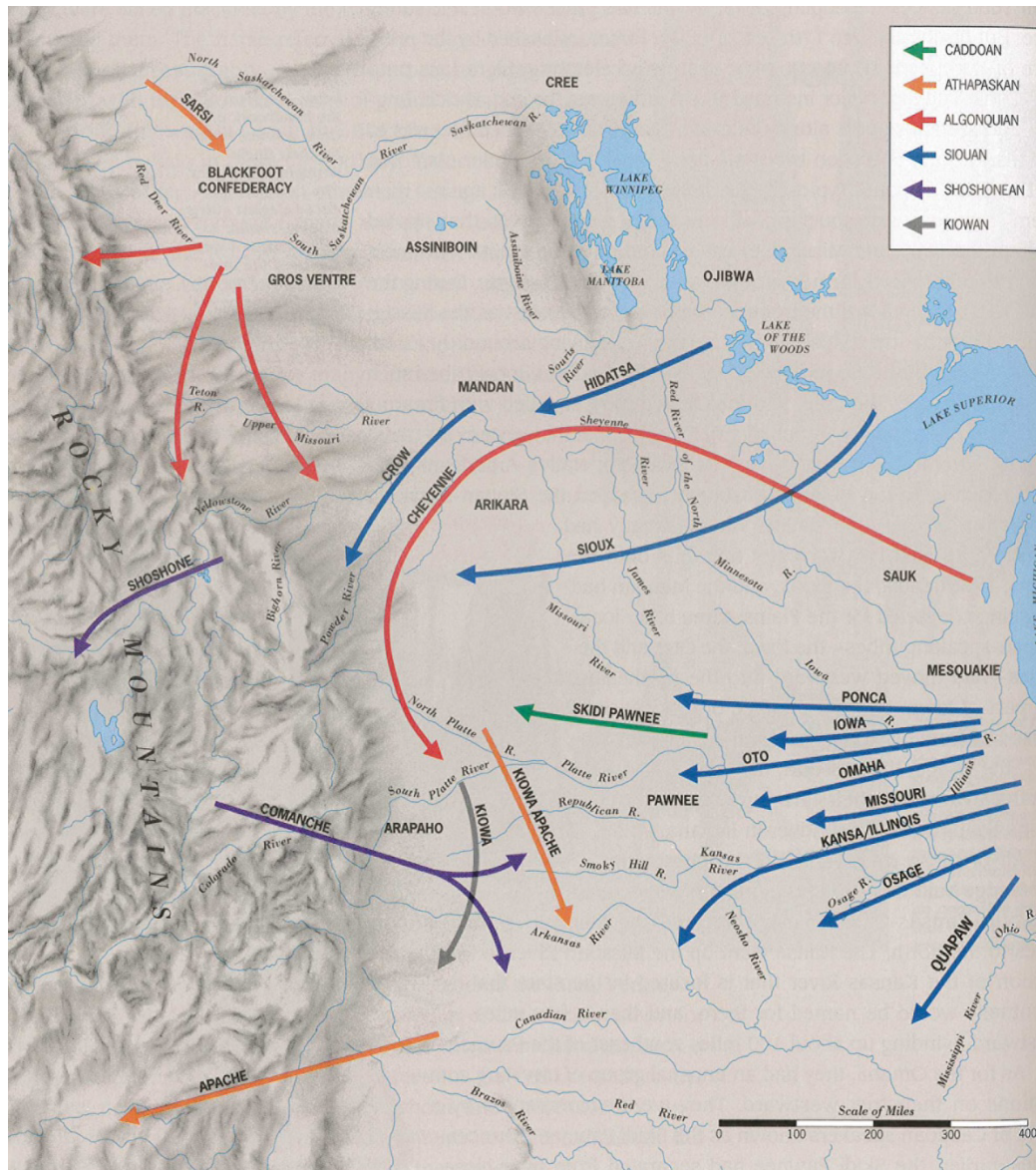
The Nebraska SHPO has identified nine Tribes with historical ties to western Nebraska: Plains Apache, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Teton (Lakota), Comanche (Shoshone), Crow, Kiowa, Pawnee, and Arikara (Nebraska SHPO 2006: 25). Some Northern Plains researchers have noted that other Tribes had historical connections to the Black Hills immediately north of the Crow Butte project area, but there is no evidence they ventured south of the Black Hills into western Nebraska. These include the Santee Sioux (Dakota), Assiniboine, Hidatsa, and Mandan, all of whom consider the Black Hills to be sacred (DeMallie 2001c).

The Protohistoric period is characterized by large-scale migrations into the northern Plains from the east, north, and northwest, all by different groups speaking different languages (figure 4). These migrations had ripple effects that resulted in the displacement of some preexisting groups, new alliances between others for mutual protection, and a shuffling of socioeconomic power structures oriented towards the Canadian fur trade.

Migrations from the west and northwest might have been climate related. A megadrought in the late 1500s engulfed not only the middle and southern Great Plains, but also the American Southwest and Great Basin. Based on tree-ring evidence (International Tree Ring Database), it was the worst megadrought in the past 1,200 years (Williams et al. 2020), and it coincided with or accelerated the ongoing migrations of Athapaskan-speaking groups from northwestern Canada into the Plains and later the American Southwest, and Numic-speaking groups from the southern Great Basin into the Rocky Mountains and later the western Plains.

The Hidatsa, Sioux, and Mandan were the first Siouan-speaking groups to migrate from their Ohio River homelands, perhaps as early as the AD 1200s to 1400s. The Sioux resettled around Lake Superior, and the Hidatsa initially settled in Manitoba but were soon pushed south by the more populous Ojibwe toward the Heart River and Knife River areas in the upper Missouri River country. There are different views as to whether the Hidatsa joined with the Mandan already there or whether the Mandan later joined with the Hidatsa. The Mandan-Hidatsa alliance, oriented towards the Missouri River trading network, became the most powerful economic force in the region by the AD 1700s, although the farming-based Arikara lower on the Missouri River and the Pawnee maize farmers of the Platte River and Republican River areas were also major economic forces (DeMallie 2001c; Woodhead 1993).





**Figure 4: Migrations into the Northern Plains during the Protohistoric period (after AD 1600) prompted by the Iroquois displacing groups in the Ohio River Valley and Ojibwe-Cree groups displacing others around the Great Lakes. (Image from Woodhead 1993:24.)**

East-to-west migrations in the AD 1600s and AD 1700s were more profound. They were stimulated by political factors, primarily competition between the French, English, and Dutch over the western fur trade that resulted in a convergence of new technologies that altered power dynamics and released new diseases on indigenous populations with no immunities, a pattern that played out with devastating effects across the Western Hemisphere (Diamond 1997). None of the upper Missouri River and northern Plains escaped the combined impacts of guns, germs, and steel.

In brief, the Dutch first armed the Huron and their allies, who then turned those guns on the powerful Iroquois Federation, sometimes referred to as the Iroquois League or Iroquois Confederation. The Iroquois then acquired guns from the British and American colonists in the

1600s, and they turned their guns on their western enemies, the powerful Ojibwe and Cree, who were in turn armed by the French. The French allies eventually repelled the Iroquois, but they then turned their weapons on their Siouan-speaking and Algonquian-speaking neighbors in the Great Lakes and Manitoba regions (Richter 1992; Woodhead 1993).

The Iroquois attacks in the AD 1600s resulted in a second wave of migrations from the Ohio River Valley by the Iowa, Oto, Omaha, Quapaw, Osage, Kansa, and Ponca groups, all of whom took different routes westward into Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. The Ojibwe, in turn, pushed the Sioux west from the Lake Superior area, and the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hidatsa were pushed south out of Manitoba (Woodhead 1993; Figure 4).

In the eastern Plains, the dual socioeconomic pattern of large agricultural villages along major waterways and nomadic bison hunters who traded bison meat and hides for agricultural products had been established long before initial Euro-American contact (Schlesier 1994). Sedentary populations along the upper Missouri River effectively blunted western expansion by the displaced Tribes, including the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota. The Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, and Pawnee agricultural villages often had populations of more than a thousand people, which made them largely resistant to attacks by the much smaller nomadic groups.

The balance of power began to shift in 1795 with the first in a series of devastating epidemics that swept through the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara villages (the Pawnee were more geographically isolated from the Euro-American fur trade, and they avoided the most devastating epidemics until the 1830s). Euro-American diseases proved particularly deadly to Native Americans in settled communities who lived in close proximity to one another, and with mortality rates of up to 90 percent, the surviving populations found themselves vulnerable to withering attacks from the Sioux (Swagerty 2001; Woodhead 1993; Zimmerman 1985).

Native American groups that occupied or exploited bison resources in western Nebraska during the Protohistoric period are briefly summarized here to provide temporal context for the Lakota occupation of the region during the Historic period. To avoid unnecessary repetition, the Lakota are discussed in greater detail in section 4. The references cited below are not comprehensive or site specific; the reader may consult the official public tribal histories available online.

