

The First Hunters

After the most recent retreat of the glaciers that covered this land, humans, who had populated other parts of the world, made their way to Turtle Mountain. It was the first place in the region to be free of ice. It was soon home to both the hunter and the hunted.

The Clovis Culture

The first to arrive were a group we call the Clovis Culture. That was about 12000 years ago.

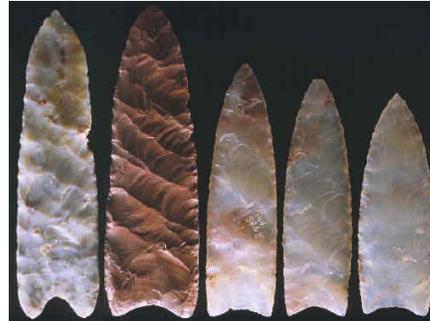


They came from the south, around New Mexico and Arizona, and would have moved north slowly as the climate warmed and the ice disappeared. We know little about them, but can identify them by the tools they left behind, especially the stone points they crafted for the tips of their weapons.

Clovis points that have been found in Southwestern Manitoba were made of Knife River flint from southern North Dakota, and crafted into sharp points shaped like a willow leaf. Attached to sturdy spears, these points could be used to take down even the huge woolly mammoth.

Taking down a mammoth would take skill, teamwork, courage and the best weapon

you could get. These spear points would have been very valuable.



The next “settlers” were the Folsom people. Their spear points were smaller and thinner than the Clovis points. This may have been because they were hunting smaller animals. Mammoths had slowly become extinct. It was pre-historic buffalo that the Folsom hunters hunted.

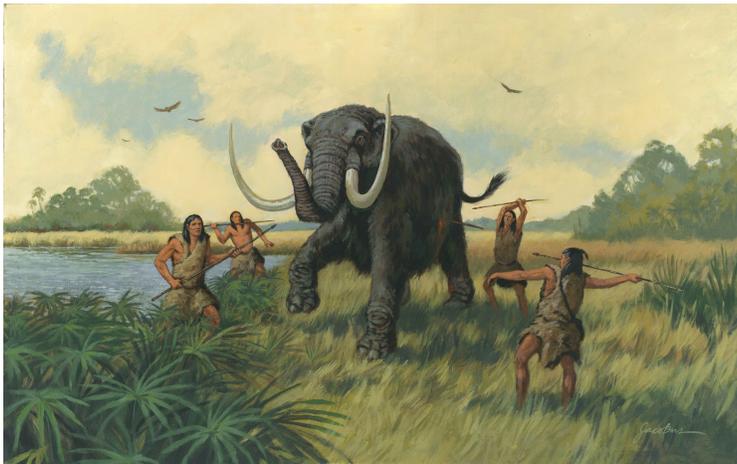
From about 10000 to 70000 years ago the Plano people hunted buffalo and pronghorn here. Pronghorn are the only large mammals in North America to survive the coming of man. But buffalo were becoming the most important prey.

By about 6000 years ago, agriculture, which developed far to the south, had appeared in Manitoba.



The Pronghorn survived in Manitoba until about 1900, and now prefers the wide-open spaces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Big Game



There was a time when mastodons, mammoths, camels, horses, and huge long-haired bison roamed the Souris Plains and sought shelter on Turtle Mountain.

Traces of them start to disappear at about the end of the last ice age – about 12000 BC, and by 6000 BC two-thirds of the species of North American mammals that weighed more than 60 kilograms at maturity had become extinct.

Could it have been that the climate was getting warmer and drier? The animals that travelled in large herds may have not been able to adapt.

Or the warmer temperatures may have disrupted breeding cycles.

If climate was the problem, why were the animals not able to move to a more suitable region?

Another possibility is that these large mammals faced a new threat – humans.

