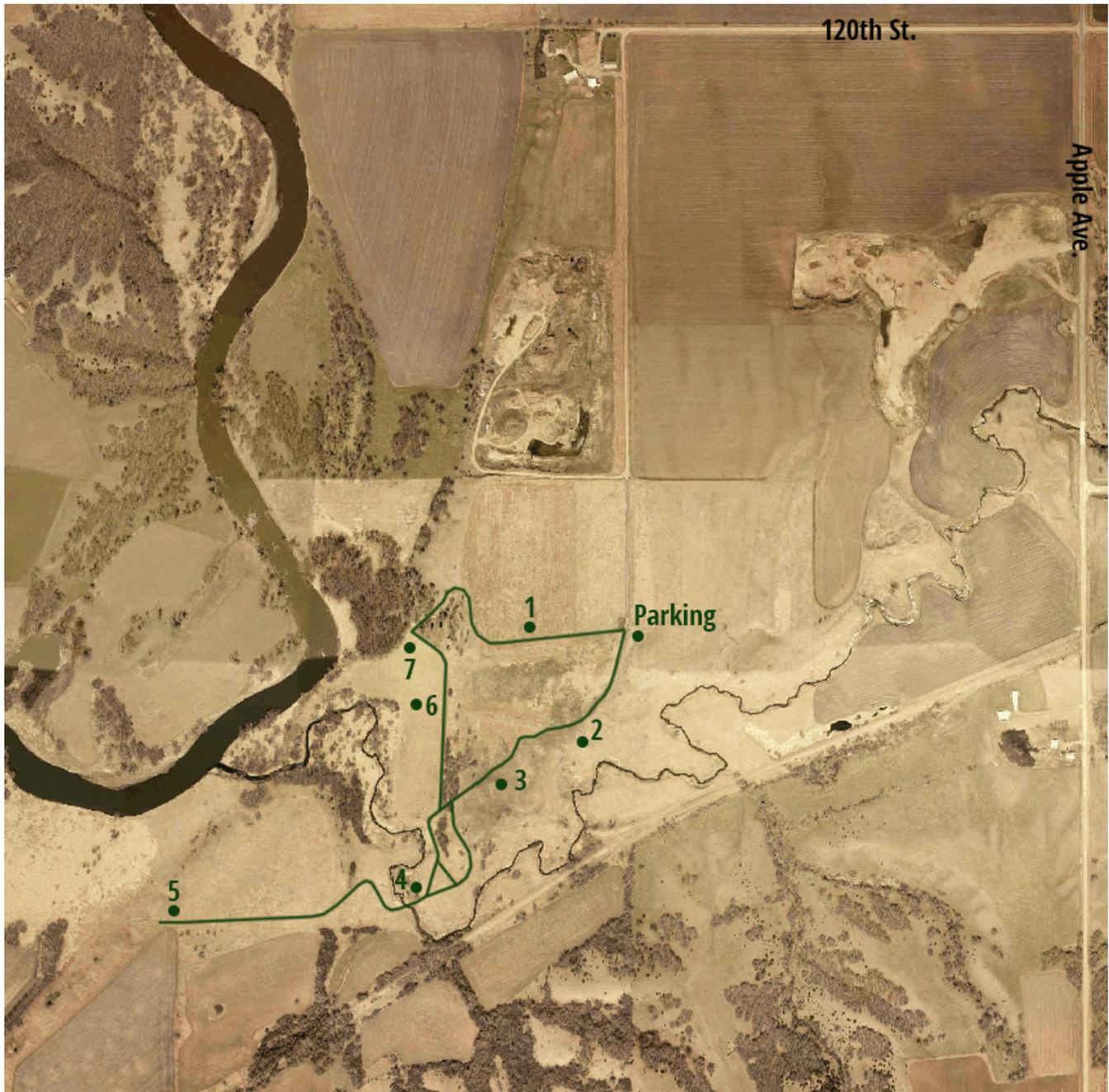


Blood Run National Historic Landmark Walking Tour



1. Mound Group A, Quarry Edge
2. Mound Group A, Quarry Edge
3. Prairie
4. Blood Run Creek
5. Mound Group B, Pitted Boulder
6. Flood Plain/Farm Field
7. Martin Johnson Farmstead Site

Directions and Parking

From the junction of Apple Ave. and 120th St. north of Granite, Iowa, travel west one mile, follow the curved road and travel 1.3 miles south. Parking is located on your right. Enter the Blood Run National Historic Landmark site at the gate. Grounds are open sunrise to sunset.