### **3.1 The Sedentary Tribes**

#### **3.1.1 The Arikara**

The Arikara, also referred to in early historical documents as the Sahnish, Arikaree, Ree, or Hundoi, was a semi-sedentary, horticultural Tribe who occupied the upper Missouri River valley in present-day Nebraska and South Dakota at the time of historic contact in 1743. They lived in fortified villages of earthen lodges, cultivated maize, and spoke a Caddoan dialect with origins in eastern Texas. Their villages were ideally situated to take advantage of trade networks along the upper Missouri River, and their surplus agricultural production made them popular trading partners with most nomadic Plains hunting groups. The Lakota were traditional enemies, although the two groups had brief periods of peace and trade (Ewers 1988; Meyer 1977; Parks 2001a). Epidemics in the late 1700s reduced their population from an estimated 30,000 to 6,000, and the number of villages from 32 to 2. The weakened Arikara were subsequently devastated by persistent attacks from the Lakota to the west and the Dakota to the north. Some migrated to western Nebraska along the Platte River, where Colonel Henry Dodge encountered them in 1835. Others joined with the Skiri Pawnee, and by the late 1830s the remaining Arikara had joined forces with the Mandan and Hidatsa of the upper Missouri River, who were also semi-sedentary farmers under attack by the Sioux and beset by epidemics (Abel 1997; Collison

2013; Dollar 1997; Parks 2001a). The Arikara might have used the Crow Butte area before the 1800s (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:75), but this was probably limited to seasonal bison hunts inasmuch as no Arikara villages have been reported in the area.

### **3.1.2 The Hidatsa**

The Hidatsa, sometimes referred to as Minnetaree, were semi-sedentary horticulturalists who occupied the upper Missouri River in the Knife River and Heart River areas of North Dakota. The archaeological evidence suggests the Hidatsa, a name applied to at least three loosely confederated groups who spoke similar dialects of the Siouan language, had occupied this area since the AD 1200s (Ahler et al. 1991). As part-time bison hunters, they ranged far onto the Plains and often into the Black Hills (Bowers 1992; Stewart 2001). The sedentary village dwellers became close allies of the Mandan, and together they were influential middlemen in a thriving trade network with Canadian fur traders in the 1790s, in the process becoming the most powerful economic force in the region (Wood and Thiessen 1985). Epidemics, especially those in the 1830s, devastated the economic alliance, and the Hidatsa and Mandan came under relentless attacks by Sioux Tribes, and they retreated farther north to the Fort Berthold area. They participated in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty and received treaty lands north of the Heart River (Meyer 1977; Stewart 2001). Their association with northwestern Nebraska is tenuous, although a related, nomadic band of Hidatsa did occupy western Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. This band became known as the Crow Nation (Voget 2001).

### **3.1.3 The Mandan**

The Mandan Tribe's history mirrors that of the Hidatsa in most aspects. They were also Siouan-speaking, semi-sedentary horticulturalists who occupied the upper Missouri River in the Knife River and Heart River areas of North Dakota. They were noted for their large, fortified villages with earthen lodges around a central plaza; some of the villages had populations in excess of 1,000 people (Fenn 2015; Meyers 1977; Wood and Irwin 2001). By some accounts, the Hidatsa were already present when the Mandan arrived, and the Mandan were assimilated into the Hidatsa social and economic structure. They traded maize to nomadic Plains Tribes for bison meat and bison hides, and the hides became currency to trade for horses, guns, and Euro-American metal goods from the Canadians. Epidemics between 1781 and 1838 reduced the Mandan population from 10,000 or 15,000 before contact to 125 individuals in 1838. The Mandans also participated in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty and received treaty lands jointly with their Hidatsa allies north of the Heart River. Despite the treaty, the Mandan and Hidatsa, and later the Arikara who joined them, found themselves under constant attack by the Lakota (McGinnis 2010; Meyer 1977; Wood and Irwin 2001). With the Hidatsa, the Mandans made hunting forays into the Black Hills (Bowers 1992), but their association with western Nebraska is tenuous.

### **3.1.4 The Pawnee**

The Pawnee, who were ancestrally related to the Caddoan-speaking Arikara, comprised four separate bands of semi-sedentary maize farmers who occupied large villages in much of Nebraska, eastern Colorado, and Kansas, particularly along the Loup, Republican, and Platte rivers (Parks 2001b). They probably arrived in the region in the AD 1200s from ancestral lands in Texas and Arkansas. The northernmost band, the Skiri, occupied lands south of the Black Hills, and historic records indicate they frequently came into contact with the Lakota. The large Pawnee villages were also susceptible to raiding from Plains Apaches to the west and Siouan-speaking groups to the east, all of whom had acquired horses and guns. Pawnee women and children were commonly captured and sold into slavery in New Mexico by their

Apachean neighbors in the Nebraska Panhandle (Gunnerson 2001). By the 1720s, the Pawnee had acquired their own horses and guns, and they turned on their enemies with a legendary ruthlessness that made them widely feared. Unlike the sedentary farmers of the upper Missouri River, the Pawnee were not fully enveloped within the larger Missouri River trade networks of the 1700s, and the most devastating effects of epidemics did not arrive until the 1830s. The severely weakened Pawnee were then repeatedly attacked by the Lakota, who destroyed entire villages in what has been described as a “war of extermination” (Parks 2001b:520). During the Sioux wars of the 1850s to 1870s, the Pawnee served as enthusiastic scouts for the U.S. Army in order to settle scores with their Lakota and Cheyenne enemies (Parks 2001b; Woodhead 1993, 1994). The Pawnee likely used the Crow Butte area before the 1800s (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:75), but Pawnee villages have not been reported in the Crow Butte area.

### **3.2 The Nomadic Tribes**

#### **3.2.1 The Arapaho**

The Algonquian-speaking Arapaho occupied eastern Wyoming, eastern Colorado, and portions of western South Dakota, Montana, and Saskatchewan at the time of historic contact. They were closely allied with the Northern Cheyenne, and somewhat loosely allied with the Lakota during the 1800s. Their ancestral homeland was the western Great Lakes region, where they were largely sedentary agriculturalists. The Ojibwe and Cree Tribes pushed them westward onto the Northern Plains sometime before AD 1700. The Arapaho became increasingly nomadic after acquiring horses from other Tribes, extending their range into western Kansas, western Oklahoma, Wyoming, and the Nebraska panhandle, including the Crow Butte region (Fowler 2001:841). Even though the Tribe split into northern and southern bands, they remained closely allied, and their power and influence increased in about 1806 when they made an alliance with the Cheyenne. By 1826, they had also allied themselves with the Lakota and Dakota to push their one-time friends and allies, the Kiowa and Kiowa Apache, out of the Black Hills region. The Arapaho were enthusiastic trade partners with the sedentary Tribes of the upper Missouri River, trading bison hides for maize, beans, and squash. Once friendly with the U.S. Government, the Arapaho and their Cheyenne allies became hostile following the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado. Arapaho solidarity fractured in the years that followed, with some groups advocating peace with the United States and others joining Oglala Lakota chief Red Cloud in 1866–1868 in the war over the Bozeman Trail, called Red Cloud’s War (Fowler 1982, 2001; Woodhead 1993, 1994). The Crow Butte area would have been part of Arapaho bison hunting territory by AD 1800 (Fowler 2001).

#### **3.2.2 The Cheyenne**

The Cheyenne, like the Arapaho, were Algonquian-speaking farmers who were pushed out of their ancestral homelands in the Great Lakes region by the AD 1700s. In the upper Missouri River country, they built large fortified villages protected by stockades and deep ditches; one fortified village on the Cheyenne River had at least 70 lodges (Woodhead 1993:26). By the mid-AD 1700s, they had been pushed south into the Black Hills of South Dakota and then west to the Powder River country of Montana, where they gave up farming and became nomadic bison hunters. By one account, they introduced horses to the Lakota in about AD 1730, only to have the more numerous Lakota push the Cheyenne out of the Black Hills sometime after AD 1776 (Walker and DeMallie 1992). The Cheyenne were traditional enemies of the Lakota until the Sand Creek Massacre in AD 1864, after which they allied themselves with the Lakota to resist Euro-American encroachment on the Northern Plains. As with their long-time allies the Arapaho, they fought alongside the Lakota throughout the AD 1870s. The Nebraska panhandle



was once traditional bison-hunting territory, although the northern bands lived primarily along the North Platte and Yellowstone rivers. The emergence of warrior societies often put them in violent conflict with most other Plains Tribes (except the Arapaho), as well as Tribes in the Southwest and Rocky Mountains (Moore et al. 2001; see also Liberty and Liberty 1982).

### **3.2.3 The Comanche**

The term “Comanche” is a generic term for Numic-speaking groups in the Rocky Mountains and western Plains, and they were probably the first Plains Tribe to acquire horses (Kavanagh 2001). Numic-speaking groups mentioned in the ethnohistoric literature include the Utes, the Eastern Shoshone, Northern Shoshone, and the Southern Comanche. All of these groups ventured onto the Plains to hunt bison, although the Arapaho resisted these efforts in the Northern Plains. The Eastern Shoshone and Northern Shoshone were noted as superb horse breeders, and their involvement with Plains Tribes probably was focused on horse trading (Osborn 1983). The Shoshone are mentioned as occasional trading partners at the Mandan-Hidatsa villages, but this might be overstated or misrepresented. The Hidatsa were enemies of the Shoshone and were known to take and sell Shoshone captives as slaves (the most famous Shoshone slave was Sacagawea, the interpreter on the Lewis and Clark expedition). The Southern Comanche were among the first to acquire horses from the New Mexico pueblos. They became superb equestrians, and by the 1760s they were the dominant bison-hunting Tribe on the Southern Plains, controlling all territories from Kansas to north Texas. There is minimal evidence that they used the Crow Butte area, aside from Shoshonean ceramics in a private collection (Rob Bozell, personal communication 2021). A Shoshone war party is mentioned in Lakota oral tradition related to Lovers Leap near Crawford (discussed hereafter). Kavanagh (2001:887) places the Crow Butte area at the extreme northern fringe of Comanche territory.

