

An Introductory Handbook to Saskatchewan Archaeology

People have lived in Saskatchewan for at least 10,000 years. The purpose of this handbook is to provide those not previously acquainted with this rich and extensive history and heritage, as it is interpreted by the discipline of archaeology, with a brief and convenient introduction to archaeology in Saskatchewan.

Any curious person who has encountered rings of stone on unbroken prairie or found a hammerstone in a cultivated field has likely wondered, "Who made these things? Why? How? How long has it been since they were used by people?" Such basic human concerns are the motivation that drives archaeologists to consider what human life in the past might have been like. The endeavour to answer such questions responsibly constitutes the practice of archaeology.

By carefully and scientifically studying evidence in the soil of past human activities, archaeologists are able to reconstruct past human lifeways. By tradition, there are two broad categories of archaeology: historic and prehistoric. Historic archaeology deals with sites and artifacts after the start of European exploration, when records existed, while prehistoric (or pre-contact) archaeology is the term used to refer to times previous to approximately 1690 A.D. These terms have been adopted because not all history is written, and it recognizes the impact European contact has had on the indigenous populations of North America.

Archaeologists undertake several scientific practices to investigate how people lived in the past. Two important research activities are excavations and surface surveys.

At a "dig" or excavation, archaeologists control the unearthing of areas occupied or modified by earlier human activity. Scientific examination of artifacts and other remains of human activity within a buried context can explain the kinds of activities people engaged in during their daily existence. The study of fossilized pollen grains and other deposits in soils containing artifacts helps archaeologists reconstruct earlier ecological environments.

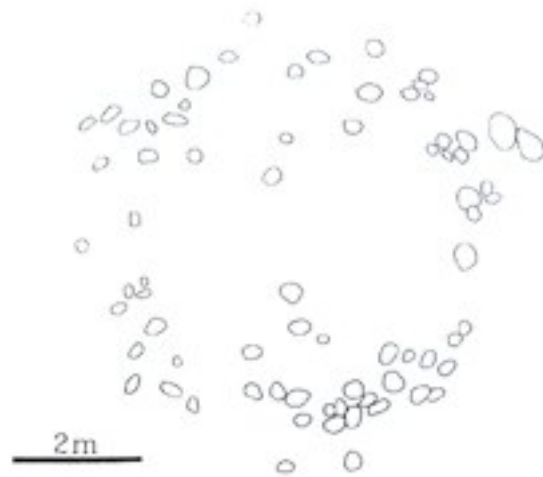
Surveys of land surfaces containing archaeological materials are important methods of obtaining information about where people chose to live. For instance, surface surveys which have mapped many different tipi ring encampment sites from different geographic regions can be compared, and settlement patterns can be suggested. Occasionally, surveys identify areas that are intrinsically significant, such as boulder configurations (effigies, medicine wheels, etc.), rock art, and vision quest sites.

Archaeological Sites

A site can be understood as any place where human activity occurred sometime in the past, and for which there is evidence of that activity. A site is categorized and interpreted according to several criteria: its geographic location, the artifacts and features it contains, the space and time relationships among the artifacts and features, its age, and the purpose for which the site was used. There are various kinds of sites: habitation, kill, quarry, burials, rock art, boulder configurations, trade centers, agricultural, transportation, and fortification. Although most sites are recognized when artifacts or features are discovered, not all sites contain direct evi-

dence of human presence. Areas which figure prominently in events related through oral traditions or through written documentation are occasionally considered to be sites.

Features and Artifacts



Stone ring feature

Features are things like hearths, postholes, stone flaking stations, stone rings, boiling pits, and storage pits. Unlike artifacts such as arrowheads which can be removed intact from a site, features depend entirely on their position within the site for their identity. Features are therefore often understood as nonportable artifacts.

