

THE CRAZY WOMAN CODY SITE, JOHNSON COUNTY, NORTHEASTERN WYOMING

by

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ABSTRACT

A Scottsbluff point was recently found in an upland area on a sand-covered slope next to an intermittent drainage. No additional materials were noted on the surface, but there is a potential for buried cultural deposits of interest to Paleoindian studies.

INTRODUCTION

This brief note is intended to provide basic information on a Paleoindian site (48JO1676) found during initial surface inspection of a proposed energy project in northeastern Wyoming (Figure 1). A single Scottsbluff point was found in an actively eroding area, and presently it is not

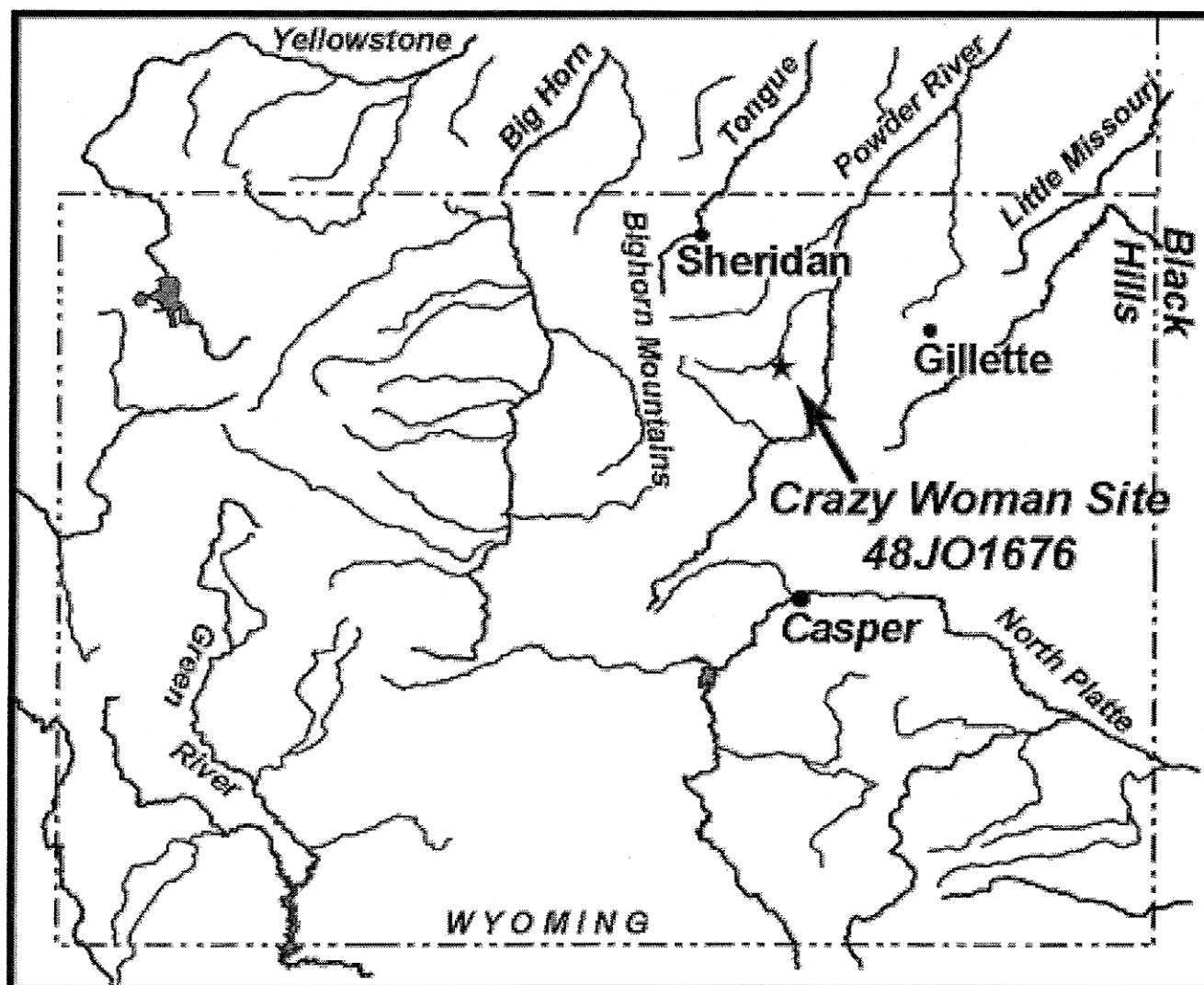


FIGURE 1: Site location for Crazy Woman Site, 48JO1676.

known if this is an isolated artifact or the only recognizable exposed evidence of a much larger site. No subsurface testing or excavation was done, but this description can be used in morphological and locational comparisons. Sites of this age are not common, and even such limited information as this may be of use in synthesis studies on Paleoindian occurrence and assemblages in North America, specifically northeastern Wyoming. More details on the location, including the site map and legal information, are on file with the Wyoming SHPO and the BLM (Greer and Greer 2000).