### **3.2.4 The Crow Nation**

The Crow Nation, or Absaroka, is a Tribe that splintered from the Hidatsa in the early 1700s. This group was pushed westward onto the Northern Plains, first by the Cheyenne and later by the Lakota. The Crow eventually found refuge in the Powder River and Yellowstone River country of Wyoming and Montana, although they were surrounded on all sides by their enemies, the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Arapaho-Cheyenne-Lakota alliance (Frey 2009). They participated in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 and were granted the Bighorn Mountains of Montana as their tribal lands, an area also claimed by Lakota bands who were still pushing westward. Like the Pawnee, the Crow were bitter enemies of the Lakota and were allies of the U.S. military during the Great Sioux Wars. Crow Butte is named for an encounter between the Crow and Lakota in 1849 (discussed in Section 4). Voget (2001:696) does not include the Nebraska Panhandle within traditional Crow territory, although the Crow Nation has expressed great interest in the Crow Butte area as a traditional territory (see Santee Sioux Nation 2013).

### **3.2.5 The Kiowa**

The Kiowa Tribe is a Tanoan-speaking Tribe of bison hunters once present in western Nebraska and the Black Hills at or just before the time of Euro-American contact. Tanoan speakers are commonly found in the American Southwest, but the Kiowa origin stories place their original migration to the Plains from the Rocky Mountains near Yellowstone. Linguistic evidence suggests they might have once been farmers in the eastern Great Basin and northern Colorado Plateau, known as the Fremont Culture, before migrating north with their Apache allies in the AD 1500s (Ortman and McNeil 2017). The ancestral Kiowa people might have been pushed out of the Rocky Mountains by Shoshoneans, or they might have been part of a major, drought-

induced migration. Some Kiowa became so closely aligned with Apache immigrants from northwestern Canada they became known as Kiowa Apache (Levy 2001; Schlesier 1994). The Kiowa arrived in the upper Missouri River and Black Hills regions in the middle AD 1600s, where they became allies and trading partners with the sedentary Tribes, especially with the Arikara. This put them at odds with the Cheyenne and later the Lakota. By about AD 1800, the Cheyenne and Arapaho formed an alliance to push the Kiowa onto the Southern Plains. By 1806, the Kiowa and Southern Comanche formed a powerful alliance that deterred Lakota expansionism onto the Southern Plains (Levy 2001; Wishart 2007). The Kiowa are recognized as former occupants of the Nebraska Panhandle (NPS 2004, 2010), and they probably used the Crow Butte area before their displacement from the Black Hills in the middle 1700s.

### **3.2.6 The Plains Apache**

The Plains Apache, sometimes referred to as Kiowa Apache, are also listed among the historic contexts for western Nebraska. As discussed above, they were closely allied with the linguistically unrelated Kiowa (Foster and McCollough 2001:927). The archaeological complex of farmers and bison hunters known as the Dismal River Complex (AD 1600 to 1750) is believed to be associated with the ancestral Apache in western Nebraska and the Black Hills (Gunnerson 1960, 1987). The Kiowa Apache had been pushed out of the region by the late 1700s, migrating south with the Kiowa where they joined with the Comanche and other Athapaskan groups (Navajo and Apache), who at that time were semi-sedentary farmers and hunters. As with the Kiowa, the Kiowa Apache probably used the Crow Butte region before their displacement. Site 25DW105 about 4.4 miles north of the CBR ISR facility yielded Dismal River Complex ceramics (Bozell and Pepperl 1982:16).

### **3.2.7 Summary**

As discussed above, the Crow Butte region was probably occupied or used by many different Sedentary and Nomadic Tribes throughout the Protohistoric period. Physical evidence of this is limited, however. Euro-American trade items were privately collected from 25DW114, a site that had been periodically occupied for 10,000 years (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:74). Shoshonean ceramics have been reported from a private collection, and Dismal River Complex artifacts attributed to ancestral Apache groups have been noted in western Nebraska. It is possible that some of the earliest Canadian fur traders visited the region in the 1700s, but the name White River does not appear in those journals and the name Crow Butte was not applied until after 1849. The Protohistoric record, supported by various tribal histories, indicates that western Nebraska and the adjacent Black Hills of South Dakota experienced a succession of occupations by different groups, culminating with the arrival of the Lakota and the complete dispossession of rival Tribes by about AD 1800.

## 4. HISTORIC PERIOD

The beginning of the Historic period, as used in this review, is placed at about AD 1800, when Lakota and Dakota bands began exerting their dominance in the upper Missouri River country, the Black Hills, and the Platte River country (DeMallie 2001a, 2001b). The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara trading centers were being weakened at this time by a series of epidemics and persistent warfare with nomadic Tribes migrating west from the Great Lakes region. This disrupted the lucrative Canadian fur trade, which shifted in focus south to St. Louis and French-American traders based there after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (Hanson 2017).

For all intents and purposes, the Historic period in western Nebraska is the Lakota Period, at least as it relates to Native American history. It encompasses that period of time when the Lakota and their Dakota cousins to the north exerted dominance over vast swaths of the Northern Plains in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, eastern Wyoming, and eastern Montana (Gunnerson and Gunnerson 2015). The period ends with the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.

The beginning date is merely an organizational convenience, and it could just as easily have been placed at AD 1775–1776, when the first Lakota to see the Black Hills, Standing Buffalo (Tatanka Najin), returned with the bough of an unusual pine tree particularly suited for lodge poles (Powers 2010:78). The importance of this event was recorded in a winter count, an artistic device that documented the most important event that occurred between the first snow of one particular year and the first snow of the following year.

The beginning could also be placed at 1803–1806, when exploration of the Louisiana Purchase, recently acquired by the U.S. Government, brought the upper Missouri River country to the attention of a broader American public, including writers, artists, explorers, and adventurers. This attention unleashed an onslaught of western migration in the decades to follow that ultimately overwhelmed all of the Northern Plains Tribes (Ambrose 1996; Catlin 1973; Mooney 1975; Moulton 1987).

Specific to Crow Butte, the beginning could have been in 1837 or 1849 when James Bordeaux established a trading post (or winter house) in the area near modern-day Chadron, Dawes County (see Section 4.3). Bordeaux was married to two sisters of prominent Lower Brulé Lakota chief Swift Bear (figure 5), and Lower Brulé bands camped near the trading post for decades before the reservation period that saw the Lakota restricted to the Red Cloud Agency and nearby Spotted Tail Agency (Hanson 2020; Hanson and Wyatt 2009:5).

For most of the Historic period, the Black Hills and neighboring Pine Ridge country of western Nebraska was Lakota territory. The Lakota had become aware of the region as early as 1775 or 1776. As summarized by Powers (2010:78), the Lakota visited the Black Hills as needed to cut the slender pines need for lodge poles, but they did not live there. It was a mysterious and frightening place with severe and frequent lightning, as well as caves and spirit holes that became famous among the Lakota as places of power.

Hanson and Wyatt (2009:5), citing tribal oral histories, make the case that the Crow and their Kiowa allies occupied the Black Hills and adjacent Pine Ridge country of western Nebraska into the late AD 1700s, and the Cheyenne had claimed the Black Hills by AD 1800. In the early 1800s, more populous western Sioux bands of Lakota and Dakota waged war on the occupants of western North Dakota, western South Dakota, and western Nebraska, driving the Crow west into Montana and the Kiowa south onto the Southern Plains. By 1820, the Cheyenne had

withdrawn to the west and south. And by the 1830s, the Lower Brulé Lakota occupied the Pine Ridge country of western Nebraska as their winter camp, which was also conveniently located to facilitate military forays against the Pawnees for control of the Nebraska Sandhills a short distance to the southeast.