1. Mound Group A

In 1987, the State Historical Society of Iowa, through cooperative efforts of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and local landowners, acquired a portion of the site. The 200 acre portion purchased was locally known as the "Decker farm." It was intensively occupied from the late prehistoric to the early historic period.

The Blood Run National Historic Landmark Site is located on both sides of the Big Sioux River in western Lyon County, Iowa and eastern Lincoln County, South Dakota.

The main portion of the site, which shows evidence of continuous occupation, extends over at least 650 acres. Evidence of occupation and/or use by the site occupants can be found from immediately south of Gitchie Manitou State Preserve to approximately 1/4 mile south of county blacktop A18.

To preserve the complete Blood Run site and its visual environment will require protection of approximately 2340 acres in Iowa and approximately 1000 acres in South Dakota.

Site Size

- Blood Run is the largest of the known Oneota cultural sites: 650-1250 acres. The site margins have not been precisely determined.
- The Leary National Register Historic Landmark site, in extreme southeastern Nebraska, is believed to be the second largest Oneota site: estimates of size {again the margins have not been determined) are consistently over 500 acres.
- The Utz National Register Historic Landmark site, located above the Missouri River in central Missouri, is probably the third largest Oneota site, with estimates ranging from 150-300 acres.
- Mounds are rare; only three Oneota sites {all in northwest Iowa) are associated with mounds.
- Blood Run is unique among Oneota sites because of the documented 176 mounds. Approximately 80 mounds are still visible on the surface. Other unique features of the site were "boulder circles."
- The mounds appear to have been made of carefully selected stone and soil which were tightly packed.
- Some mounds have been reduced or destroyed by cultivation. Many are still very large because of the methods employed in their construction. Some mounds are still over six feet high and measure 80 feet in diameter.

- One of the 176 mounds was apparently an effigy. What it represents is still undetermined. (Effigy mounds are mounds shaped in the form of an animal of some type. This animal is believed to have played a significant role in the Native Americans lives.)
- The mounds that have been excavated and described in archaeological reports were constructed primarily for human burial. Mounds are generally regarded by Native Americans as holy places. They may contain human remains and associated artifacts. Mounds often yield evidence for ritual belief systems.

Quarry Edge

Site Overview, Oneota Culture, and Cache Pits

- From the edge of the quarry the remains of a 100 foot wide abandoned railroad right-of-way can be seen crossing the site. It allows site access from the east.
- There may have been an earthen serpent effigy, reported by some as extending 1/4 mile in length. No trace of this structure remains. It may have been destroyed by railroad construction or perhaps a portion of an earthen enclosure was mistaken by some as serpent shaped.
- Boulder outlines were characteristic features of the Blood Run site. These were in the form of circles, approximately 30 feet in diameter, and ovoids, approximately 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. There were probably 100 of these. None are visible today. Lodges were placed at the center of these circles. The boulders circling the lodge were used to hold the roof covering down.
- Although there is no historic documentation for their presence, comparative data suggests a Yankton Sioux authorship for many of the surface features and some of the occupational debris on the Blood Run site.

Other tribes (Oneota Culture) that may have visited the Blood Run

- Omaha - found there by French traders (LeSeuer's men) in 1699
- Ioway - found there in 1700 with the Omaha
- Possibly the Oto

The Oneota Tradition and Historic Tribes

- Traditional Oneota: Winnebago, Ioway-Oto and Missouri
- Acquired Oneota: Kansa, Osage and Omaha (these tribes arrived in the plains/prairie border region late and assumed some elements of the Oneota tradition)
- Other: Blood Run data suggests that the Yankton/Yanktonai Sioux may have shared in the Oneota tradition in the late 1600s

There is no certain evidence of intensive site occupation after the Omaha left (1706?), but members of all these tribes may have visited the site intermittently during the early 1700s. After the Oneota Culture left, the site has presented evidence that the Sioux may have occupied the site for a time.