SETTING

The site is on the west side of the Powder River Basin of northeastern Wyoming. The area is a high plains of rolling grasslands and gentle drainages almost immediately bordered on the west by the dramatic escarpment of the Big Horn Moun-

tains. The site is about 15 miles east of the mountains, just past the main snow shadow that dumps seasonal moisture along the slightly lower fallout zone between the site and the mountains. In historic times this was a favored Native American hunting zone and apparently had been such for a long period, perhaps partially because of its rolling yet protected nature, good water and drainage, and excellent pasturage. Major trails through the region were heavily utilized during the frontier expansion period for Euroamerican access north to the Yellowstone River and the gold fields to the west.

The dart point is on an eroded slope just off the crest of a sandy ridge spur and above the terrace of an eroded drainage flowing northwest into Crazy Woman Creek (Figure 2). It is in a general area of rolling hills and low ridges that characterize the area south of Crazy Woman Creek,

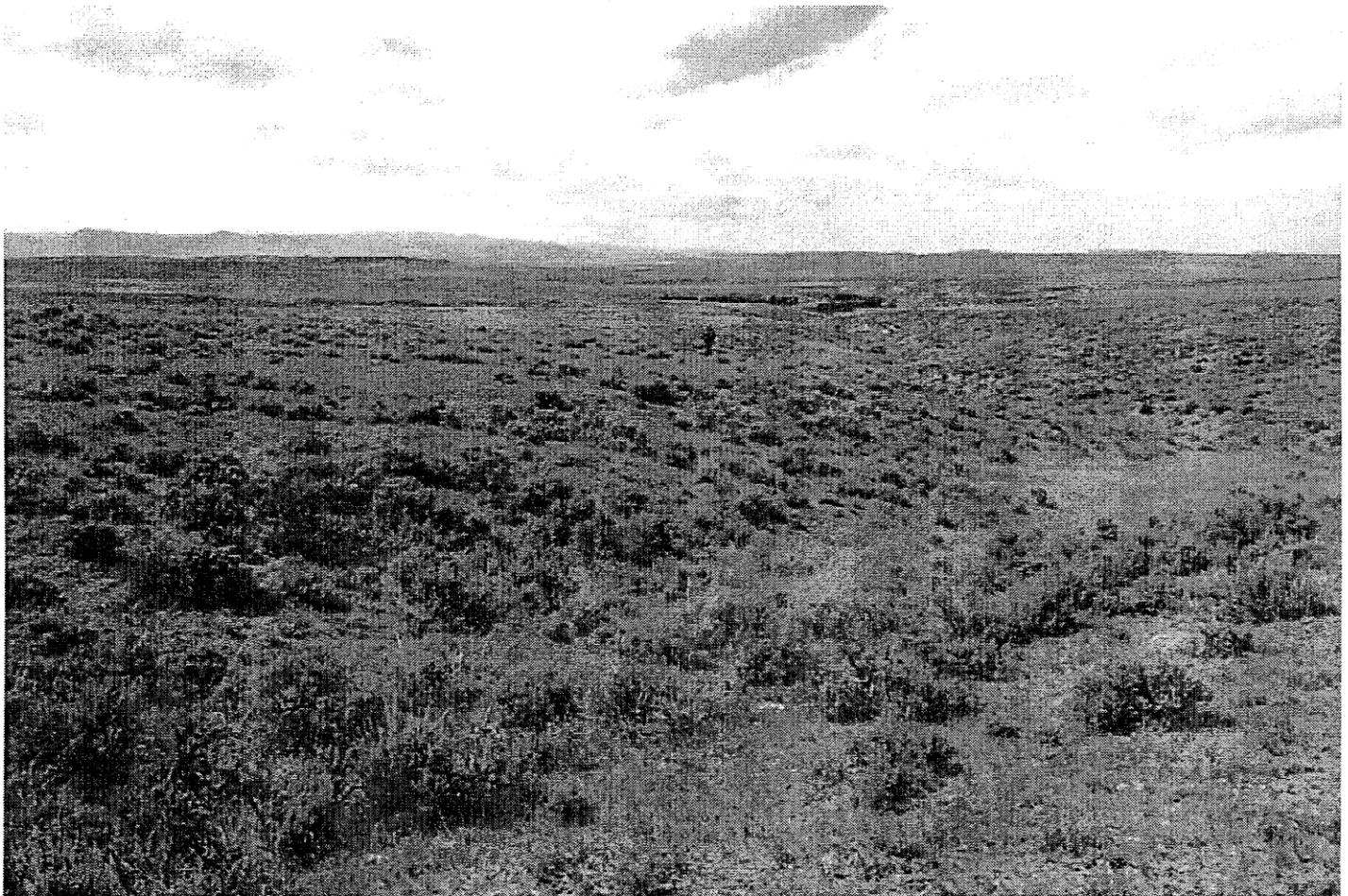


FIGURE 2: Location of point, looking northwest.