**Figure 5: Lower Brulé chief Swift Bear. (Image: NSHS RG1227.PH000010-000007.)**

#### **4.1 Oceti Sakowin Origins**

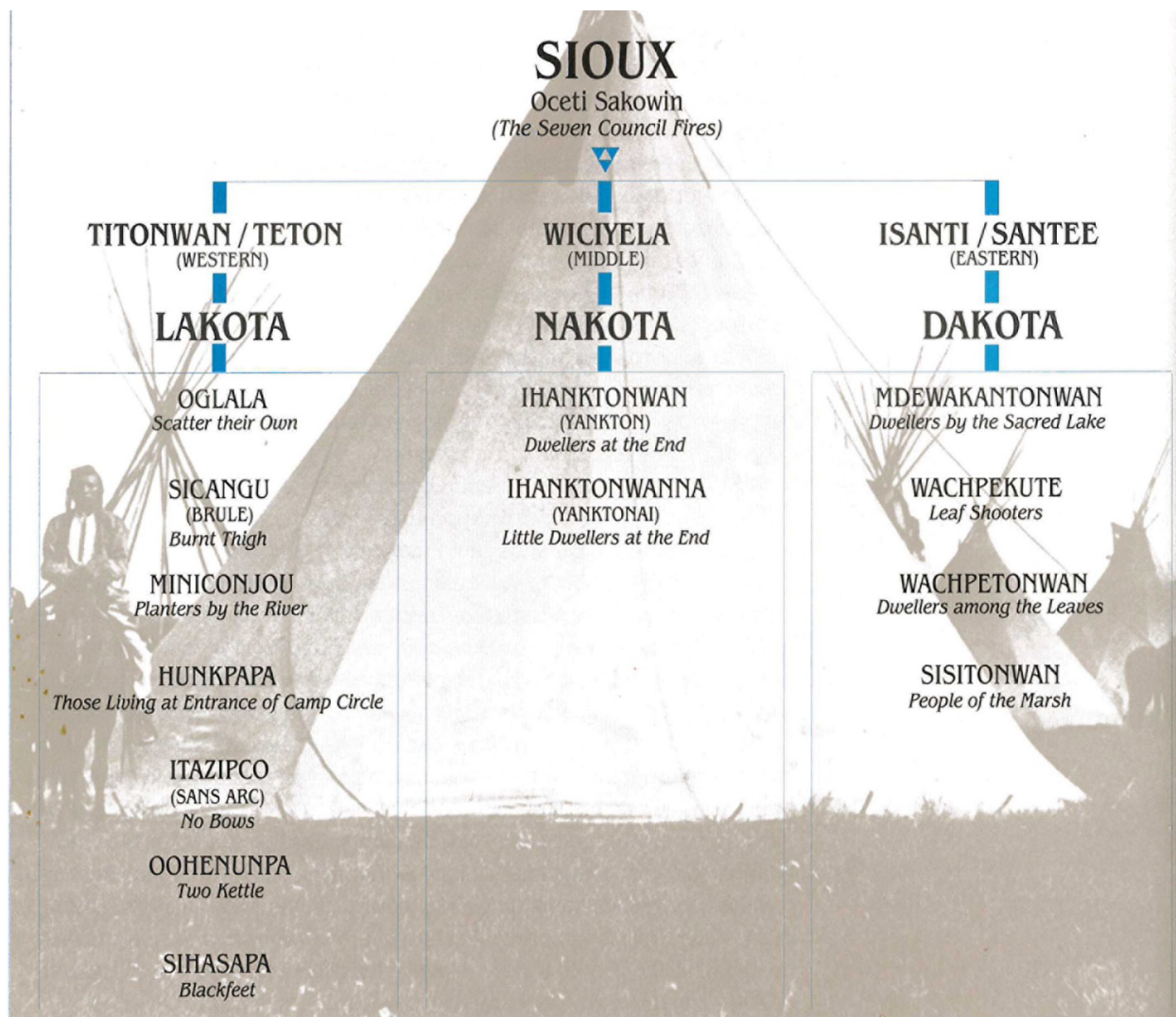
The names Sioux, Lakota, and Dakota are used interchangeably in the earliest historic accounts. The name Sioux is derived from French word *Nadouessioux*, a translation of the derogatory Ojibwe name for the Oceti Sakowin that meant “Little Snakes.” The name Sioux applies to three groups: Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota, each of which speak slightly different but mutually understandable dialects. They referred to themselves collectively as Oceti Sakowin, meaning the Seven Council Fires (Woodhead 1993:19–20; see figure 6).

In the AD 1300s and 1400s, numerous Siouan-speaking groups were entrenched throughout the Ohio River Valley. The Oceti Sakowin began their own migration to the northwest in the AD 1300s or 1400s, settling in the lake country of Wisconsin and Minnesota. It was here they probably encountered bison for the first time. They were mostly sedentary, constructing large rectangular houses with heavy timber frames. But they apparently gave up farming and instead used canoes to harvest wild rice in the marshes and swamps, something they might have learned from their Ojibwe neighbors (Woodhead 1993:18–19).

#### **4.2 Western Expansionism**

The Ojibwe, often referred to as the Chippewa, was the most numerous and powerful Tribe in the Great Lakes region in the AD 1600s, and once armed by the French they became a powerful military force. By the middle AD 1650s, they had turned their weapons on the Oceti Sakowin: the Dakota to the far east, the Nakota in the middle, and the Lakota to the far west. All Oceti Sakowin groups were pushed westward away from Lake Superior, resulting in a ripple effect across the region. (Moore et al. 2001; Woodhead 1993).





**Figure 6: Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota bands comprising the Seven Council Fires.**  
(Image modified from Woodhead 1993:20.)

It is unclear from whom the Oceti Sakowin acquired guns, although all three divisions had them by AD 1700. No references indicate that they were allied with the British fur traders, and it seems unlikely the French-allied Cree and Ojibwa would trade guns to their enemies. More likely, the Oceti Sakowin acquired guns through their control of lucrative, large-scale trade fairs centered on the Blue Earth and Des Moines rivers in southwestern Minnesota. The Oceti Sakowin were essentially middlemen situated between the Plains Tribes and woodland Tribes. As the Lakota migrated farther west, these trade fairs were eventually shifted to the upper Missouri River country and centered on the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa villages, probably by 1750. The Mandan were shrewd businessmen who were known to trade in guns to nomadic Tribes at huge markups (Parks 2001a; Stewart 2001; Wood and Irwin 2001; Woodhead 1993).

From AD 1650 to 1700, the Lakota aggressively pushed westward. The Lakota quickly displaced other immigrants living east of the Missouri River: Cheyenne, Oto, Omaha, Missouri, and Iowa. But they could not displace the entrenched Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa groups, who had superior numbers and the protection of elaborately fortified villages. The Lakota increasingly became full-time bison hunters as they moved west, and their relationship with the

village agriculturalists was initially economic in nature. The Lakota traded bison meat (protein) for agricultural products (complex carbohydrates), but on unfavorable terms set by the villagers (DeMallie 2001a).

There is no indication the Lakota expansionism extended very far west of the Missouri River until the middle AD 1700s. Rather, the Great Plains of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and western Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota were left to other bison-hunting Tribes, most of whom also traded with the upper Missouri River villagers: the Blackfeet Confederacy, Arapaho, Crow, and the Cheyenne, all of whom had acquired horses. Lakota expansion to the west probably occurred once they also had acquired horses (DeMallie 2001a; 2001b).

It was the horse that changed the balance of power on the Northern Plains (Haines 1964; Osborn 1983). The Plains Tribes might have encountered mounted fur traders from Canada in the middle or late AD 1600s, but the transition to an equestrian, bison-hunting lifeway was the result of events in the American Southwest. The Puebloan Revolt of AD 1680 had left large Spanish horse herds untended. These were appropriated by the Apache of the Arkansas River country and the Comanche (Shoshone) of the Colorado Rocky Mountains, both of whom proved adept at horse breeding and horse trading (Haines 1964). By AD 1770, the Dakota of Minnesota were mounted. By inference, the western Lakota would have acquired horses before that time from Plains Tribes or intermediaries to the west. Perhaps not coincidentally, AD 1750 is the year assigned to the first Sioux incursion west of the Missouri River onto the Northern Plains (Woodhead 1993).

The Lakota probably acquired horses from southern and western Tribes, most likely the Kiowa, Comanche, and Shoshone, who were renowned horse breeders and horse traders. One account claims they acquired horses from the Cheyenne in about 1730 (Liberty 2006), but this seems unlikely given the open warfare that existed between the two groups at that time. Horses greatly expanded the range of all Plains Tribes, both agriculturalists and hunter-gatherers. Improved hunting efficiencies led some farmers to increase their reliance on bison hunting as a food staple, while others, like the Cheyenne, abandoned farming altogether.

Once armed with guns and horses, the Lakota quickly became the dominant military and economic force in the upper Missouri River country by the late AD 1700s. The large village-based trading networks were collapsing under the combined onslaught of epidemics and Lakota-Dakota expansionism. Devastating epidemics killed as much as 90 percent of village populations, which were hardest hit because the diseases spread more easily and quickly among large groups living in close proximity to one another. The nomadic Lakota who traded with the villages were not immune to the diseases, but the Lakota avoided the vast devastation because their nomadic lifestyle kept them away from infected communities except for brief trading forays (DeMallie 2001a; Woodhead 1993).

The Lakota expansion was by all accounts militaristic. Male status was based largely on prowess in warfare and raiding, with horses serving as the currency of that status. As summarized by Powers (2010:39), "Sioux men found something appealing about dying young in battle. It was not a death wish exactly, but a death sentimentalism. The Sioux prayed for success and safety, but they scorned fear."

Within a matter of decades, the Lakota were raiding as far west as the Rocky Mountains, as far north as Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and into the central plains of Kansas and Colorado. They apparently never ventured into western Montana and Alberta, controlled by the powerful Blackfeet Confederacy, nor did they venture into the Southern Plains, controlled by the

Southern Comanche and their Kiowa allies. But they were the dominant military presence everywhere in between (DeMallie 2001a, 2001b; McGinnis 2010; Woodhead 1993).

To be certain, the Lakota were not the only Plains Tribe to embrace a warrior lifeway (McGinnis 2010). Most nomadic Plains Tribes raided one another, depending on shifting alliances, and sometimes raided among themselves. The sedentary Plains Tribes, such as the Pawnee, the early Cheyenne, the Arikara, and the Mandan-Hidatsa alliance, were stationary targets for these raiding enterprises, and once weakened by epidemics, they were no match for the Lakota (or anyone else for that matter). Not surprising, most of the Plains Tribes viewed the Lakota as their traditional enemy.

