

Indian Camp Sites Along the Mackinaw River Near State Route 51

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For the past fifteen years the writer has followed the hobby of hunting over Indian camp sites during the late fall and early spring in search of Indian artifacts or other evidences of Indian habitation. This paper describes briefly those camp sites found along the Mackinaw

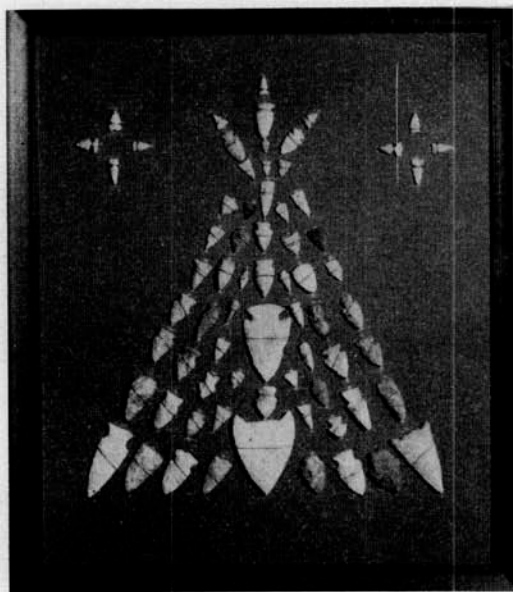


Fig. 1.—ARROWHEADS FROM CAMP SITE ALONG SIX-MILE CREEK.

River within a range of five miles on either side of State Route 51. In this region Route 51 extends north-south except for a slight curve on the north side of the river. The Mackinaw River flows in a westerly direction over the entire ten mile stretch except for a number of short curves.

The area includes two northwest-flowing tributaries that enter the Mackinaw from the south and along which a number of camp sites have been found. The larger tributary, called Money Creek, lies about three

miles east of Route 51. A few years ago the city of Bloomington constructed a dam across this creek to create Lake Bloomington as a source for city water. The various activities and enterprises which followed, such as the building of the pumping plant, settling reservoir, and dwelling houses, and the general rise of water in the valley to form the lake, obliterated a number of camp sites. The smaller tributary, called Six-Mile Creek, lies on the west side of Route 51 and flows into the Mackinaw River about two and a half miles west of the bridge on Route 51. According to pioneer reports and records, the Potawatomie Indians made their last stand against the white men in this region along Six Mile Creek approximately one mile northwest of the present village of Hudson. In 1920, an engraved boulder was erected as a memorial to this



Fig. 2.—VIEW OF ONE OF THE CAMP SITES (FOREGROUND) IN THE MACKINAW RIVER REGION.

struggle by the Letitia Green Stevenson Chapter of D. A. R. of Bloomington, Illinois, on what is now Route 51 at the cross-roads intersection about half a mile west of Hudson. Six Mile Creek flows within about one hundred yards of this boulder. Downstream and within two miles of the boulder the writer has hunted over four camp sites a number of times and has found approximately two hundred arrowheads and spearheads, as well as a number of other artifacts. Seventy of the arrowheads and spearheads are shown in figure 1.

The river valley ranges in width from about one-quarter of a mile to nearly one mile in some places. The stream itself in normal times often ranges from 30 to 75 feet in width. The Indians located practically all of their camp sites on a point of ground having good drainage and on a little higher elevation than the surrounding land, out of danger of flood and with a commanding view of the possible approach of their enemies from all sides. They were, however, reasonably close to the

stream which provided water for use in preparation of food as well as for drinking and other domestic purposes.

Fall-plowed land which has been compacted and slightly eroded by rains and melting snow is the best type of ground on which to search for artifacts. Typical evidences which an experienced person may see on such sites are rough broken and darkened fire stones and broken chips and bits of flint. The better artifacts are usually found at the outer edge of the camp site or even a short distance further away.

Artifacts other than arrowheads and spearheads include axes, celts (both granite and flint), pitted stones, hammerstones, drills, scrapers, polishing stones, etc. One bear's tooth was found, identified by the authorities at the State Museum in Springfield. Bear's teeth were often worn as ornaments or charms.

As much pleasure may be gained around Indian camp sites in picking up kitchen middens such as large broken animal bones, broken pottery, discarded inferior arrowheads and spearheads, firestone, burned clay, charcoal, flint chips, flint percussion points, and flint cores, as in finding a perfect artifact.

Flint is a curious material, intensely hard, yet rather elastic. When it is struck by a hammerstone, the blow generally detaches a flake. The implements resolve themselves into two types. The first type is made from the core of flint itself, flakes being removed to give the desired shape. The larger implements like celts, axes, and hammers are shaped cores. The second type of implement such as knives, lances, arrowheads, spearheads, scrapers, etc., were fashioned flakes. In thinking how these different artifacts were made, we must remember the extraordinary patience of the Indians. One writer says that a North American Indian would spend all the leisure time of his life making one stone tomahawk. Try to make a flint implement yourself, but wear motor goggles to safeguard your eyes, and you will gain a new respect for these expert old handicraftsmen.