whose valley proper is visible from the site. The artifact is in an area where the lateral tributary begins to have a more developed and defined channel than just upstream. Downstream from the artifact, the drainage continues to downcut but remains a relatively narrow channel for as far as can be seen from the site. The drainage is flanked by low slopes with moderate inclines but with intermittent erosional bare areas exposing underlying bentonite and clay sediments overlain by compact sand, which appears to be at least a foot thick. The artifact is on a gentle slope that almost flattens out at this location but rises somewhat more steeply up to the low crest to the southwest. Vegetation is sparse and spaced and consists of a ground-level sod cover of prickly forbs and short grasses interspersed with erosional bare areas. Short grasses, sage, and prickly pear also occur. Vantage is northwest down the drainage, with an excellent view of the Big Horn Mountains on the western horizon.

SCOTTSBLUFF POINT

The single Scottsbluff point at this location (Figure 3) is made of a somewhat variegated medium brown to light gray chert, which at least along the edges is semi-translucent. This is a high

quality non-local material similar to cherts in the Lubbock area of the southern Plains (i.e., northwestern Edwards Plateau chert). Origin of the material, however, is not known. The point is finely bifacially flaked and is bilaterally symmetrical in both cross sections. Fairly evenly spaced flakes were driven straight toward the center of the blade, much in the normal collateral fashion, but these are small and many end in slight hinge fractures less than 30% across the blade. The point subsequently was finely marginally retouched on all edges. The stem and basal edges are lightly ground as are the extreme proximal ends of the blade edges just above the slight barbs to strong shoulders. The distal tip is snapped, apparently caused by a weak imperfection in the chert at the break. There was no attempt to resharpen the point. The artifact has been lying in its current position for quite some time as the dorsal face is lightly patinated with white to very light gray patina. The ventral face has no patination. The point (minus the tip) measures 64 x 34 mm x 5 mm thick.

DISCUSSION

The Cody Tradition is generally viewed in the Northern Plains as composed of the Alberta

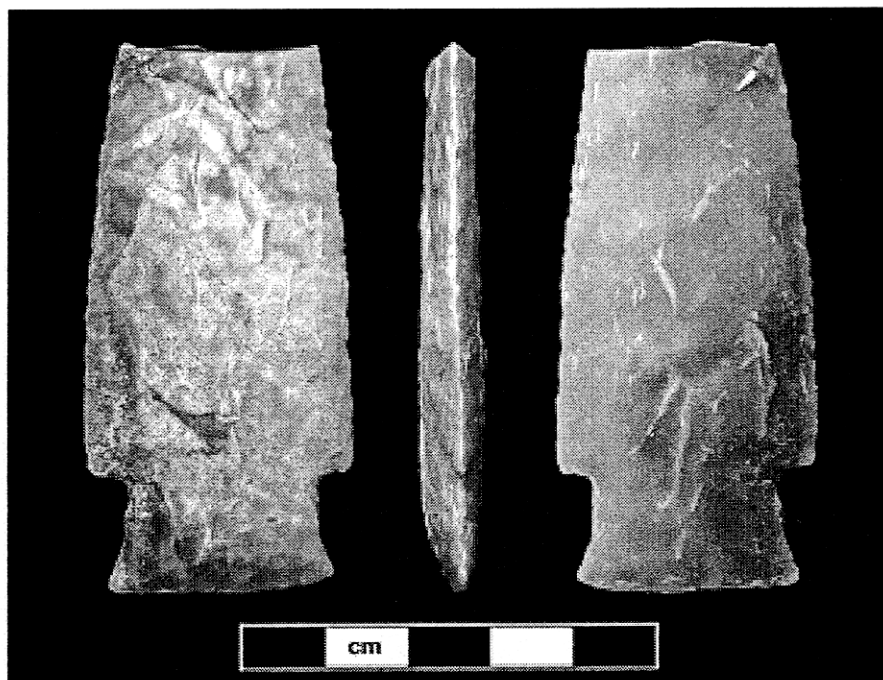


FIGURE 3: Scottsbluff projectile point recovered from 48JO1676.