Artifacts are any portable objects that are considered to have been modified, shaped or moved by human action. For purposes of resource management and interpretation artifacts are classified according to their function. Some types of artifacts that are unique to specific places and /or times, are said to be diagnostic. In excavations in Saskatchewan, especially of ancient Pre-European Contact sites, only items of more durable materials such as bone, stone, or ceramic are preserved from corrosive natural processes. The following are examples of common artifact types.

Projectile Points

The term projectile point is used to refer to any object that was fastened, or hafted, to a shaft that was intended to be thrown or cast. Projectile points have been divided into three types based on their function: spear points, dart points, and arrow points.



spear point



dart point

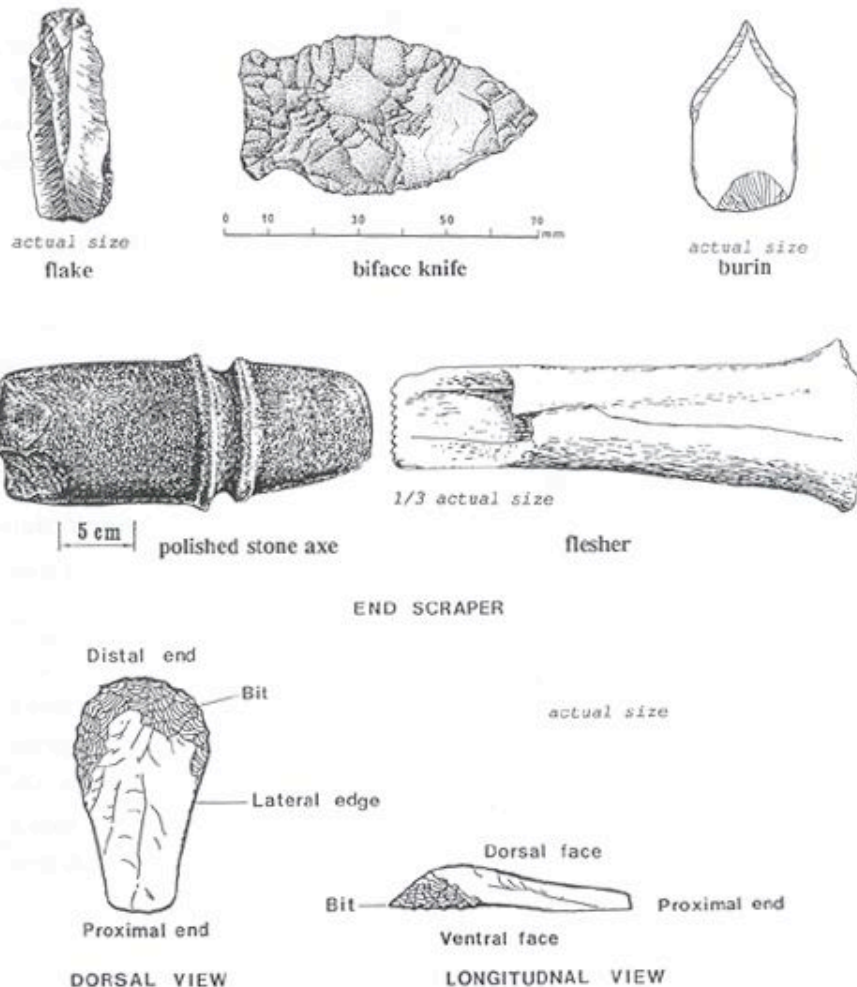


arrow point

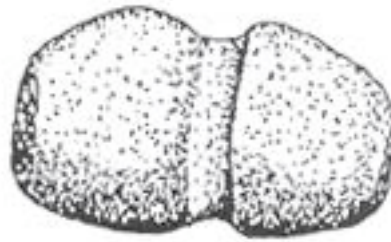
Many archaeologists believe that the earliest points found in the province, such as the Folsom point below, were used to tip hand-held javelin-like spears. Spear points tend to be the largest and oldest of the three types of points. The somewhat smaller Dart points were hafted onto shafts intermediate in size between spear and arrows. Darts were hurled by means of a throwing stick, usually called an atlatl. While it is agreed that the atlatl and dart weapon system was used in Saskatchewan until roughly 2,000 - 1,500 years before present, it is uncertain when this weapon was first used. Some believe it was introduced by the people who used the Clovis points 11,500 years ago; others believe the atlatl and dart technology was adopted or developed as late as 7,500 years ago. The smallest and most recent of the projectile points is the arrow point, which apparently was first used with by the people who made the Avonlea style points about 1,700 years ago.