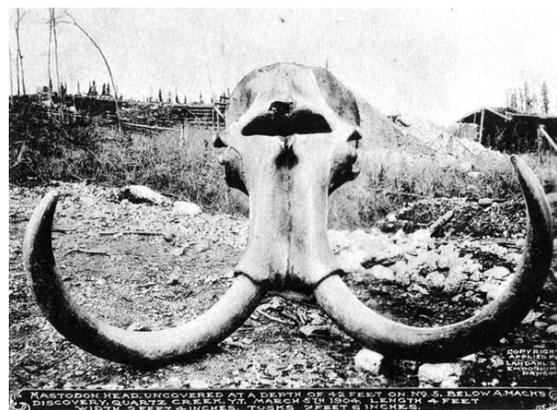
As the ice retreated, human hunters spread across the continent, continually improving and adapting their hunting practices. These humans, unlike the other predators, were

able to organize and improvise. They were deadly enemies.

Perhaps the climate may have weakened the populations and the humans finished them off.



A mammoth tusk found in Southern Manitoba, on display at the Moncur Gallery in Boissevain



A mammoth skull

The Buffalo People

By about 4500 years ago the climate was similar to what we have today. In Southwestern Manitoba a series of cultures developed great skill in hunting and using the buffalo.

When the first European traders and explorers came to this land they found that the people here depended on the buffalo for nearly everything. It was their main food. The hides gave them shelter and clothing. Tools were made from the bones and sinews.

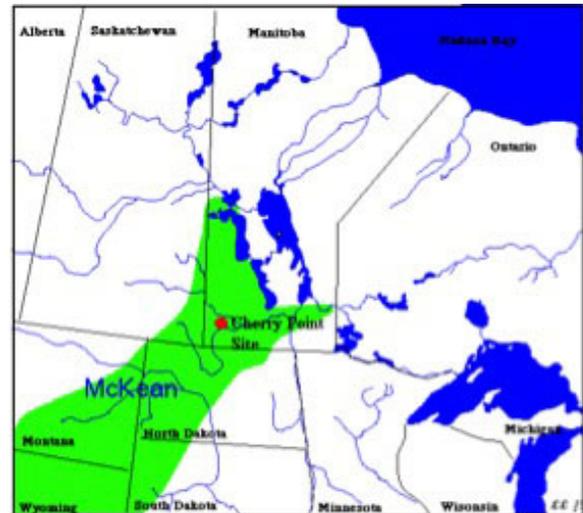
By drying the meat in strips and pounding in fat and berries they made pemmican – a food that was nutritious and would last nearly forever without spoiling.

The lifestyle was developed over hundreds of years.

The Oxbow culture were perhaps the first to stew or boil their meat by placing heated stones in a lined pit full of water, meat and bones. It was an especially good way of removing the rich marrow from cracked bison bones. They also left the first tepee rings, and they were the first to bury their dead. They lived in the region for a long time.

The McKean people continued to perfect methods for killing, processing, and using the buffalo. A well-known buffalo kill and butchering site at Cherry Point on Oak Lake has yielded important artifacts left there over 2000 years ago. They would drive small herds into the marsh at the edge of the lake where some would get bogged

down where hunters could kill them with spears.



The Pelican Lake People may have been the first to think of killing buffalo by driving herds over steep cliffs. They also seem to have perfected the use of the Buffalo Pound – herding animals into a fenced enclosure where they could kill them with spears. They traded widely to the south and east, and crafted ornaments from the shells and copper they obtained.

The Besant-Sonata Culture was also a trading culture. Remains of their pottery have been found in dozens of sites throughout southern Manitoba, including sites along the Souris River, and at Clay Banks Buffalo Jump site near Cartwright.

The Buffalo Lifestyle



The buffalo you might see in a zoo today would weigh no more than 1,500 kg and have a maximum height of 1.80 metres.

But its ancestors, who roamed the Souris Plains about 10000 years ago, were much bigger. *Bison latifrons* it was called. It was 2.5 meters high and his head held an antler more than 2.5 meters long.



An artist has imagined what the modern and the Ice-Age animals might look like side by side.