By the AD 1830s, the northern Lakota (Hunkpapa, Sicasu, Itazipco, O'heonpa, and Miniconjou) had pushed into western North Dakota and South Dakota, and the southern Lakota (Oglala and Lower Brulé) had by this time pushed into southwestern South Dakota, western Nebraska and southeastern Wyoming. The Oglala and Lower Brulé soon found themselves directly in the path of hundreds of thousands of Euro-American immigrants bound for Oregon, Utah, and California, beginning in 1841 and accelerating in the 1840s and 1850s. The wagon route followed the North Platte River in western Nebraska about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of the CBR ISR area.

#### **4.3 The Lakota in Western Nebraska 1830–1850**

As discussed above, hunters have periodically exploited the Crow Butte region for thousands of years from terminal Ice Age times. During the Protohistoric period, it was occupied or used by successive Plains Tribes: the Kiowa and Kiowa Apache, the Crow, the Cheyenne, and lastly the Lakota beginning in about AD 1800. DeMallie (2001a, 2001b) makes the case that the Lakota used western Nebraska for seasonal bison hunts, but their presence here was occasional and temporary. Hanson and Wyatt (2009:5) state that the Crow Butte area was a preferred winter camp for the Lower Brulé Lakota in the 1830s.

During an exploration in 1837, J.N. Nicollet noted that Lower Brulé Lakota occupied 90 lodges near the headwaters of the White River and the White Buttes near the head of the Niobrara River (DeMallie 1976:261). Lower Brulé winter camps were also observed near Crawford (Hyde 1961:17–18) and in the Chadron Creek and Bordeaux Creek areas near modern-day Chadron (Hanson and Wyatt 2009:5).

Lakota use of western Nebraska probably increased after AD 1834 when Fort William (later renamed Fort John and then Fort Laramie) was established at the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers in southwestern Wyoming about 190 kilometers (67 miles) from the Crow Butte area. Robert Campbell and William Sublette established the post specifically as a nexus for trade with Native American groups. Many rival Tribes traded their tanned bison hides for Euro-American manufactured goods at Fort Laramie, but especially the Lakota (NPS n.d.a).

James Bordeaux, a former trader at Fort William, established his own trading post on a tributary of the White River near modern-day Chadron 37 kilometers (23 miles) northeast of Crawford (the tributary was later referred to as Bordeaux Creek). He also had a trading post on the Platte River south of Fort Laramie in southeastern Wyoming (Hanson 1972). Hanson and Wyatt (2009:5) state he arrived in the White River country in the fall of 1849, and he soon traded for nearly 100 horses and mules that he intended to sell to immigrants at Fort Laramie (2009:5). Hanson and Wyatt's map (2009:6), however, indicates the trading post was established in 1837. Bordeaux had married two sisters of renowned Lower Brulé chief Swift Bear, and Lower Brulé bands camped along the creeks nearby. In 1849, a band under chief Grabbing Bear was

camped along Beaver Creek northeast of the trading post. A skirmish between the Lower Brulé Lakota and Crow that occurred in the fall of 1849 is specific to Crow Butte and led to the naming of the prominent geological formation.

Multiple versions of the skirmish have been offered over the years, although the basic elements are the same. According to the most definitive account in Hanson and Wyatt (2009:5–7), 32 Crow warriors, perhaps under the command of Crow war chief White Bear (figure 7), arrived just before dawn on October 15, intent on stealing horses from the Lower Brulé camps. They arrived on foot with pack dogs loaded with dried meat, extra moccasins, and braided lariats. In the darkness, they happened upon Bordeaux's "small wintering house." The Crow appropriated 82 horses and mules and burned the post. Bordeaux and his companions escaped to a Lower Brulé camp 10 miles to the east, and a war party led by Red Leaf and Two Strikes set out in pursuit of the Crow Indians fleeing west. By early afternoon, the Lower Brulé pursuers had closed on the Crow raiders, slowed by trying to herd so many animals. Half of the Crow raiding party laid in ambush along Ash Creek and the other half continued west with the horses and mules toward their homes in Montana. The Crow warriors hidden along the creek bed unleashed a "fusillade" at their Lower Brulé pursuers, who then retreated and regrouped. With the horse herd disappearing into the safety of the open plains, the Lower Brulé turned their attention toward the Crow hidden along Ash Creek. The mounted Crow dashed southwest and abandoned their horses at the foot of an unnamed butte, then scurried up a trail to the top. The Lower Brulé attempted to follow but were met with stones and bullets. There was only one route to the top of the butte and one way out, so the Lower Brulé were content to wait for hunger and thirst to force the Crow from their refuge. The Crow, meanwhile, built bonfires, sang songs, and danced to taunt their enemies. On the morning of the fourth day, there was no noises coming from the top of the butte. The Lower Brulé scaled the butte to find the Crow had escaped by rappelling down the sheer south cliff face using rawhide strips or lariats. Left behind was a pack dog and one warrior who had died of his wounds. The Lower Brulé had been outwitted and shamed. The butte became known as Dancers Hill and later Crow Butte.



**Figure 7: Crow chief White Bear is named in historical documents as the leader of the Crow raiding party in 1849. (Image: Library of Congress.)**

Different iterations of the story, all compiled in Hanson and Wyatt (2009), indicate that all of the Crow warriors escaped or as many as three were found dead on the butte. One indicates that the single dead warrior was an old man who kept up the singing and commotion as a diversion to allow the others time to escape. Another contends the escaped Crow then ambushed the



unsuspecting Lower Brulé and took many scalps before escaping on the Lower Brulé horses. Another reports that the Crow warriors were rescued by mysterious Indian maidens. What is clear is the event was of such momentous importance to the Lakota that it was recorded by Brown Hat, a Lower Brulé historian, in his winter count of 1849–1850 (Mallery 1893). Documentary support that the event actually occurred was later offered by Bordeaux, who filed an Indian depredation claim with the U.S. Government to recover the value of his lost horses and mules (reprinted in Hanson and Wyatt 2009). Jeff Nothelphim, an Oglala Lakota elder, confirmed the general details of the events during a May 2021 visit to the CBR ISR license area.

The Battle of Crow Butte, as it came to be known, was fresh on the minds of the Lakota when the U.S. Government convened a “Grand Council” in September 1875 (see section 4.5) to discuss the sale of the Black Hills due to the discovery of gold and uncontrollable trespassing by white miners into the region. Oglala chief Red Cloud (figure 8), the most famous of the Lakota chiefs of that time, wanted the talks held at the agency bearing his name near Camp Robinson. Spotted Tail (figure 9), a famous chief of the Lower Brulé Lakota, wanted the talks held on Chadron Creek, the traditional winter camp area of the Lower Brulé. After much wrangling, the Government-appointed commissioners settled on a location on the White River plain a mile or so north of Crow Butte (Potter 2016:15). Various newspaper accounts of the grand council refer to the location as White Earth Creek, Little Clay Creek, and White Clay Creek.



**Figure 8: Oglala Lakota chief Red Cloud.** (Image: Library of Congress.)



**Figure 9: Lower Brulé Lakota chief Spotted Tail.** (Image: Library of Congress.)

The disagreement over where to hold the council was centered, in part, on Lower Brulé Lakota feelings toward Crow Butte itself. John T. Bell, in a dispatch to the Herald dated September 12, 1875, and Albert Swalm, in a dispatch to the Fort Dodge Messenger on September 14, 1875, both related an account of a chief named Drag Stone who argued forcefully for the Chadron

Creek location in that “a good many of his young men were afraid to go to Crow Butte, as it is a war butte” (Bell, cited in Potter 2016:149) and as war buttes they “think them capable of an unlucky influence upon the fortunes of the Dakota” (Swalm, cited in Potter 2016:183).

#### **4.4 The Great Sioux Wars 1851–1877**

The role of western Nebraska, specifically the Crow Butte region, is not clearly articulated in the various published histories. Massive migrations of settlers bound for Oregon, religious refugees bound for the Salt Lake Valley, and fortune-seekers bound for the California gold fields overwhelmed the Platte River country by 1850. The preferred route along the North Platte River took these immigrants within 80-95 kilometers (50-60 miles) of Crow Butte. Conflicts with nomadic Tribes along this route were inevitable, but they were initially low-intensity encounters that rarely resulted in bloodshed. The U.S. Army purchased Fort John in 1849, renaming it Fort Laramie, as a military outpost to protect immigrants.

To further ensure the safety of the immigrants, the U.S. Government dispatched treaty commissioners to negotiate safe passage with 11 Plains Tribes, many of whom were at war with one another: Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Assiniboiné, Hidatsa, Arikara, Mandan, Gros Ventre, Oglala Lakota, and Lower Brulé Lakota (the Shoshone attended but were not invited because they were not considered a Plains Tribe). Called the Horse Creek Treaty at the time, it is now known as the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, an event attended by more than 10,000 Native Americans. Government representatives included renown mountain men Thomas Fitzpatrick and Jim Bridger, Jesuit priest Peter De Smet, and famed explorer John C. Fremont, as well as the superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis (NPS n.d.b).

The treaty included provisions that the Tribes would stop fighting among themselves, the U.S. Government was authorized to establish roads and military outposts within tribal territories, the U.S. Government would protect the Tribes from depredations by U.S. citizens but the Tribes would be responsible for any attacks on white immigrants occurring on their lands, and the Tribes would guarantee the safe passage of immigrants through their lands (see NPS n.d.b for the complete wording of the treaty). The Government made no claims on tribal lands, but it did divide the Plains into tribal territories. The Lakota were given the Black Hills and surrounding lands, much to the chagrin of the Cheyenne and Arapaho who claimed those same lands (Fowler 1982; Liberty and Liberty 1982).

