

Nebraska Archaeology

Prehistoric ★ Base Camp Site 25CD86/89



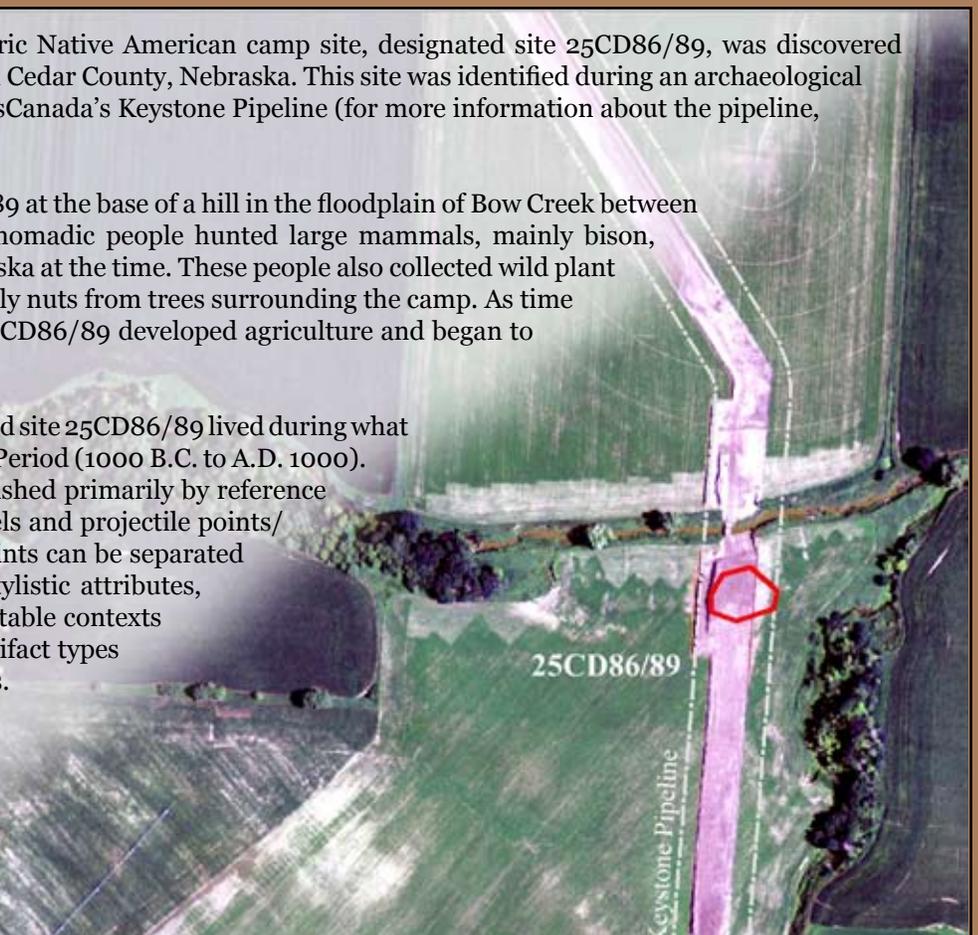
American Resources Group, Ltd., Excavating Site 25CD86/89 in the Winter of 2008/2009.

In the early spring of 2009, a prehistoric Native American camp site, designated site 25CD86/89, was discovered along the southern bank of Bow Creek in Cedar County, Nebraska. This site was identified during an archaeological survey prior to the construction of TransCanada's Keystone Pipeline (for more information about the pipeline, see back page).

Native Americans lived at site 25CD86/89 at the base of a hill in the floodplain of Bow Creek between 740 B.C. and A.D. 1200. The earliest nomadic people hunted large mammals, mainly bison, which roamed the vast prairies of Nebraska at the time. These people also collected wild plant foods native to the area, most importantly nuts from trees surrounding the camp. As time proceeded, the people occupying site 25CD86/89 developed agriculture and began to supplement their diet with corn.

