

MONTANA ANCIENT TEACHINGS

Introduction and Acknowledgments

Archaeology has tremendous potential for enhancing appreciation of the differences as well as the similarities across cultures.

Karolyn Smardz, 1995
SAA Archaeology and Public
Education Newsletter 5(4):7

Montana Ancient Teachings is designed for easy use by classroom teachers. It should not be one more item to add to an already crowded curriculum, but rather it should blend in to fit existing needs. It is an interdisciplinary teaching approach focusing on archaeology. It is our hope that, as teachers use *Montana Ancient Teachings*, additional lessons and activities will evolve and further contribute to the value of this unit.

We developed the *Montana Ancient Teachings* curriculum on the basis of several premises. First, the curriculum focuses on what we know about prehistoric people based on the science of archaeology. The material is about prehistoric archaeology—a subject that teachers have indicated that they want to teach and need to know more about. We only touch on contemporary Montana Indian tribes because teachers already have available to them several documents on Montana Indians. Also, we feel that Indian history as known by Indian people is best told by the tribes themselves rather than by a non-Indian teacher and archaeologist.

Second, we believe that people of all ages relate best to a subject matter that affects them on a personal and human level. Our focus, therefore, is on the anthropology of Montana's first people rather than on overly technical archaeological facts and terminology. We attempt to breathe life into the past by concentrating on how people hunted, gathered plants, made tools, built shelter, and cooked food. We do not concentrate on specific projectile point types, culture names, or other subtleties of Montana archaeology. We think that this information is best suited for college-level classes. We believe that by "humanizing" the science of archaeology and relating the day-to-day life of prehistoric people to the lives of today's children, we will create not only an early interest in and enthusiasm for archaeology but also empathy and understanding for different cultures and ways of life.

Our feedback from the teaching community and from experts in archaeology education indicates that curriculum must be simple and accessible. Teachers want information that they can quickly understand and then convey to children in an almost mutual learning session. *Montana Ancient Teachings* presented us with an opportunity to design such a curriculum as an interdisciplinary teaching unit, using current methods and strategies to deliver information to students. Building lessons to implement a topic, complete with activities and student reading

material, can be extremely exciting. Our goal was to develop a unit that would not sit on a shelf and collect chalk dust, but be used across the curriculum by teams of teachers. We view *Montana Ancient Teachings* as a unit that will continue to evolve and develop with input from those who use it.

The work completed, to this point, represents a great amount of time and effort to create hands-on material for introducing students and teachers to the science of archaeology and its role in contributing to our understanding of Montana prehistory. Thanks go to many people who gave us encouragement and support by sending curricular materials from other states as examples of work done in the field of archaeology education.

Thanks especially to the following for input and materials: D. Krass, Society for American Archaeology, Public Education Committee; B. Straw, The University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania; J. Moe, Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Project Archaeology; V. Wulf-Kuhle, Kansas State Historical Society; J. Stewart-Abernathy, Museum of Prehistory and History, Arkansas Tech University; D. Nemec, Arkansas Archaeology Survey, University of Arkansas System; Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio; R. Timmons, Kootenai National Forest, Montana; and the National Park Service.

Special thanks also goes to a group of teachers, from a two-week summer class in Helena, who worked to develop ideas for their final project around the subject of archaeology. Their input helped in the development of this curriculum. Thanks to M. O'Brian, L. Johnson, and G. Rooney, Helena, and C. Paul, Great Falls, for their efforts. Thanks also to the other twenty-four teachers who listened to our vision and gave feedback for the unit.

Funds to create the *Montana Ancient Teachings* curriculum were provided as part of a grant to the Montana Historical Society from the Society for American Archaeology, Public Education Committee. Montana was one of only two states in the nation to receive this grant funding in 1997 as an Archaeology Education Coordinator Pilot Project. Montana Historical Society staff Mark Baumler (State Archaeologist) and Marcella Sherfy (Education Officer) conceived and prepared the grant proposal and jointly administered and reviewed the creation of this product. Our thanks to them for believing that we had the know-how to create *Montana Ancient Teachings*.

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Helena, Montana
1997