Cutting, Scraping, and Engraving Tools

Sharp flakes of all sizes freshly struck from a larger stone core and biface knives were used as multipurpose cutting and scraping implements. Burins, with their chisel-like edge, were used for engraving or carving. Ground and polished stone axes were used for chopping wood. Hides were scraped with stone end and side scrapers, and with fleshers made of bone.



Percussion and Grinding Tools



1/4 actual size

Stone mauls, or hammers were used for everything from pounding stakes to quarrying stone. Many of the larger mauls are grooved to facilitate hafting. Smaller pecking stones are ungrooved, but can be identified by the impact scars usually at either end. These smaller pecking stones were often used in the chipping of stone tools, a process called flintknapping. Bell-shaped pestles were used for pounding and grinding everything from dried meat and chokecherries for pemmican, to earth paints for adornment.

Drills and Perforators

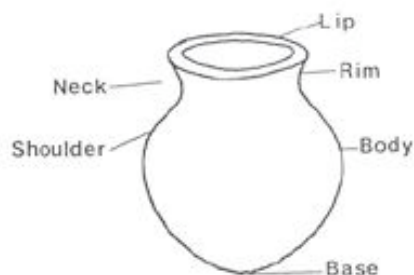


stone drill

actual size

Drills fashioned from stone were used to auger through wood and bone. Perforators, made either of stone or bone, were used to punch holes in softer materials such as leather.

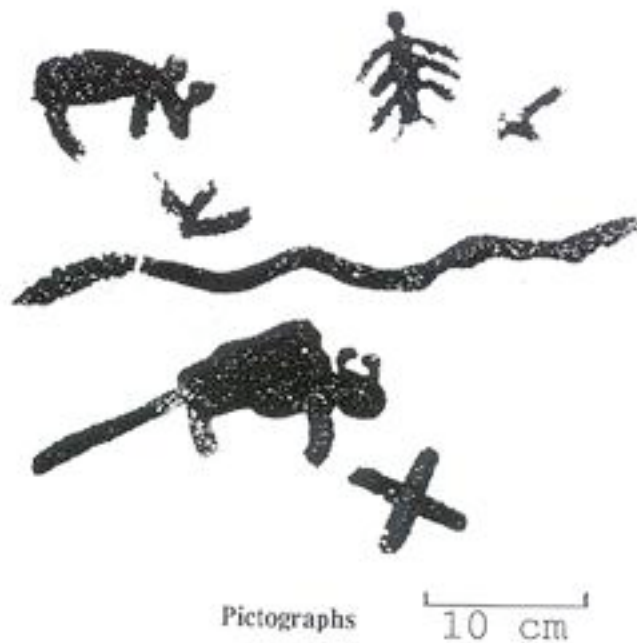
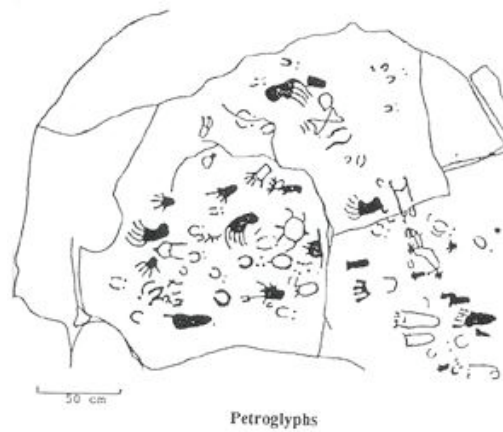
Ceramic Vessels