The Native American people that occupied site 25CD86/89 lived during what archaeologists refer to as the Woodland Period (1000 B.C. to A.D. 1000). Prehistoric cultural groups are distinguished primarily by reference to two classes of artifacts: ceramic vessels and projectile points/hafted knives. Pottery and projectile points can be separated into types on the basis of distinctive stylistic attributes, and the recovery of these types from datable contexts allows archaeologists to assign these artifact types to specific temporal and cultural periods.

At site 25CD86/89, there were two main prehistoric occupations of two different eras: the first archaeologists call Valley Variant and the second, Great Oasis.



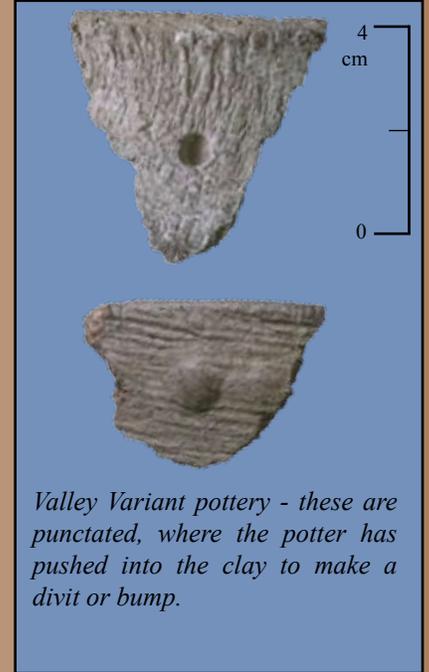
Plains Woodland 740 B.C. to 260 B.C.

Valley



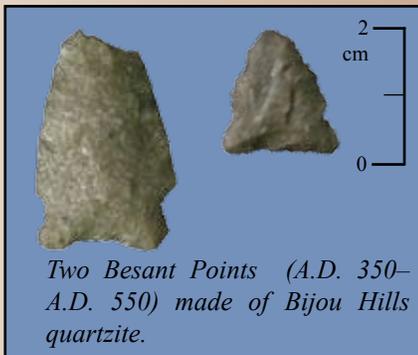
Two stone drills, the top one is made of Knife River chert, the bottom is of Florence D chert.

The earliest Native Americans occupying site 25CD86/89 lived there from 740 B.C. to 260 B.C. The pottery recovered from this early occupation has been identified by archaeologists as Valley Variant. Other Valley Variant camps are found throughout the east-central Plains and western prairies.



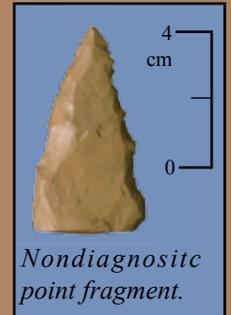
Valley Variant pottery - these are punctated, where the potter has pushed into the clay to make a divot or bump.

By looking at the stone tools people made and used at site 25CD86/89, it is apparent that the procurement and processing of meat and other animal products was a common activity. The presence



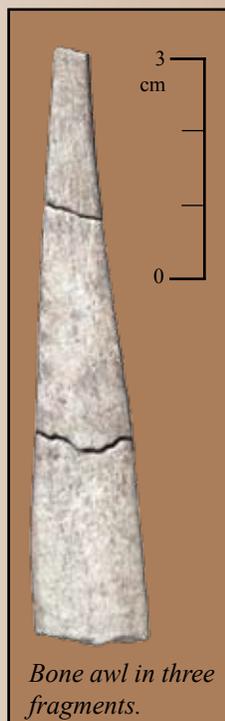
Two Besant Points (A.D. 350–A.D. 550) made of Bijou Hills quartzite.

of projectile points/hafted knives, also known as arrowheads, indicates these people were hunting animals. Other chert tools, like blades, were used to process meat for consumption. The pottery vessel remains found at site 25CD86/89 also show that cooking took place at the camp. Finally, the presence of chipped-stone drills and scrapers, as well as bone awls, suggest that perishable items made from animal and plant materials were also being



Nondiagnostic point fragment.

made, such as animal hides for shelters and clothing and plant fibers for weaving baskets, matting, and clothing. These non-durable items decayed and disintegrated long ago.