and Cody complexes. In practice it might be best to think of these as the Alberta and Cody phases of the overall Cody Complex since the two are so closely related and are mostly separated by slightly differing projectile point forms with incredible internal diversity of morphological traits and slightly different ages. Alberta points are generally slightly larger, with more rounded basal corners, fairly strong shoulders, and may be slightly earlier. The various forms of Cody points, at least from most of Wyoming and Colorado, generally have sharper basal corners, ephemeral sharp shoulders, and appear to be slightly later. The original Scottsbluff type, a name which we use here to facilitate communication, falls within the later, or Cody Complex, of the overall tradition. That type, however, like its parent complex, covers a wide variety of morphological variation across Wyoming. For instance, a distinctive form occurs, together with small, thin Cody knives, in parts of southwestern Wyoming, perhaps best known from the Larson Cache (Ingbar and Frison 1990; Frison 1991:353-354) but also reported at several other sites (Vlcek 1980; also SHPO files for sites 48CR2001, 48CR2911, 48CR3050, 48CR2960, 48SW1930, 48SW4712, 48SW13620). Small points of nearly identical shape also occur at some Cody kill sites (particularly Horner; Frison and Todd 1987) while some southern Wyoming sites such as 48SW1930 (Vlcek 1980) also contain Eden and other more lanceolate forms. The meaning of the variation, like most traits of the overall complex, are not understood. Any review of these problems is clearly beyond the purpose of this paper.

Frison (1991) summarizes Cody Complex ages in Wyoming, with dates from excavated deposits ranging 8000-9000 B.P. Dates for the Cody occupation at Horner are 7880-8840 B.P., Finley 8950-9026 B.P., Medicine Lodge Creek 8830 B.P., and Hell Gap estimated at 8650 B.P.

Cody points are found sporadically across much of Wyoming, from lower elevations within the intermountain basins up to timberline, seemingly with an increase of traditionally recognizable forms in the northern mountains and foothills

(Frison 1978:34; 1991:62; Zeimens *et al.* 1977:97). Although a few sites have been reported, and related artifacts are found in museums and private collections, intact sites from this period are rare in northeastern Wyoming. Primary reported sites with Cody deposits in Wyoming include Finley in southwestern Wyoming, Horner and Medicine Lodge Creek in the Bighorn Basin, Carter-Kerr McGee in the Powder River Basin, and Hell Gap and Agate Basin (although no intact deposits have been found yet) in the far eastern part of the state (Frison 1984, 1991; Frison and Todd 1987). Since only the largest and most intensively investigated sites have been reported, and then mostly only partially, almost nothing is known of the occurrence, distribution, numbers, morphology, setting, or associations of other known Cody materials.

Cody Complex sites, especially camp areas, are typically quite large and may encompass several acres. Horner, Carter-Kerr McGee, and Finley are good examples of the large size. Large extent may be more common than is usually assumed for many Paleoindian camps of other periods also. Thus, when assessing site size, usage, character, or possible subsurface extent, it is often useful to consider depositional areas in which no artifacts are exposed but into which cultural layers could extend. This has been the case at several excavated sites and is pertinent to Crazy Woman.

The dart point at Crazy Woman is large, and its size, overall form, and distinctive stem shape are representative of what we refer to as the eastern tradition of Scottsbluff. As such it is assumed to be about 8000-9000 years old. It is clearly dissimilar from the smaller, thinner Cody Complex points, usually made of local material, found across much of southwestern Wyoming. It is made of nonlocal material, as is common for projectile points from this period. Use of exotic materials has been reported specifically at Horner (Frison 1991:66).

The location has not been studied in detail and presently is little understood. The dart point is the only artifact noted during the initial inspection. The adjacent ridgecrest, lateral slopes, areas

along the drainage, and slopes across the drainage were inspected, but no additional artifacts recognizable from this period were found. The area is naturally covered with a substantial veneer of compact sand, and there is a potential other artifacts, associated features, or cultural deposits are obscured by sheetwash or areas of grass cover. It could be this is an isolated artifact, perhaps lost during hunting, and may represent a single episode event by a single person, or perhaps a small camp or activity station utilized by only one or two people for a very short period of time. Equally likely, however, the point could be exposed on the edge of an associated larger camp representing a more complex cultural presence. The depth of surrounding sandy sediment indicates the area has a potential for buried cultural materials and features, such as artifacts and hearths, that could provide information on the use, function, and complexity of the occupation. The site is not within a proposed construction impact area and hopefully will withstand the constant onslaught of surface disturbance associated with unending mineral development in the Powder River Basin.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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