The time of most intensive occupation was probably during the late 1600s - early 1700s, at which time as many as 10,000 individuals may have simultaneously occupied the site, trading and interacting in social and ceremonial activities.

The Oneota culture was believed to have originated in Wisconsin. It was a definable cultural entity by A.O. 1000. It originated out of a late Woodland base. It was characterized by shell-tempered pottery which ranged in size from teacup to bushel capacity vessels. Typical to the culture was a constricted-necked jar with a flaring rim and one or two pair of handles. A few open-orifice bowls, usually without handles, have been found.

Cache or storage pits which functioned like root cellars were the principal features excavated at Blood Run. The pits were located using heavy machinery and then excavated with trowels and shovels. The soil was screened through 1/4 inch mesh and all materials bagged for washing, cataloguing, and analysis. Materials that were found in these pits, which ranged in size up to nine feet in diameter and over six feet in depth, are listed below:

- Pottery fragments - mostly shell-tempered jars.
- Chipped stone – arrow points, knives, and scrapers.
- Ground stone maul (hammer) - heads with encircling grooves for affixing the handle.
- Ground stone grinding implements - probably used for processing corn and beans.
- Bone tools - especially hoes made from the shoulder blade of the bison or elk, awls, punches, flaking tools of antler, and items of ornamentation.
- Fragments of pipestone - some of which were parts of plaques, pipes, and items of adornment.
- Items which evidence trade with Europeans - glass beads, brass kettle fragments, brass beads and tinklers, and iron knives.
- Animal bone - principally bison, with some elk and dog. Fish bone and mollusks are rare amongst the features excavated. (Many cache pits were discovered during the operation of the old quarry.)

Dating of the Blood Run site has primarily been done by resorting to historic documents. Some storage pits will be dated using radiocarbon (C14) assays.

Gravel Quarry

Quarrying of gravel has been sporadic. The latest quarrying activity was initiated in 1984 in the area identified as "Mound Group A". This activity was discontinued in the fall of 1990. Earlier quarrying has removed approximately five acres of the terrace on which the mound group is located and another three to four acres has probably since been removed. Both terraces, where mound groups are located are underlain with sand and gravel deposits. The former gravel quarry has been renovated through regrading, installing topsoil, and seeding with prairie grasses.

The quarrying activity unearthed many artifacts while destroying considerable archaeological evidence. Both the gravel quarrying activity and cultivation practices left the surface of the site open to collecting (legal and illegal). Thousands of artifacts have been spread along with gravel over county roads. When trained archaeologists are able to recover some to these exposed artifacts discoveries about the Oneota culture are also revealed.

Prehistoric use of the site extends back in time to as early as 6500 B.C. or 8491 years ago, judging from a few projectile points recovered from the surface (probably spear or dart points). Principal site use was apparently during the time in which the site was occupied by people with an Oneota cultural tradition.

Prairie

The prairie is located down the steep hill toward Blood Run Creek.

At the time of European contact (c. 1675-1669), the area was primarily covered with a variety of prairie species. A few stands of overstory trees probably grew along the river bottom and on the north- and east-facing valley walls.

In current planning, emphasis is being placed on prairie restoration for the portion of property controlled by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Some prairie species that can be found at the Blood Run site are (not all are native):

- Big Bluestem
- Little Bluestem
- Indiangrass
- Foxtail (invader)
- Needle and thread
- Switch Grass
- Wheatgrass
- Canada Wildrye
- Porcupine Grass
- Brome Grass
- Blue Grama Grass
- Wildflowers

The prairie soil is rather dry. It is made up of a sand and gravel mixture which makes it prime for quarrying activities.

At the time the Native Americans inhabited Blood Run it was predominantly covered with prairie. They respected the prairie because it supported bison and other animals. Grazing helped prevent an overabundance of dry grasses that could feed a fire. Because the Native Americans feared fire they were careful so their campfires would not ignite the prairie. Lightning storms were also a threat to the prairie. When the prairie caught on fire there was no way to stop it, and it sometimes destroyed their homes.

The Native Americans hunted the bison (buffalo) for meat and skins. Although the bison was their main food source, skeletal remains found in the cache pits indicate that elk, deer, antelope, dog, and some smaller mammals may have been used as well. Surprisingly (their campsite sets right along the Big Sioux River and Blood Run Creek) few fish or mollusk remains were found in the cache pits.