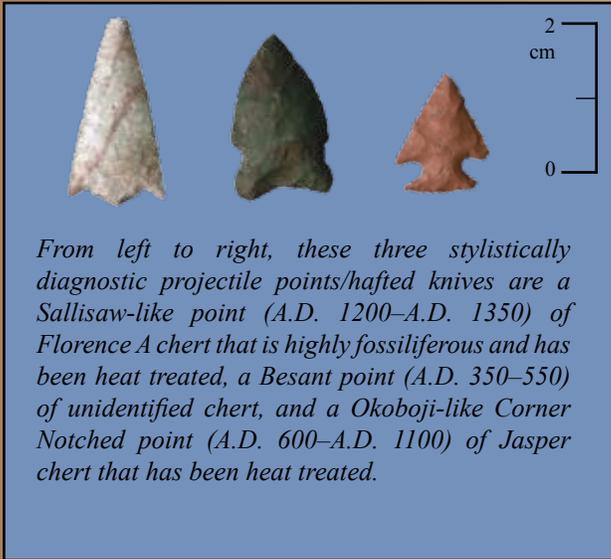
Bone awl in three fragments.

The types of bone recovered during excavation indicate that the Valley Variant hunters at the site were focusing on “first-line” resources, with grassland species being the most common. Of the six animal species found in the archaeological record, large mammals—bison and deer—were the most common. The presence of deer remains suggests that individuals from the site traveled about 20 miles north to the Missouri River region to hunt this woodland and wood-edge species. Although the only plant remains from this occupation was a single fragment of black walnut shell, the recovery of pitted stones and grinding stones suggests that their diet included hard nuts which required grinding and processing into meal.

Variant

Plains Village

A.D. 870 to A.D. 1200



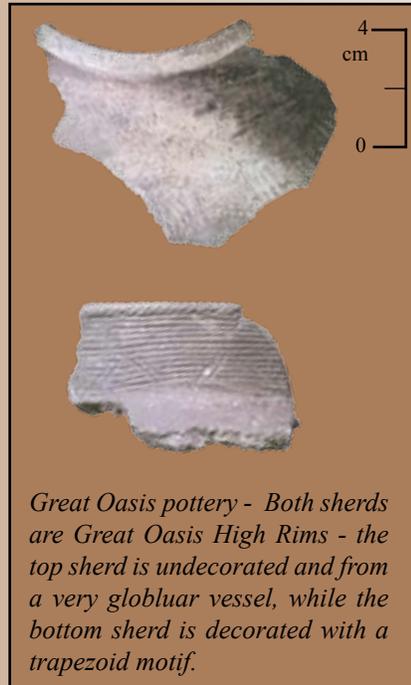
From left to right, these three stylistically diagnostic projectile points/hafted knives are a Sallisaw-like point (A.D. 1200–A.D. 1350) of Florence A chert that is highly fossiliferous and has been heat treated, a Besant point (A.D. 350–550) of unidentified chert, and a Okoboji-like Corner Notched point (A.D. 600–A.D. 1100) of Jasper chert that has been heat treated.

From A.D. 870 to A.D. 1200, or approximately 1,130 years after the original occupation of site 25CD86/89, another group of prehistoric Native Americans lived there. This occupation is defined as Great Oasis by archaeologists, based on the similarity of pottery found at the Great Oasis Site of southwest Minnesota. Great Oasis people along the Missouri River began establishing small, semi-sedentary villages. These people are considered to be the ancestors of the Middle Missouri Tradition people who, at a later time, lived in large fortified villages along the Missouri River.

The Great Oasis-type pottery recovered from site 25CD86/89 is very distinctive: it has thinner vessel walls than the earlier Valley Variant pottery and exhibits very fine incised line decorations on vessel rims.