About 5000 years ago the buffalo cultures became the main residents of the plains. Vegetation and climate stabilized, evolving to what we know today.

Hunting practices probably evolved along with the buffalo.

From 1000 to 2000 years ago southwestern Manitoba was home to many seasonal camp and bison kill sites for hunter-gatherers.

Elsewhere in North America during those times Inca, Mayan and Aztec civilizations of Central and South America had erected large cities. The Anasazi, or Ancient Pueblo Peoples were building cliff dwellings in Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. To the east the Iroquois and Huron civilizations flourished in their large villages.

The north-central plains were one spot in North America where agriculture wasn't important. The climate wasn't suitable and the huge bison herds provided nearly everything the people needed.

This region was home to several cultures that were very good at using the buffalo.

Of course they took advantage of other available large game, they trapped small animals, and foraged for seeds and vegetables.

They adapted to their surrounding.

The hunter / gatherer lifestyle was the logical choice for the time and place. In other places, and at other times, other strategies were needed.

The Hunt

Over centuries the Plains People found hunting methods that worked for them in their region. If there were steep cliffs or valleys, they might create a buffalo jump, by herding the animals over the edge.

If there were no hills they might build a buffalo pound – a fenced in area - and trap the animals inside where they could be shot by arrows.



The Pelican Lake people used Buffalo Jumps and perfected the use of the Buffalo Pound. They traded widely to the south and east and crafted ornaments from the shells and copper they obtained.

The Brockinton Site along the Souris River near Melita, has been carefully examined and is one of many buffalo kill sites in Southwestern Manitoba.

The site was occupied by three different cultures over the last 1600 years. These occupations left behind valuable evidence about how the people lived. For instance, things like the type of pottery they used and the type of material they used for

arrowheads tell us about where they traded, and how far they might have travelled.



Buffalo bones can easily be found today along the banks of the Souris River



This marshy shoreline along Oak Lake was a favorite kill site over 1000 years ago. The McKean People would drive buffalo into the marsh where they could more easily kill them with spears.

Weapons & Tools



The Awesome Atlatl

The spear is used all across the world. The bow and arrow was created in Africa and the first people to arrive in North America brought them along.

They also brought along the atlatl - a powerful weapon capable of sending a projectile over 120 yards and killing a wooly mammoth.

It was the first complex weapon system developed by humans. It originated in Europe over 30,000 years ago and spread wherever humans lived.

The atlatl consists of two parts: the atlatl itself and the dart. The atlatl is held in the hand, and acts as a lever to propel the dart with more force. The atlatl can be made completely of wood, bone, or both and some may incorporate weights made from stone or shell.

Projectile Points

Numerous detachable tips that were used on weapons such as arrows or spears have been collected. Stone points may be **unifacial** (one cutting edge) or **bifacial** and may be manufactured by flaking or grinding. Projectile points are particularly useful time markers for the archaeologist because of members of a culture, often kept to a particular style.

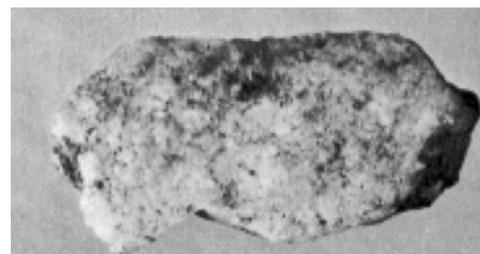
For example, three styles of projectile points are associated with the McKean culture: McKean, Duncan and Hanna. The McKean has a concave base with no side notching, the Duncan has a similar base but includes side-notching. The Hanna point has wider corner notches.



McKean | *Duncan* | *Hanna*

Scrapers

Scrapers were also generally made of stone. They were used to scrape hides to remove hair and fat, and to soften skin. They were also used for cutting skin.



Scrapers are typically formed by chipping the end of a flake of stone in order to create one sharp side and to keep the rest of the sides dull so you could hang on to them.