The treaty did not hold. The Tribes continued to fight among themselves, often over disputed tribal territories assigned in the treaty. Paul (2004:12) blamed the demographic makeup of the immigrants, mostly single men bound for the California gold fields, who killed the game, cut the trees, and fouled the water holes, bringing a scourge of cholera that soon infected the Lakota. In 1853, Fort Laramie soldiers fired on a Miniconjou camp, leaving four or five Lakota dead (Paul 2004:15–16). In 1854, a Miniconjou butchered a lame ox left behind by Mormon immigrants, but he was, in turn, accused of theft. Lt. John Grattan and 28 soldiers set out for the large village of Miniconjou and Lower Brulé nearby to arrest the perpetrator. Oglala chief Man Afraid of His Horses (figure 10) tried to discourage the soldiers, as did Lower Brulé head chief Conquering Bear and trader James Bordeaux. Grattan’s entire command was wiped out in a matter of moments; Conquering Bear, beloved by Lakota and whites alike, also died in the exchange (Paul 2004:22–23).



**Figure 10: Oglala chief Man Afraid of His Horses was among the greatest chiefs of the Historic period. (Image: Library of Congress.)**

The Miniconjou, Lower Brulé, and Oglala Lakota scattered before the military could exact its revenge. Hostilities continued in 1854, but they were minor by comparison to the Grattan incident. That changed in September 1855 with a savage new military strategy, implemented by General William Selby Harney, that amounted to the destruction of entire Lakota encampments of men, women, and children. The first such massacre occurred at Blue Water Creek in southwestern Nebraska about 235 kilometers (146 miles) southeast of Crawford, when a Lower Brulé and Oglala Lakota camp came under attack by 600 soldiers. The soldiers killed 86 Lakota, almost half of whom were women and children, and captured 70 women and children (Beck 2004; Paul 2004).

The brutality of the U.S. Army at Blue Water Creek was widely decried by Eastern newspapers, which labeled it Harney's Massacre, but Secretary of War Jefferson Davis embraced the military strategy, and it would become the template for the subjugation and destruction of Northern Plains Tribes in the decades that followed. It also served to unify the various Lakota and Dakota bands once beset by petty squabbles into the Great Sioux Nation unified in its opposition to the U.S. military.

Other major conflicts followed, but these were peripheral to the Crow Butte region and are only briefly mentioned here. In 1863, the Bozeman Trail had been blazed from Fort Laramie to the Montana gold fields, and three military forts were constructed along the route to protect the miners. The route, however, took the miners through Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho hunting territories in the Powder River country they had recently wrested from the Crow Nation. Oglala chief Red Cloud, allied with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, waged a 3-year campaign of hit-and-run strikes on soldiers and civilians. In the largest engagement, in December 1866, Captain William J. Fetterman and his entire command of 81 cavalry and infantrymen were lured into a trap and annihilated by a war party of 1,000 to 3,000 warriors waiting in ambush. It was the worst defeat of the U.S. military on the Northern Plains to that time (see Liberty 2006, McGinnis 2010 and Olson 1974 for different perspectives of Red Cloud's War).



In 1868, the U.S. Government sued for peace with the Lakota-Cheyenne-Arapaho alliance, in part because the military campaign was expensive with no end in sight and partly because of shifting priorities to protect the soon-to-be-completed transcontinental railroad. Under terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, the Government agreed to close the Bozeman Trail and abandon its forts there; granted the three Tribes the Powder River country as exclusive hunting territory, as well as hunting territories in western Kansas and eastern Colorado; and created the Great Sioux Reservation that included the Black Hills and large swaths of the Northern Plains west of the Missouri River, including the previously established Ponca Reservation. In return, the Government received promises the Lakota would allow the construction of railroads so long as the railroads did not enter reservation lands. Among the Sioux who signed the treaty were the Miniconjou, Oglala, Hunkpapa, and Lower Brulé Lakota and the Yanctonai Dakota bands (see Fixico 2018 for a more detailed discussion of the treaty terms). The Sioux signatories included the greatest and most influential chiefs of the era: Spotted Tail of the Lower Brulé; Man Afraid of His Horses, American Horse, and Red Cloud of the Oglalas; Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapas; and Spotted Elk of the Miniconjou. Not signing was Crazy Horse, who had emerged as a great warrior during Red Cloud's War, being credited with the ruse that lured Fetterman's company to its demise.

#### **4.5 Sign or Starve Era**

As stipulated in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, the Government set out to construct Indian "agencies" or facilities for the distribution of Government supplies. The first Oglala agency, called the Red Cloud Agency, was constructed in 1871 along the North Platte River near Henry, NE, but in 1872 it was moved to the upper White River about 6.4 kilometers (4 miles) northwest of the CBR ISR license area. Red Cloud's camp was located just northeast of the agency on the banks of the White River. In the wake of the killing of an agency clerk, army troops were dispatched to keep the peace, constructing Camp Robinson a short distance from the agency. In theory, the troops were there to "protect" the agency, but the troops actually served as a deterrent to the Lakota leaving the reservation on unauthorized bison hunts. The agency was actually located outside the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation.

Lower Brulé chief Spotted Tail initially found his band assigned to lands along the Missouri River at the mouth of Whetstone Creek, a place he despised, and in 1871 he successfully lobbied officials to have his agency moved to northwestern Nebraska, even though three different locations identified for the new agency were not within the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. The Government eventually settled on a location for the Spotted Tail Agency on Beaver Creek about 71 kilometers (44 miles) east of the Red Cloud Agency. In 1874, the army constructed Camp Sheridan at the Spotted Tail Agency to ensure the peace. Spotted Tail and many of his followers were much more content camped on Bordeaux Creek near Chadron, the site of their traditional winter camps for decades (Potter 2020:146).

Related events between 1874 and 1876 would bring an end to both agencies by 1877. In 1874, George Armstrong Custer led 1,000 soldiers and a gaggle of newspaper reporters into the Black Hills to investigate claims the area contained gold, even though these were Lakota treaty lands and off limits to soldiers and miners. By 1875, the rich gold deposits at Deadwood and Whitewood Creeks had unleashed a rush of trespassing miners (Parker 2003).

In May 1875, Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, and Lone Horn traveled to Washington, DC, in a last-hour attempt to persuade President Ulysses S. Grant to honor the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and put an end to the trespassing. But Government officials had little appetite to stop the encroachment, and instead the Lakota received another offer couched as a threat: sell the Black

Hills and be relocated to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The Lakota delegation insisted that any discussions of ceding the Black Hills happen in their own country. The following month, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano appointed a commission led by Iowa Senator William B. Allison to “treat with the Sioux for Relinquishment of the Black Hills” (Potter 2016:13; 2020:145).

The Government proposed a Grand Council to be held in the Crow Butte area to negotiate the terms. Thousands of Lakota (and some Cheyenne and Arapaho) began to arrive in September 1875, although a large number of Lakota not assigned to any particular agency refused to attend. Spotted Tail insisted that he had been promised the council would be held on Chadron Creek, the site of his traditional winter camps. Red Cloud was just as insistent it be held at the Red Cloud Agency. The disagreement reflected the intense rivalry between the two great Lakota chiefs. The commissioners settled on a location about a mile northwest of Crow Butte itself (Potter 2016, 2020).

The Government’s representatives and a flock of reporters and correspondents representing newspapers across the Nation arrived at the Red Cloud Agency in early September 1875. During the lengthy lull in negotiations over the location of the council, the bored reporters fired off dispatches with lurid and fantastical descriptions of the participants and the local terrain, most of them perpetuating negative Indian stereotypes of the day (these have all been compiled in Potter 2016). One account on September 15, printed in the *New York Herald*, described the events leading to the naming of Crow Butte. Reuben Davenport wrote of Crow Butte, “They [the Sioux] have never forgotten it and the ill luck of the place” (cited in Potter 2016:184).

The first negotiations convened on September 20, 1875, and the commissioners offered to lease the Black Hills and return it to the Lakota after the gold was removed. That evoked derisive laughter from the Lakota. Red Dog, an Oglala spokesman for Red Cloud, informed the commissioners the various bands required several days to council among themselves. The negotiations resumed on September 23, but angry opposition from Little Big Man, a noted Oglala warrior and perhaps a representative of Crazy Horse (who had refused to attend), threatened the commissioners and the few soldiers there to protect them. The combined influences of Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, Man Afraid of His Horses, and Sitting Bull defused what could have been a disastrous armed confrontation (Potter 2016:18). Other interruptions followed. Andrew Burt, in a telegraph to the *New York Herald* on September 29, wrote that “Lone Horn of the Miniconjous disturbed the council by riding up and delivering from his saddle a violent speech against the Lower Brulé and Oglalas for trying to sell his country, the Black Hills” (cited in Potter 2016:281).

When the council reconvened on September 23, the Lakota had a counteroffer: long-term food and clothing for every tribal member. Spotted Tail’s proposal was vague, asking for “pay as long as we live.” Red Dog, speaking on behalf of Red Cloud, proposed long-term support for the next seven generations. The Lakota also demanded the southern boundary of the Great Sioux Reservation be extended southward to the North Platte River to encompass their new homes in western Nebraska (the Red Cloud Agency and Spotted Tail Agency were both in Nebraska and outside the existing reservation boundaries). The commissioners had no authority to change reservation boundaries, and they had been authorized to offer no more than \$6 million for the Black Hills. The negotiations collapsed with both sides far apart (Potter 2020:152–153).