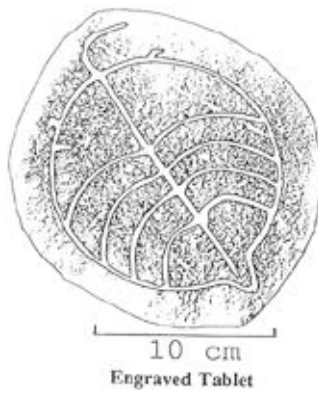


The oldest pots made of fired clay containing grit first appear in the archaeological record about 2,000 years ago, associated with Besant artifacts. Overall size and shape, construction methods, and some decorative markings can be used to identify different styles of ceramics. As is the case with projectile points, some types of pottery are diagnostic to particular place in time.

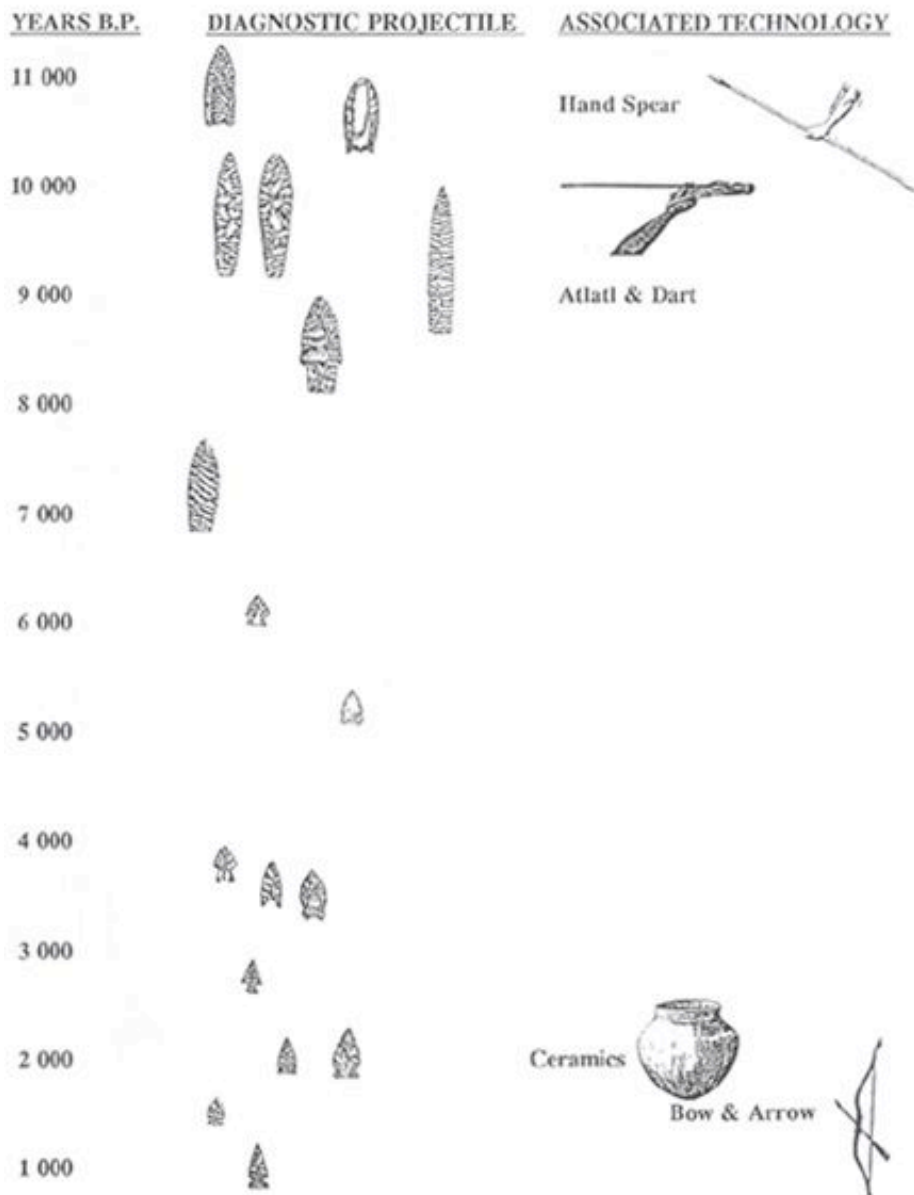
Portable and Non-Portable Art

Portable Art is the term used to refer to art objects that can be moved easily from place to place, such as sculptures and engravings. Pictographs, or pictures painted on stationary rock, and petroglyphs, or pictures carved into stationary rock, are the two main kinds of non-portable art in Saskatchewan.





Artifact Affiliations In Southern Saskatchewan

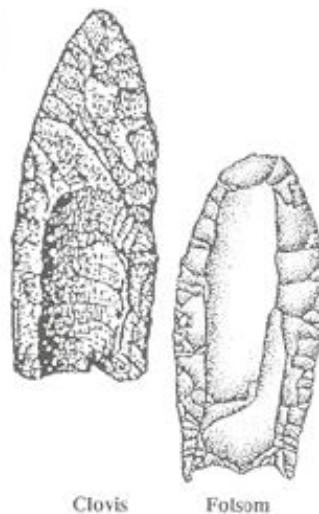


Projectile Point Chronology of Southern Saskatchewan

It is generally assumed that the area of North America now bounded within the jurisdiction of the province of Saskatchewan has been occupied by people at least since the last glacial retreat about 11,500 years ago. Some archaeologists think that humans could have lived here far earlier, 20,000 - 35,000 years before present, during intermittent warmer periods of the last ice age. However, unequivocal evidence for such occupation has not yet been established, so the current chronology of human habitation in Saskatchewan begins with the ending of the last ice age and the appearance of the distinctive Clovis technology.

