

National Historic Landmarks

Blood Run

The geology of Blood Run stretches back millions of years into the pre-Cambrian period, when Sioux Quartzite, its ancient bedrock, was formed from compressed grains of quartz sand. Glaciers – advancing across the region some 10,000 to 30,000 years ago - deposited a layer, sometimes quite thick, of soil and gravel atop the bedrock. Finally, a mantle of loess, a fine-grained windblown material, covered the land as the glaciers retreated. Slowly over time, Blood Run Creek and the Big Sioux River have eroded the loess deposits and rearranged the gravel and sand deposits, carving a widening path through the rolling landscape. Prairie grasses and trees help keep erosion in check.



Prehistoric use of Blood Run began as early as 6500 B.C., judging from the few spear or dart points characteristic of that time that have been found on the surface. Archaeological evidence suggests that the most intensive site use was between A.D. 1500 and 1700, when Oneota people dominated the region. The villages and mound groups that characterize Blood Run are found on the high flat terraces bordering the Big Sioux; gardens were probably placed primarily in the bottom lands. At the time of first European contact, perhaps in the 1690s, the area was primarily covered with a variety of prairie species. A few stands of over story trees probably grew centuries ago along the river bottom and on the north and east facing valley walls just as they do today. These trees were doubtless important to prehistoric groups and certainly were to the first European settlers in this almost treeless land dominated by prairie forbs and grasses. At present, pasture and row crops constitute the dominant groundcover on the privately-owned portions of the site.

Both terraces where the largest mound groups are located are underlain with sand and gravel deposits. Quarrying began in the area just prior to 1886 when the former railroad line was constructed. Quarrying over the past century has unearthed many artifacts while destroying considerable archaeological evidence. Thousands of artifacts have been dug out and then spread along with gravel over county roads, destroying forever the stories those objects could have told. The latest quarrying activity within the National Historic Landmark boundaries was initiated in 1984 adjacent to the northern mound group. Earlier quarrying had removed approximately five acres of the terrace on which the mound group is located and another three to four acres were removed during the 1980s quarrying activity. This disturbance led to the 1985 and 1986 archaeological investigations and the state purchase of approximately 200 acres of the site.

Oneota, a Traditional Native American Culture

The Oneota culture may have originated in Wisconsin. A definable cultural entity by A.D. 1150, it evolved from a Late Woodland cultural base. Regarded as a Midwestern phenomenon, characteristic villages, cemeteries and, occasionally, mound groups are found within an area from around lower Lake Michigan, the St. Louis locality, along the lower Missouri and into the eastern Plains in Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota, across the southern half of Minnesota and northern Illinois back to Chicago and Lake Michigan. By far, the majority of Oneota sites are found in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and Missouri.

Oneota village sites are characteristically quite large, often ranging upwards of 50 acres and more. They are rarely fortified but were placed in easily-defended positions. Blood Run is the largest Oneota site: 650-1,250 acres, although the site margins have not been precisely determined. The Leary National Historic Landmark site, located

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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 Historic Landmark site, located high above the Missouri River in central Missouri, is probably third in size, with estimates ranging from 300 acres.

Archaeologists readily identify Oneota sites by the presence of characteristic shell-tempered pottery which ranged in size from teacup- to bushel-capacity vessels. Typical was a constricted-necked jar with a flaring rim and one or two pairs of handles. A few shallow bowls, usually without handles, have also been found.

The Oneota were gardeners whose horticultural activities included growing corn, beans, squash and a number of plants with edible seeds that we now consider weeds. In addition to garden products, the Oneota ate bison, deer, elk, dogs, smaller mammals, birds, fish and mollusks, depending upon regional availability and cultural preference. Cemetery areas were often placed near villages, but human remains have been found in house floors and occasionally with village refuse.

Only four Oneota sites (all in northwest Iowa) are associated with mounds. Other Oneota earthworks are found in northeast and northwest Iowa and in central Missouri. They characteristically are 'enclosures,' perhaps functioning as redoubts that afforded some protection when a village was under attack. Oneota villagers interacted frequently with other groups; such contacts were usually Oneota-to-Oneota, but they obviously dealt (not always peacefully) with late Mississippian peoples along the Mississippi River Valley and in northern Illinois as well as with some eastern Plains villagers and Late Woodland groups.

The Oneota Tradition and Historic Tribes

Tribes that apparently were part of the Oneota cultural tradition when first contacted by Europeans are the Winnebago, Ioway, Oto, Missouri, Omaha, Ponca, Kansa and Osage, the quality of evidence varies from tribe to tribe. It should be noted here that the Ioway/Oto and the Omaha/Ponca were once single tribal units but they had split, forming independent tribal entities, at about the time European traders and explorers came into the upper Midwest. Tribal locations for the Oto or Ponca have not been verified historically prior to the mid-1700s. They are often simply referred to in early historic accounts as the Ioway or the Omaha.