Spotted Tail harbored hope the Lakota would be invited to Washington for further negotiations. But the failure of the Allison Commission had strengthened the cause of U.S. Government hardliners demanding a punitive military response. In November 1875, the army was relieved of

its responsibility to keep miners out of the Black Hills, and in December the Government issued an ultimatum that all Lakota, including nonagency and nontreaty bands, must report to an agency by January 31, 1876, or face military action. The short time allowed under the ultimatum and the realities of winter travel on the Northern Plains made compliance impossible. As a result, in March 1876, the U.S. Army began destroying Lakota and Cheyenne villages in what press accounts at the time described as massacres (Potter 2016; 2020).

Uitley (1994:122–124) believes the foundation for the Cheyenne-Sioux resistance was laid in the summer of 1875 at a Sundance ceremony when Hunkpapa chief Sitting Bull revealed a vision in which he said, “the Great Spirit has given our enemies to us. We are to destroy them.” In the spring of 1876, refugees from the U.S. Army onslaught, including famed war leaders Sitting Bull, Gall, and Crazy Horse, were retreating to the west toward their Powder River hunting territories granted in the 1868 treaty. This culminated in the famous Battle of the Greasy Grass in June 1876 where Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s command was annihilated and two other regiments of the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry suffered catastrophic losses in the worst U.S. Army defeat in the history of the American West (see also Uitley 2004 and 2020).

All Lakota bands were represented at the Battle of Greasy Grass, and accusations soon flew that noncombatants at the agencies were somehow involved. By July 1876, civilian control of the agencies had been transferred to the military, and the Lakota were all disarmed and their horses taken from them, leaving them no means to hunt. In August, another commission was created to settle the Black Hills issue once and for all. There would be no negotiations. Former Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny delivered the ultimatum in September 1876: give up the Black Hills or all Government rations would cease. Red Cloud and Spotted Tail both signed the agreement under duress in what came to be known to the Lakota as the “sign or starve” campaign, and they instructed their followers to do the same. The number of signatories was still far fewer than the three-quarters of male tribal members required under terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, but Congress ignored that detail and ratified the agreement in February 1877.

The Lakota-Cheyenne alliance splintered after the Battle of Greasy Grass, with some participants returning to the Indian agencies while others fought hit-and-run engagements for the next year. Crazy Horse surrendered at Camp Robinson in May 1877. Crazy Horse was killed 4 months later while allegedly resisting imprisonment (Powers 2010).

The Lakota presence in western Nebraska ended later in 1877. The Spotted Tail Agency was moved to a location on Rosebud Creek near its confluence with the White River, also in South Dakota. It was renamed the Rosebud Agency in 1878, and in 1889 it was renamed the Rosebud Indian Reservation by an act of Congress. The Red Cloud Agency was also moved in 1877 farther down the White River into South Dakota, and in 1878 it was moved again to southern South Dakota. In 1889, it was renamed the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation by an act of Congress. The Pine Ridge Reservation was the site of the infamous Wounded Knee Massacre on December 29, 1890, in which nearly 300 Miniconjou and Hunkpapa men, women, and children under chief Spotted Elk were slaughtered by the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry while attempting to seek sanctuary with Red Cloud (see Brown 1970 and Uitley 2004 for more detailed accounts of the tragedy, as well as the Ghost Dance phenomenon and murder of Sitting Bull that led to it).

Camp Robinson was renamed Fort Robinson in 1878, and U.S. Army troops based there led an 1878 campaign against the Cheyenne fleeing Indian Territory in Oklahoma and quashed a Cheyenne escape attempt from the fort in 1879 (some histories claim troops were involved in the Wounded Knee Massacre, but the Fort Robinson official history denies this). Fort Robinson

remained operational until 1947. White homesteaders had claimed most lands south of Crawford and around Crow Butte beginning in 1885. The town of Chadron was established in 1885, and Crawford, the one-time civilian camp supporting Fort Robinson, was formally established as a town in 1886.

#### **4.6 The Archaeological Evidence**

Physical evidence of Native American presence in the CBR ISR region during the Historic period is rather limited (table 3). The most obvious resources are Fort Robinson (25DW51), now a State park and National Historic Landmark; the Red Cloud Agency (25DW54), also a National Historic Landmark; and the Fort Robinson general area (25DW55).

Three other historic Native American sites are located within 5 miles of the CBR ISR facility. Site 25DW73 was described as a scatter of lithic flakes and bone located about 2.8 miles northwest of the 1982 survey area and adjacent to White Clay Creek. It was attributed to a historic Sioux occupation, but the 1959 survey by the NSHS did not indicate why this affiliation was assigned. Site 25DW88 was identified during a 1969 NSHS survey of Cherry Creek as a series of burials along a narrow ridge and were considered “probably historic Sioux” (Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15). And an isolated metal arrow point (25DW299) identified in the proposed North Trend Expansion Area was described as consistent with arrow points manufactured in the 1840s through 1870s, although it was likely associated with those living around the Red Cloud Agency from 1873 to 1877 (Späth 2006:8).

Glass trade beads were privately collected from 25DW114 within the CBR ISR license area (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:32). And in the 1950s, private landowners exposed and removed what they believed was a historic Native American burial from a ridge near 25DW194, also in the license area. Efforts during the 1987 survey to identify the burial location or additional burial materials were unsuccessful (Bozell and Pepperl 1987:49). The ultimate disposition of the burial is unknown.

Additional evidence of historic Native American use of the area near the CBR facility comes not from archaeological evidence but from a photograph published by Potter (2016:108) that is believed to have been taken in about 1877. The photograph (NSHS RG2955-48; see figure 11 here) depicts a large complex of teepees. The caption indicates it is Red Dog’s camp and that Crow Butte is in the extreme left of the photograph. The skyline is not clearly visible in the published version, but it is in the digital image on file with the NSHS. In November 2021, efforts to reidentify the location on the camp, based on unique features in the photo, identified a possible location about 800 meters (a half mile) northwest of the western boundary of the CBR ISR license area. As discussed above, Red Dog was a renowned orator and the primary spokesman for Red Cloud during the 1875 negotiations with the Allison Commission.

**Table 3: Historic Native American Resources within 5 miles of the CBR ISR Facility**

Site No.	Site Type	Description	Size m <sup>2</sup>	Cultural Affiliation	NHPA Eligible	Impacts	Citation	Distance from CBR ISR Facility
25DW51	Military Fort	Camp Robinson site of many significant Native American events	Not Specified	Lakota, Cheyenne	NHL	Multiple	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	4.4 mi
25DW54	Indian Agency	Red Cloud Agency	Not Specified	Oglala Lakota	NHL	Multiple	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	3.4 mi
25DW55	Camps	General area around Fort Robinson; site of many significant Native American events	Not Specified	Lakota, Cheyenne	Not Specified	Multiple	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	4.4 mi
25DW73	Artifact Scatter	Small scatter of lithic flakes and animal bone	Not Specified	Historic Sioux	Not Specified	Not Specified	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15; Spath 2006:2	2.8 mi
25DW88	Burials	Series of burials on a ridge next to Cherry Creek	Not Specified	Historic Sioux	Not Specified	Not Specified	Bozell and Pepperl 1982:15	4.0 mi
25Dw114	Artifact Scatter	Glass trade beads in private collection	150,000	Unknown Native American	Criterion D	Agriculture and Private Artifact Collection	Bozell and Pepperl 1982, 1987	Inside
25DW194	Burial	Burial removed by private landowner in 1950s near this location	Unknown	Unknown Native American	None	Gravel Quarrying, Agriculture	Bozell and Pepperl 1987	Inside
25DW299	Isolated Find	A single metal arrow point; 1840s-1870s	<1	Unknown Native American	Not Eligible	Agriculture	Spath 2006:8; Spath 2007a: n.p.	4-5 mi



**Figure 11: Historic photo (stereoscopic pair) depicting the location of Red Dog's camp in about 1877 (Image: NSHS RG 2955-48.)**

## 5. PLACES OF TRIBAL SIGNIFICANCE

The concept of formalized surveys to identify TCPs in the Northern Plains region is rooted in the efforts of Sebastian LeBeau (2009), a Cheyenne River Lakota who developed an approach whereby TCPs and other sites of traditional significance can be identified, described, and understood by nontribal individuals and decisionmakers. Two different TCP surveys in the Crow Butte region draw from LeBeau's approach to a greater or lesser degree and warrant a brief discussion.

In the early 2000s, the National Park Service (NPS) implemented a holistic approach to the identification and documentation of historic landscapes, including TCPs, at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Sioux County, NE, about 40 miles southwest of the CBR ISR facility. This cultural landscape approach resulted in the identification of numerous historic contexts and individual sites within those contexts, including the formal National Register eligibility determination for Red Cloud's annual camp there as a contributing resource (NPS 2003, 2004, 2010). Part of this landscape approach was a TCP survey (LeBeau 2002) that identified Native American spiritual relationships with fossils, as well as Lakota oral histories of the Monument's landscape. Fourteen TCP sites were identified within the Monument, including cairns and fossil quarries of spiritual and medicinal significance (NPS 2004:7; SRI Foundation 2012:3).