The record of human presence in Saskatchewan has most often been divided into three time periods, largely as a matter of convenience, but not without some empirical justification. Drastic changes in climate mark corresponding changes in lithic technology between the Early and Middle periods, while the switch to the bow and arrow as the dominant weapon along with the new use of pottery signal the transition from the Middle to the Late Period.

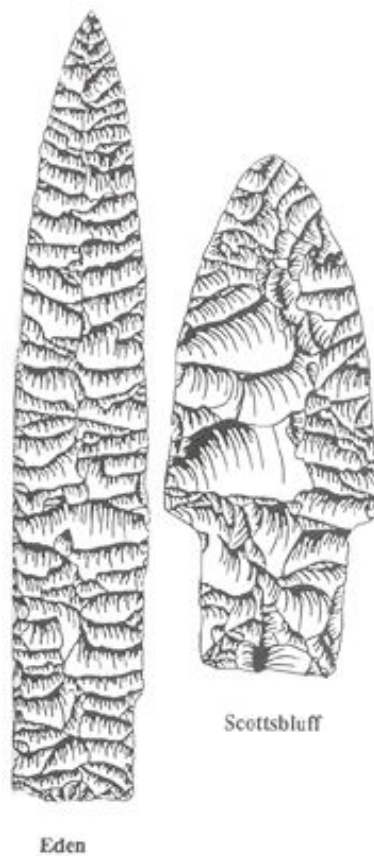
The Early Period, 11,500 - 7,500 Year Ago



The period of Early human occupation begins about 11,500 years ago, but it is likely more accurate to consider the first (Clovis) and possibly the second (Folsom) discrete point technologies as categorically separate from the later Paleo-Indian technologies of the Early period. Clovis and to some extent Folsom represent human activity in the Pleistocene epoch. The end of the Pleistocene witnessed the mass extinction of the big-game animals hunted by these people. It was also at this time that the grasslands began to expand northward and the bison emerged as the species which was to provide the foundation of Plains Indian subsistence.