The most common type of artifact found during this Great Oasis occupation of site 25CD86/89 is chert flakes. The presence of such a large amount of flakes means that stone tools were being produced and sharpened at the site. Some of these tools were made from materials that were traded or collected from distant sources, the most exotic being a piece of obsidian that originated from Idaho, about 1,230 miles to the west. A variety of projectile points indicate that bows and arrows were being used for hunting. During this occupation, the hunting of grassland species, particularly bison, was more prominent than the earlier occupation, and the use of plants at this time included domesticates, such as maize and sunflower. But like the earlier Valley Variant occupation, these people's diet also included nuts. Another similarity to the earlier occupation at the site was the recovery of chert knives, blades, and scrapers, along with a bone awl, which indicate that plant materials and animal remains were being processed into useful products and artifacts. Additionally, a groundstone celt was found suggesting that the

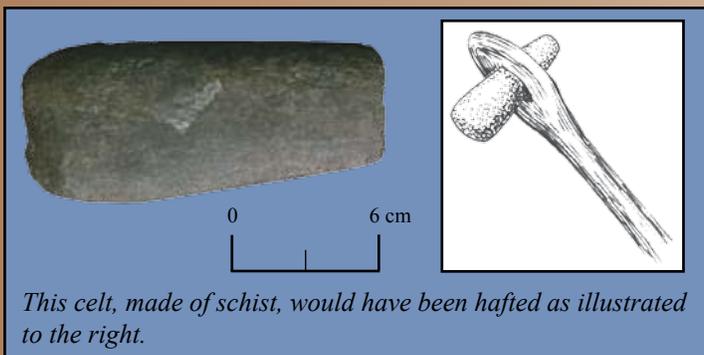
Great Oasis people were also cutting down trees and using wood for the construction of shelters and the production of other wooden artifacts.



Great Oasis pottery - Both sherds are Great Oasis High Rims - the top sherd is undecorated and from a very globular vessel, while the bottom sherd is decorated with a trapezoid motif.



Bone awl fragment.



This celt, made of schist, would have been hafted as illustrated to the right.

Great Oasis



Keystone Pipeline construction in North Dakota.

The Keystone Pipeline is 2,151 miles long and transports 590,000 barrels of crude oil per day from Hardisty, Alberta, to markets in the Midwestern United States at Wood River and Patoka, Illinois, as well as to Cushing, Oklahoma (visit TransCanada's website for more information: <http://www.transcanada.com/keystone.html>). The excavation conducted at 25CD86/89 was carried out by American Resources Group, Ltd. (ARG), of Carbondale, Illinois. The excavations were conducted in order to fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Archaeological and Historical Preservation Act of 1974, and Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, all of which exist to protect our collective cultural heritage in the United States. Since TransCanada was to construct the pipeline across

the land where 25CD86/89 is located (about 4 acres of land), the portion of site 25CD86/89 that would have been disturbed was archaeologically excavated by ARG in the winter of 2008/2009, and all cultural materials were collected and preserved. After the materials recovered during the excavation were analyzed and catalogued by archaeologists, zoologists, and botanists, a technical report was prepared to document and preserve the history of the site.



The circular depressions shown in the photograph to the left are prehistoric features that have been partially excavated by ARG personnel. Features such as these pits were used by the prehistoric site occupants for cooking, storing food, and for refuse. Because pit features often contain artifacts and food remains found in association with charcoal suitable for radiocarbon dating, the excavation of these 'time capsules' can yield a wealth of information on the material culture and diet of the original site occupants; this data can also identify the age of the site and even the season of the year the pit was used.

The archaeological excavations of site 25CD86/89 in Cedar County in northeast Nebraska have opened a window into the lives of the prehistoric people of eastern Nebraska, providing information on how the inhabitants of this part of our country lived for over 1,700 years ago.



Rock cluster (Feature 51) that is interpreted as the remnants of a hearth. The Okoboji-like projectile point (see reverse side, upper left) was found in this feature.

This release and the preservation of our nation's cultural heritage was made possible by the cooperation of these private businesses and state agencies:



United States Department of State
Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs



American Resources Group, Ltd.
Carbondale, Illinois