Blood Run Creek

Blood Run Creek has been rumored to have received its name from the bloody Native American battles held there. The reddish color of the water was supposedly from the shed blood of the Native Americans that entered the creek. Another possible theory behind the naming of Blood Run Creek stems from the name of a local farm family who lived upstream, the Blud family. The theory that most scientists tend to side with is that the reddish color of the water originated from the iron ore that has leached out of the rock lining the stream banks and bottom.

Blood Run Creek connects with the Big Sioux River which also runs through the site. It is the largest river in the area.

Mound Group B

Note: Mound Group B is inaccessible when Blood Run Creek is high.

When standing on top of the Mound Group B plateau, the fence line that divides the state's 178 acres from the two private land owners indicates the center of the complete Blood Run site. **Note:** The Blood Run National Landmark site consists of more than just the state-owned portion on the Iowa side.

Fifteen to twenty mounds, still in fairly good condition, exist on top of the Mound Group B plateau. This plateau has not been cultivated, although some of the mounds show signs of human disturbance. Some of the mounds are still over six feet high and 80 feet in diameter.

Along the fence line, heading toward the Big Sioux River is a large "Pitted Boulder" which lies partially on state property and partially on the Melvin Ruud property. Archaeologists familiar with Blood Run theorize that the large pits on the north face of the boulder may have been created by hot coals placed on the face of the boulder in some sort of pattern.

On down from the "Pitted Boulder" lies the Big Sioux River valley. At one time it was intensively occupied by Oneota villages. Artifacts still lie deeply buried beneath stream sediment produced through flooding.

The Big Sioux River was a major trade route. The Blood Run site offered an excellent location for tribal interaction at the turn of the 17th century. It was located near the Big Sioux River, which offered access to trade materials (Bijou Hills quartzite and pipestone), good food supplies (bison and elk must have abounded near the site), and afforded easy access to both plains and prairie resources. It may have also been chosen due to its close vicinity to European traders and their sought-after trade goods.

Flood Plain/Farm Field

Evidence of occupation is found on the floodplain adjacent to the current course of the Big Sioux River, suggesting that a great deal of information about the occupants might be lying buried beneath the river deposited sediments.

Interactions were apparently Oneota-to-Oneota for the most part, although some interaction with Mississippian peoples is also evident along the Mississippi River valley and in northern Illinois. Oneota people existed during the same time as other cultural traditions (Mill Creek, Great Oasis, Cambria, Woodland and Lower Loup) but data available suggest little interaction with these groups.

Horticultural activities included growing corn, beans, and squash. At the present time, pasture and row crops constitute the dominant groundcover. This does not pose a threat to the archaeological record because it lies deeply buried under river-deposited sediment. Given that this area was used for horticulture by the Native Americans, usage has not changed much over the years.

Hunting was also important and was carried out year round. Men hunted a variety of game animals, particularly, bison. Women and girls tended the extensive gardens throughout the summer and harvested in the fall.

Martin Johnson Farm (Norwegian-American Settlers)

The "Decker Farm" property includes an abandoned farmstead (the Martin Johnson farm), which consists of two small barns, a small collapsing residential structure, and a house foundation (the house has been moved and serves as a residence elsewhere in Lyon County). The farmstead was developed by the Norwegian-American settlers.

The small residential structure is believed to have been the original home, which later was used as a barn and garage. The newer and larger residence seems to have been constructed after the pattern of the old-fashioned Norwegian homes. The basement of such a structure was often used to house the livestock. The heat given off by the animals helped warm the home for the family. Future plans are to preserve the homestead.

Continuing Disturbance

Along the northern border of the existing state-owned property an active quarry operation can be seen on the "Dieters farm." The "Dieters farm" contains both archaeological features and an operating farmstead.

Prairie Crossing

To gain a better understanding of what the Native Americans had to deal with traveling to the Blood Run National Landmark site each group will traverse a section of the prairie on top of the Mound Group A plateau.

The Native Americans were relatively of short stature (predominantly five feet in height). The tall grass prairie was a challenge to cross. A tall grass prairie is often referred to as a "sea of grass". Just as sailors became disoriented as they sailed across the vast seas, the Native Americans experienced some disorientation as they crossed the prairies.