The First Nations

The Turtle Mountain – Souris Plains area has been home to many cultures, and on trading routes that connected those cultures to others far distant from here. In the past 2000 years the people living here increased their dependence on immense herds of buffalo.

The herds were always on the move and roamed a huge territory. To make use of them the hunters had to move with them. Permanent villages were not helpful.

By the 1700's when explorers from New France began showing an interest in this region, it was often visited by hunters from Nakota (Assiniboine), Dakota (Sioux), Cree, and Ojibway people.

It was the Nakota, whom LaVerendrye encountered on his trips in 1838 and afterwards.

Over the centuries various cultures developed better weapons and sharper tools. They learned to use all parts of a buffalo carcass to provide food, clothing, shelter and tools. They developed hunting methods, relying on stealth, marksmanship, camouflage, and finally the mass killing fields allowed by pounds and jumps. They got really good at harvesting and using the most readily available resource on the plains.

A successful society is able to offer its people a fair chance at health and happiness. They were successful.

The Plains People were originally from the east where they had lived in villages, and existed by hunting, gathering and growing crops.

When they moved to the plains they had to be able to move with the buffalo. They developed portable houses called teepees.

Today we refer to descendants of these groups of people as First Nations. Their ancestors have a long history in this land.

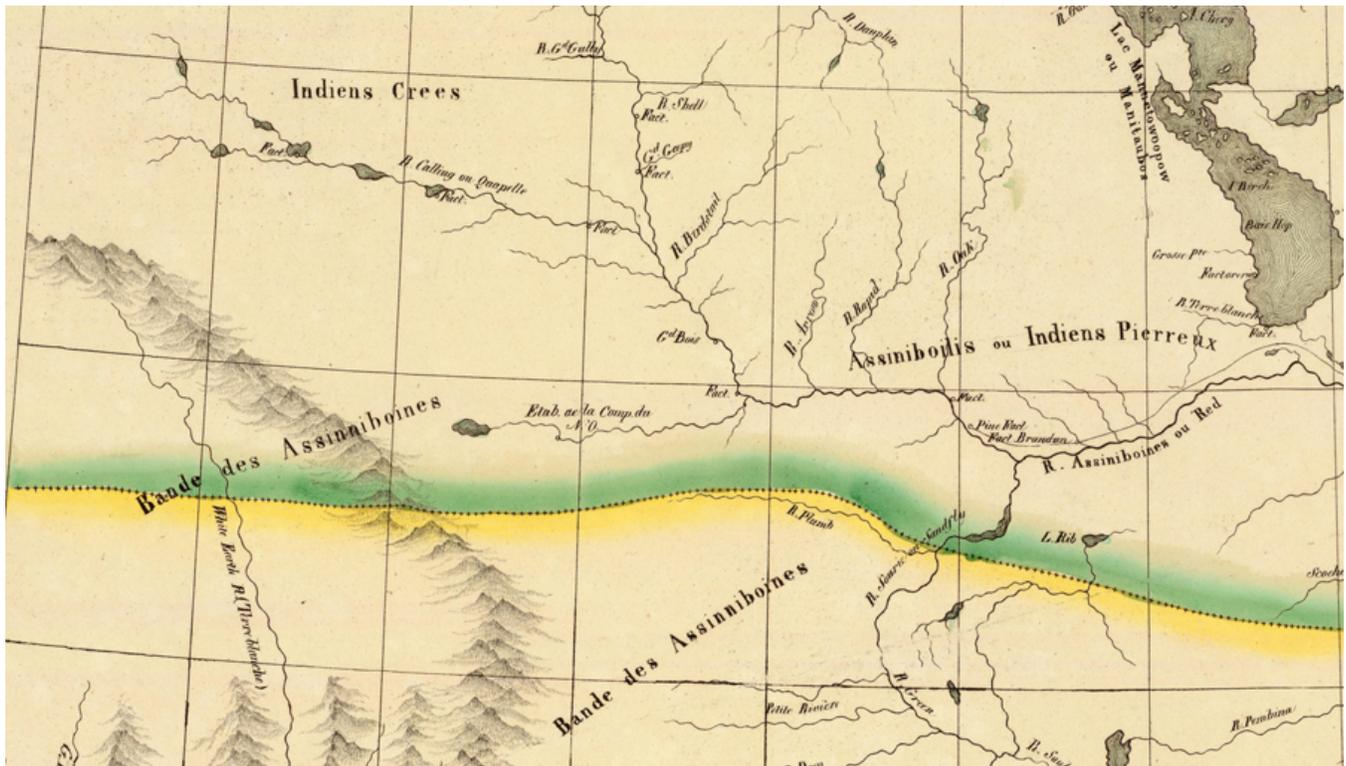
Campsite and Villages

The Souris River and its valley had resources that both animals and humans need. It offered a reliable source of fresh water, shelter, game, wood and wild fruit.

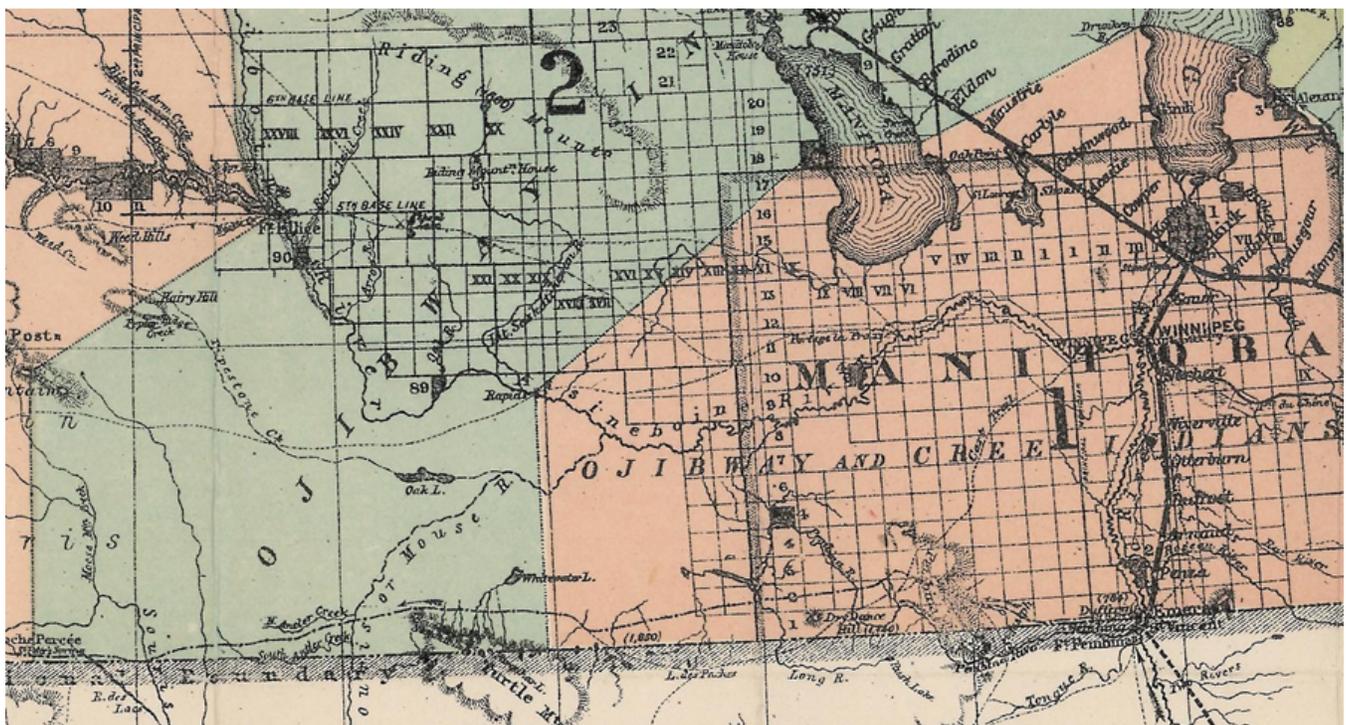
The river had been witness to the activities of the large-game hunting societies of the Clovis and Folsom people who closely followed the receding glaciers. These and later peoples left evidence of their travels and habitations in the area – tipi rings, fireplaces, medicine wheels, surface graves and stone circles are only some of the impressions that remain.