Several traditions of lanceolate-shaped projectile points occur in the archaeological record after Folsom. The Lanceolate Straight group consists of Agate Basin and Hell Gap style points, which date from about 10,300 - 8,000 year ago.



Lanceolate Stemmed points, such as Eden and Scotts bluff (part of the "Cody complex") date from 9,500 to 8,500 years ago. The points tend to have a restricted basal stem, which produces a shouldered blade.



Angostura

Late Lanceolate points date from the last 1,000 years of the Early period, 8,000 to 7,000 years ago. The concave base and parallel-oblique flaking make these leaf-shaped points distinguishable from the Lanceolate Straight points.

The Middle Period, 7,500 - 1,900 Years Ago



Early Side-Notched

The climatic environment at the beginning of the Middle period became much more arid than it had been throughout the Early period. Some archaeologists have argued that few if any people lived on the northern plains at this time, but current research indicates that this was not so. A new group of distinctive but diverse projectile points, collectively referred to as Early Side-notched, emerged about 7,500 years ago and lasted until about 5,000 years before present. Many of these points are indistinguishable from side and corner-notched points which appear several thousand years later, but as a general rule Early Side-notched points are slightly larger.



Oxbow

As the arid years of the early Middle period gave way to a climate more like our own today, another point style appears for the first time in the archaeological record. The Oxbow point with its concave base and notched sides dates from about 5,000 - 3,100 years ago.



Hanna McKean Duncan

Although the Hann/McKean/Duncan points differ stylistically, it is believed that these three distinct point types should be treated as a single related group which dates from about 4,100 - 3,100 years ago. Lanceolate-shaped McKean points have a pronounced notched base; Duncan points tend to have a flared concave base; Hanna points have wide, shallow side-notches.



Pelican Lake

The last point style of the Middle period is called Pelican Lake. The deep corner notches near the base create a "tanged", or pointed shoulder. The base is often rounded, but may be flat. Some Pelican Lake points are quite small, which has led some archaeologists to suggest that

these might have been used as arrowheads rather than as atlatl dart tips. Pelican Lake dates from 3,300 - 1,900 years ago. However, the wholesale transition to the bow and arrow as the dominant weapon is considered one of the events that inaugurates the Late Period of human habitation in Saskatchewan.

The Late Period 2,000 - 170 Years Ago



Besant

About 2,000 years ago it is believed that the bow and arrow began to quickly replace the atlatl and dart as the preferred weapon on the northern plains. Also, at about the same time pottery, or ceramic technology, makes its first appearance in the archaeological record. The oldest ceramics have been found in excavations containing Besant style projectile points. Besant points date from 2,000 - 1,150 years ago. Most of these larger side-notched points seem too large to have been used to tip arrows, so it is assumed that the Besant point makers were the last people to rely primarily on the atlatl and dart for hunting.



Avonlea

Contemporaneous with Besant, another point style clearly reflects that the people who made these delicate side-notched triangular points were using the bow and arrow. Avonlea points (1,800 - 1,100 years ago) are typically thin, well-flaked points with small shallow side-notches placed close to the slightly concave base.



Prairie

Plains

The last two styles of stone points used on the northern plains are together referred to as Late Side-Notched, or Old Women's style points. Separately, they are called Prairie and Plains Side-notched with the appearance of Prairie points (1,100 - 900 years ago) predating the Plains (800 - 300 years ago) by several hundred years.

If You Have Questions About Archaeology

Nature and human activities are constantly altering the soil surface, and exposing archaeological artifacts. As well, surface features like stone cairns or petrolyphs may still await discovery in remote or unbroken land. If you do discover something which you think is archaeological there are a number of places where you can obtain information about your find. First, if the material is buried or partially buried, or if it is an intact feature like a tipi ring, etc. - do not disturb it - take a photograph or two (with something for scale in it), and ask one of the following offices to identify the feature.