Blood Run, an Oneota Site

Blood Run is unique among Oneota sites and not simply because of its size. It is one of only four sites that offer evidence for Oneota mound building, all of them in northwestern Iowa. At one time, researchers documented 275 mounds on Blood Run of which fewer than 80 are still visible. Many mounds were quickly reduced or destroyed by cultivation. These were probably constructed of heaped up, unprocessed soil and rocks. The mounds we see today probably survived because they were constructed of carefully selected stone and soils which were tightly compacted. Some are still over six feet high and measure 80 feet in diameter despite a century of cultivation. Some Blood Run mounds that were carefully excavated and subsequently reported upon were specially prepared for human burial. Others were doubtless built as part of important ceremonies, but lack evidence for full inhumation.

Mounds are generally regarded by Native Americans as holy places. They may contain human remains and associated artifacts placed in accord with Native American ritual and belief systems and should always be given the

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respect due a sacred place. [They are also protected by Iowa law.] Other impressive earthworks were once prominent on the Blood Run surface. There was a 15 acre enclosure of heaped up earth that was quickly plowed away. And, an earthen serpent effigy 1/8 mile in length that is described in early accounts offers no visible trace today.

Other unique surface features were 'boulder outlines' and pitted boulders. Boulders (mostly Sioux Quartzite) formed outlines that were once visible. One estimate is that there were over 800 boulder outlines on the Blood Run site prior to cultivation. The majority of these are assumed to have delineated the edges of houses. Most were circular and from 12 to 30 feet in diameter and a few were ovoid, up to 125 feet long and 30 feet wide. The boulders were probably placed around lodge edges to hold the covers (mats and hides) in place. None can be seen today. Some of the boulders that have had numerous pits ground into their surfaces remain in place; the largest is covered with at least several hundred small ground pits. The purpose of these pits is a matter of speculation.



The Omaha appear to have been the principal occupants of Blood Run at the time of European contact, perhaps just before they separated from the Ponca. Some Ioway (and, probably Oto) also lived on the site at times. Archaeological evidence, specifically their characteristic pottery, suggests that the Arikara were frequent visitors as well. Their presence is corroborated by Omaha legend, stating that both the Arikara and Cheyenne visited regularly. The most intensive occupation was probably during the late 1600s, when as many as 6,000 individuals may at times have been there, trading and interacting in social and ceremonial activities.

This place offered an excellent location for tribal interaction at the turn of the 17th century. It was located along the Plains-Prairie Peninsula border along a major body of water in a place where valuable trade materials (Bijou Hills quartzite, pipestone, animal hides) were readily accessible, where good food supplies (especially bison and elk) could easily be obtained and where a great variety of both plains and prairie resources could be exploited.

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Sergeant Floyd Monument

The Sergeant Floyd Monument commemorates Sergeant Charles Floyd, Jr., the only member of the Corps of Discovery to die on the journey. Writing in his diary on July 31, 1804, Floyd noted, "I am verry sick and has ben for Sometime but have Recovered my helth again." However, this quick recovery was followed by a turn for the worse. The night before his death, Clark remarked, "Serjeant Floyd is taken verry bad all at once with a Biliose Chorlick we attempt to relieve him without success as yet, hr gets worst and we are much allarmed at his Situation, all attention to him."

On August 20, 1804, Floyd passed away, most likely from peritonitis, caused by the inflammation or rupture of his appendix. He died from an illness that even the best doctors of the day could not have cured. Clark wrote:

". . . Serj. Floyd died with a great deal of composure. Before his death he said to me, "I am going away. I want you to write me a letter." We buried him on the top of the bluff ½ mile below a small river to which we gave his name. He was buried with the Honors of War much lamented. A seeder post with the (I) Name Sergt. C. Floyd died here 20th of August 1804 was fixed at his grave. This man at all times gave us proofs of his firmness and determined resolution to doe service to his country and honor to himself . . ."

In 1857, erosion induced by the Missouri River partially exposed Floyd's grave. Local settlers recovered and reinterred most of the skeletal remains in a different location on the bluff. The grave was moved again in 1895. The Sergeant Floyd Monument, a 100-foot high sandstone obelisk, was built in 1901. Floyd's remains were moved a third time and reburied at the base of the monument. Located along US-75 in Sioux City, Iowa, the monument is within a 23-acre park overlooking the Missouri River valley.