Turtle Mountain also afforded shelter and resources for campsites, both short and long term.

Territory Changes 1805 - 1877



In 1805 the southwest corner was mainly Assiniboine territory.



By 1877 when this map shows that the Ojibway were the main occupants of this land. The Assiniboine had moved west.

The Assiniboine (Nakota)



Assiniboine (Nakota) Camp, Manitoba, July 17, 1874

In the summer of 1738 a group of about 100 Assiniboine lodges camped beside Cherry Creek (near present-day Boissevain) had an interesting visitor. A group of French traders led by Sieur de la Verendrye came to them with a request.

He was looking for a route to what he referred to as a Western Sea. He knew of a tribe he called the Mandans who lived somewhere to the south. He wanted help in finding them.

Several of the Assiniboine agreed to travel with him to show him the way to the Mandan villages on the Missouri River.

The Assiniboine were good partners to the Europeans. They gained new trade goods, which made their work easier. In turn, the Assiniboine helped Europeans traders as middlemen, excellent horsemen, and providers of food to trading posts.

From the Lake of the Woods region, the Assiniboine moved west sometime before 1680. It was here on the prairies that the Assiniboine discovered the buffalo.

They wintered in places like Turtle Mountain where shelter and wildlife were plentiful.

In the long run, the relationship with European traders had a devastating effect on the Assiniboine. Along with trade goods the newcomers brought whiskey, guns and disease – the guns proved useful but the whiskey and disease caused great damage.

One-half to two-thirds of the population died in the smallpox epidemic of 1780-81, before being cut in half again in the 1819-20 epidemic of measles and whooping cough.

By 1865, the Assiniboine were reduced to about one-tenth their original number. They migrated west and this once dominant nation were placed on reserves in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana. Manitoba has no Assiniboine reserves, only individual members living off-reserve.

Only a few hundred remain today and are known by their original name - "Stoneys".

The Dakota



The Turtle Mountain Dakota. Chief H'Damani is seen here third from the right, 1870's.

The Dakota people have deep roots in the Turtle Mountain – Souris Plains Region.

In the 1600 and 1700's the Dakota lived in territory that is now Ontario, Quebec and the north-eastern US states.

In 1851 the Dakota were forced to sign a treaty with the powerful American government. They were forced to surrender all of their land and move west.

In the summer of 1862 a minor confrontation led to a widespread armed revolt as some of the more desperate leaders tried to reclaim their lands, their lives, and a different future for their children.

The uprising failed, and soon after, about 1000 Dakota came to Manitoba. They arrived claiming that they had an historic right to be on British soil; that these lands were in fact part of their traditional territory.

The Canadian government allowed the Dakota to stay but never did sign a Treaty with them.

Turtle Mountain Reserve (IR#60)

In 1862 a Dakota Santee band led by Chief H'damani claimed to have bought the land referred to as "Turtle Mountain" from the Ojibway and requested a reserve for his people.

At first the Manitoba Government declined, but H'Damani was determined to provide for his people. When he refused to move to the Oak Lake Reserve when it opened in 1877, the government finally gave in and the Turtle Mountain Reserve was established. It became the smallest reserve in Canada, measuring only one square mile.

Later H'damani and a few others turned down a \$200 government pay-off to relocate to a reserve near Pipestone. By 1909, only H'damani, his grandson Chaske (later known as Sitting Eagle) and a few others remained.