If you come across an artifact (or have artifacts collected earlier) and wish to have them identified, either bring the artifact to one of the archaeology offices, or send a good photograph. Again, you should not simply collect artifacts as curiosities or only for your own collection. Every artifact taken from the soil of Saskatchewan should have its exact location recorded and those records deposited in a responsible public institution.

All archaeological excavations, any disturbance of archaeology sites, and collection of artifacts in Saskatchewan are regulated by the Saskatchewan Heritage Property Act, and administered by the Heritage Unit of the Provincial Government.

The following offices have professional archaeologists who can answer your questions about archaeology:

1. **Heritage Unit**, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, Regina,
Phone: 306.787.5772
2. **Royal Saskatchewan Museum**, Archaeology & Ethnology Section, Regina
Phone: 306.787.8166
3. **Department of Anthropology and Archaeology**, University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Phone: 306.966.4175
4. **Saskatchewan Archaeological Society**, Saskatoon, Phone: 306.664.4124

*If you wish to visit any of these offices personally, you should telephone ahead.

Where to "See Archaeology" in Saskatchewan

The following facilities are open to the public year-round (in most cases) and offer self-guiding opportunities for learning about archaeology:

1. **Harris and District Museum** - this small museum in Harris has excellent displays on homesteading and several small displays on the prehistoric archaeology of the area. Phone: 306.656.4707
2. **Herschel Petroglyphs Municipal Heritage Site** - 3 km west of Herschel on grid road. Two petroglyph boulders and a series of tipi rings. Phone: 306.377.2014 (Herschel Village Office) - Brochure available.
3. **Kindersley Plains Museum** - the Archaeology Room presents displays on the archaeology of West Central Saskatchewan. Phone: 306.463.6620.
4. **Regina - Royal Saskatchewan Museum First Nations Gallery** - This gallery pays tribute to Saskatchewan's aboriginal peoples, past and present, whose cultures have remained vital and dynamic over centuries of environmental and social change. Museum Hours: May 1 to Labour Day: 9:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. daily. After Labour Day to April 30: 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. daily. Phone: 306.787.8164.
5. **Saskatoon - Wanuskewin Heritage Park** - 7 km north of Saskatoon; has a major interpretive centre, trails, audio-visual presentations and activities relating to the archaeology and cultural history of Northern Plains Indians. Phone: 306.931.6767 for seasonal hours and admission fees.
6. **St. Victor Petroglyphs Provincial Park** - Saskatchewan's largest prehistoric rock-carvings site is located 3 km south of the Village of St. Victor; signage. Phone: 306.787.9573 (Provincial Historic Parks, Regina).
7. **Vidora Museum** - has several small displays of local prehistoric artifacts. Call 306.299.4882 for appointment.
8. **Notukeu Heritage Museum** - an extensive display of artifacts from sites in the Ponteix region, as well as replicas produced by archaeological experimentation, housed in the Centre Culturel in Ponteix. Phone: 306.625.3340.

The Saskatchewan Archaeological Society

The Saskatchewan Archaeological Society is a non-profit Provincial Cultural Organization dedicated to furthering research, publication, and educational and conservation programs in archaeology. Membership is open to anyone interested in supporting responsible use and enjoyment of Saskatchewan's archaeological heritage. Simply by belonging to the S.A.S., you are adding your "voice" to the cause of supporting archaeological conservation.

The S.A.S. publishes a newsletter every two months, publishes books and reports on an occasional basis, provides annual bus tours and seminars, and undertakes other special activities in research and public education.

Each year the Society holds an annual field school, which varies in length from 2 to 4 days. The Field School provides hands-on learning and participation for everyone, working under professional supervision.

The S.A.S. has available for rental "Archaeo-Kits", sets of actual and replicated artifacts suitable for teaching or demonstration purposes; slide talks; and videotapes on Saskatchewan archaeological topics. The provincial office also maintains a lending library for members, and sells archaeological books.

For further information, stop in at our office, or phone. Our telephone answerer and fax line are available 24 hours a day, if you wish to leave a message.

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