The second TCP survey occurred in 2013 near Dewey, SD, about 75 miles northwest of the CBR ISR facility. Seven Tribes participated in the field survey: Northern Arapaho Tribe, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, Crow Nation, and Santee Sioux Tribe (the Lakota Tribes declined to participate). The tribal cultural survey resulted in the recording of 47 new discoveries in the project area. Tribal experts further visited 24 of the previously recorded archaeological sites, recording 81 cultural features within the project boundary. Some of the cultural features recorded by tribal survey teams correspond to features identified in the archaeological surveys; however, many represented new discoveries. Among the new discoveries were stone circles, fasting places, cairns, quarries, paint sources, medicine wheels, possible gravesites, camps, and other localities of significance (Nickens et al. 2018:3).

Considered together, the two TCP surveys demonstrated that sites of significance can be identified by tribal members with appropriate traditional knowledge, that these sites might go unrecognized during archaeological surveys or that the complete nature of the sites may not be recognized, and that sites of tribal cultural and religious significance transcend cultural affiliation in that groups with different languages and tribal histories can recognize TCP significance regardless of which group was responsible for those remains. This is consistent with guidance prepared by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe for the BLM (Montana State Office):

Generally, from the tribal-historical perspective, it is not considered important whose ancestors created an Ancient Indian or prehistoric site. Traditionalists do not generally identify cultural material scatters, petroglyphs, bison kill sites and stone feature sites as being Crow, Northern Cheyenne or Sioux. Rather, they describe why the Indians who made the site might have camped or hunted in that particular location or why they might have chosen to build particular features. What is important from this perspective is that Indians (people who share certain beliefs with the site interpreters) or spirit beings known to Indians made the sites, and that their actions are explicable and understandable by contemporary Indians who follow traditional ways [Northern Cheyenne Tribe 2002:7.4].



The first attempts to identify TCPs in the CBR ISR project area occurred in 1998, but this effort involved making phone calls and sending certified letters to six different Tribes, two Federal agencies, and one State agency inquiring about the presence of TCPs in the Crow Butte area. The Northern Cheyenne, Southern Cheyenne, and Crow Nation responded they were unaware of any TCPs in the project area; the other Tribes (Arapahoe, Oglala, and Pawnee) failed to respond. The Bureau of Indian Affairs in South Dakota indicated its own inquiries of Oglala Sioux Tribe members living on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation had no information on possible TCPs in the permit area (Resource Technologies Group 1998:11–12).

A second attempt to identify TCPs in the Crow Butte region occurred in late 2012, when representatives of the Crow Nation and Santee Sioux Nation accepted an invitation to examine four different areas near Crow Butte: the main CBR ISR license area, the proposed North Trend Expansion Area, the proposed Three Crow Expansion Area, and the (now licensed) Marsland Expansion Area. The 19 other invited Tribes declined to participate. The main CBR ISR license area was not investigated because of the extent of previous ground disturbance, and access to the proposed North Trend Expansion Area could not be arranged. However, the Tribes identified 12 potential TCPs in the Marsland Expansion Area and 1 potential TCP in the proposed Three Crow Expansion area (SC&A 2013; Santee Sioux Nation 2013). None of the 13 sites were recognized as potentially eligible for listing in the National Register (Santee Sioux Nation 2013:6).

The only site potentially within the 5-mile buffer is tribal site 8 in the eastern portion of the proposed Three Crow Expansion Area, located on the slope of a north-flowing drainage. It consisted of a mound of earth about 10 by 7 meters (33 by 23 feet) in an area where borrow materials had been removed from an east-facing slope to create a level excavated surface. (SC&A 2013:28–29; Santee Sioux Nation 2013:4, 6).

Oglala representatives have previously identified places of significance during visits to the CBR ISR facility. For instance, in 2011, Wilmer Mesteth, at the time the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, indicated during a visit to the CBR ISR facility that Crow Butte itself is a site of historical significance to the Tribe (see discussion above in section 4.3) and that the ridge behind Crow Butte was a place for vision quests (SC&A 2011b:8). The general region also has historical significance to the Tribe related to the Red Cloud Agency and treaty negotiations (SC&A 2011b:8-9).

Another place of significance, one woven deeply into the Lakota oral tradition, is the Lovers Leap geographic feature next to the White River on the north side of Crawford (figure 12). There are multiple variations of the story, but the underlying premise, memorialized in one of the seven original Sundance songs, is the same. According to one account, a young woman and young man fell in love, but the woman's father had promised her in marriage to another who had offered a bigger dowry. When the young lovers attempted to flee together, the father killed the young man. The distraught young woman sang her death song and leaped to her death from Lovers Leap Butte ([summitpost.org](http://summitpost.org), n.d.). Another account, offered by Wilmer Mesteth in 2011 (SC&A 2011b:9) indicates the couple fell in love, but the woman's father would not consent to the marriage because the young man had not distinguished himself in battle. When a Shoshone raiding party entered the area, the young man rode into his first battle with his father's horse and war regalia, only to be killed while trying to save the life of an older Lakota warrior. Distraught, the young woman leaped to her death.



**Figure 12: Lovers Leap is part of the Lakota oral traditions related to the Crow Butte region.**

## 6. SUMMARY

As reviewed above, the Crow Butte area in the panhandle area of northwestern Nebraska was probably occupied by Native Americans during all periods of prehistory, based on the recovery of temporally distinct projectile points and ceramics. This area was probably used seasonally by nomadic bison hunters or hunting parties from established agricultural settlements elsewhere practicing a dual hunting-farming economy (or both). The earliest big game hunters, the Paleo-Indians, used the region extensively, as evidenced by the abundance of distinctive points and the presence of large bison kill sites such as the Hudson-Meng site near Harrison. The abundance of these sites probably reflects optimal environmental conditions in the Early Holocene when climates were cooler and wetter than the middle Holocene.

By middle Archaic times, at about 5500 BC, regional climates deteriorated with the onset of 3,000 years of extreme aridity, heat, and probably winds that desiccated the grassland prairies. These conditions might have rendered large swaths of the Northern and Central Plains unsuitable for large bison herds, resulting in population shifts to the Rocky Mountain foothills and the river systems on the eastern margins of the Plains where there was greater biodiversity. Archaic sites in the Central Plains are rare, but the Crow Butte and adjacent Black Hills areas might have been an environmental refuge for bison and the people who preyed on them. The abundance of distinctive Middle Archaic and Late Archaic points from one site within the license area (privately collected) suggests this area was repeatedly visited over thousands of years.

Evidence for a robust Plains Woodland and Plains Village expression in the Crow Butte area is limited to a handful of sites, mostly outside the project area, with distinctive points and ceramics. Severe droughts in the AD 1500s (the worst in the past 1,200 years) might have prompted migrations of Athapaskan and Tanoan-speaking groups from the Rocky Mountains eastward into the Crow Butte and Black Hills areas. Evidence of these groups is limited to sites with Dismal River Complex ceramics dated to about AD 1600. These new arrivals, some of whom were farmers, were probably the Kiowa and their close allies the Kiowa Apache. The Crow and Arapaho arrived in the Crow Butte area in the middle 1700s and were initially on friendly terms with their Kiowa and Kiowa Apache neighbors.

By about AD 1750, when all Tribes in the region were armed with guns and horses, the Lakota and their cousins, the Dakota and Nakota, began an aggressive western expansion, displacing other Tribes in the upper Missouri River country. Among the displaced refugees were the Algonquian-speaking Cheyenne maize farmers, who then migrated to the Black Hills in the late 1700s. They formed an alliance with the Arapaho to push the Crow northwest into Montana and the Kiowa and Kiowa Apache south onto the southern Plains. By about AD 1800, the Cheyenne had themselves been pushed out of the Black Hills by the Lakota.

The Crow Butte region was initially occupied by Lower Brulé Lakota, who established their winter camps along Chadron Creek, Beaver Creek, and Bordeaux Creek, as well as the Niobrara River to the south of Crow Butte. The first historic accounts of the Lower Brulé Lakota in this region are from the 1830s. They were still there in 1849 when a Crow raiding party stole horses and mules and then outwitted their Lower Brulé pursuers during their escape in an event that led to the naming of Crow Butte (also known as Dancers Hill). There is no mention in the literature of Oglala Lakota in this area at this time, although, given the constant movement of people between Lakota bands, the Oglala were probably present in the Crow Butte region.

The historic record indicates the Oglala Lakota were relocated to the Crow Butte area in 1873 with the establishment of the Red Cloud Agency, named for the great Oglala war chief

Red Cloud who had earlier led the successful military campaign against the U.S. Government over the Bozeman Trail that led through Lakota hunting territories in Montana. A separate agency, the Spotted Tail Agency, was established nearby for the Lower Brulé Lakota. Both agencies were short-lived due to a series of events, including the discovery of gold in the Black Hills on Lakota treaty lands, the Government's "sign or starve" forced relinquishment of the Black Hills, and a vicious military campaign against the Sioux and Cheyenne that slaughtered men, women and children. By 1877, both agencies had been relocated to South Dakota.

In effect, the prehistory and history of the Crow Butte area are a microcosm of the prehistory and history of the Northern Plains. Prehistoric groups responded to climatic changes by focusing subsistence strategies on environmental niches with adequate resources. By Protohistoric times, massive migrations or forced displacements were underway, all part of a ripple effect resulting from the "guns, germs, and steel" phenomenon that reshuffled the social, economic, and military landscape of the Northern Plains. The Crow Butte area likely experienced a succession of occupations (or seasonal utilizations) by culturally and linguistically unrelated groups that included the Kiowa and Kiowa Apache, the Crow, the Arapaho, the Cheyenne, and finally the Lakota.

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