

Chapter 3: Saskatchewan Archaeological History and Cultural Chronology

All projectile point illustrations are taken from *Tracking Ancient Hunters: Prehistoric Archaeology in Saskatchewan* (1983), edited by Henry T. Epp and Ian Dyck, Saskatchewan Archaeological Society.

All pottery vessel illustrations are taken from *Precontact Archaeology in Northern Saskatchewan* (David Meyer) and *Precontact Archaeology in Southern Saskatchewan* (Ernest Walker) both from the *Atlas of Saskatchewan* (1999), edited by Ka-iu Fung, University of Saskatchewan.

All illustrations are not to scale.

3.1 Precontact Period

The Precontact Period in Saskatchewan dates back to at least 11,000 BP (Before Present) with the earliest evidence of human occupation from various locations across the province. The ancestors of First Nations people include many groups with diverse hunting and gathering lifestyles. This chapter discusses the culture chronology of the Precontact Period in the southern and northern regions of Saskatchewan, with each of these sections being divided further into different time periods.

3.1.1 Southern Saskatchewan

The area described as southern Saskatchewan can actually be divided into two separate ecological zones. The most southern area is characterized by open grassland with rolling hills, but also includes unique landscapes such as the Big Muddy and Cypress Hills along the southern border. The northern area is known as the Aspen Parkland, which is actually a transition zone between the natural prairie and Boreal forest. This belt running diagonally through the province includes a combination of grassland and wooded areas. The archaeological record for southern Saskatchewan can be divided into three time periods: the Early Precontact Period, the Middle Precontact Period, and the Late Precontact Period.

3.1.1.1 The Early Precontact Period (12,000 – 7,500 BP)

After the retreat of the last glacier (14,000 years BP), known as the Wisconsin Ice Sheet, the first people *known* to inhabit the area of Saskatchewan were part of the Clovis culture/occupation dating from 11,200 to 10,900 years BP. These people used spears to hunt Ice Age megafauna such as mammoth and large bison. The Clovis spear point is characterized by a large flute removed from the base, which would have been used to thin the point in order to attach it to the spear.



Clovis

The culture following Clovis is Folsom and this occupation has a date range of 11,000 to 10,500 years BP. Folsom projectile points are manufactured similar to Clovis point, but the fluting extends almost to the tip of the point. During this time period, much of the megafauna living on the Plains became extinct and as a result, people began to hunt bison.



Folsom

The Agate Basin/Hell Gap projectile point style follows Folsom with radiocarbon dates of 10,500 to 9,500 years BP. These types of points are no longer fluted, but instead have a stemmed base that is more constricted to assist with hafting the point to the spear. As with Clovis and Folsom materials, Agate Basin points projectile points have only been collected from the surface, but quite a few of these finds within the province have been recovered from the Parkhill site near Moose Jaw. The Hell Gap culture is associated with Agate Basin and has slightly later dates of 10,000 to 9,500 years BP.



Agate Basin : Hell Gap

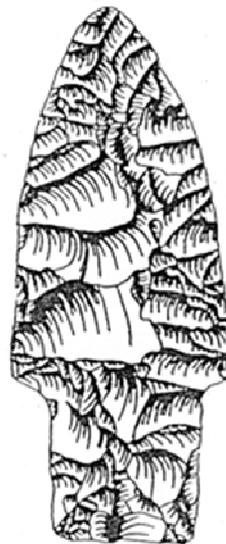
The hafting method of using a narrower base on the projectile point continued to be used in subsequent cultural groups: Alberta (9,500 BP) Alberta-Cody (9,500-9,000 BP) and Cody (8,800-8,400 BP). Alberta points have broad stems. The points included in the Cody complex are Scottsbluff and Eden and there is also a small triangular tool called a Cody knife. A number of these projectile points have been collected from sites in southern Saskatchewan, with a few even being found in situ at sites such as Napao and Niska.



Eden



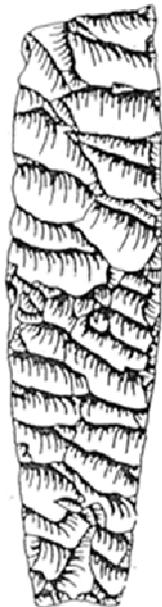
Alberta



Scottsbluff



Cody Knife



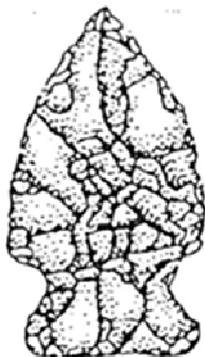
Angostura

The last part of the Early Precontact Period is affiliated with the Terminal or Late Paleo-Indian Lanceolate culture (8,800-7,500 BP). The projectile point styles included within this time period are Angostura, Lusk, James Allen, Frederick, Lovell Constricted, and Pryor Stemmed. Some of these types of points have been found as surface collections in southern Saskatchewan.

3.1.1.2 The Middle Precontact Period (7,500 – 2,000 BP)

The Middle Precontact Period is a time characterized by change in the environment, which subsequently altered living conditions, hunting technologies, and species of animals. At about 8,000 years BP the climate changed to warmer and drier conditions, and in turn, this expanded the grasslands, moving the Boreal forest further north, maybe as far as the Churchill River. This environmental shift is also referred to as the Altithermal. By this point in time, megafauna had become extinct and bison were much smaller in size compared to their ice age predecessors. There are few identified sites dating to this warmer climactic period, possibly because of their buried depth. At 6,500 years BP, change back to a cooler and wetter climate.

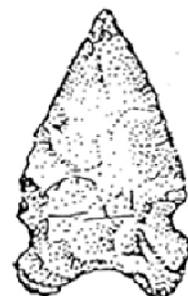
The Middle Precontact Period also saw technological changes in weaponry with a switch from large lanceolate projectile points to somewhat smaller side-notched points. These points are sometimes referred to as dart tip styles or atlatl points because they are hafted onto a dart shaft and then propelled with the aid of an atlatl. An atlatl is a tool used to throw a spear to increase speed and force. However, it is possible that the atlatl has been used in this area as long as humans have been hunting here.



Mummy Cave

At the beginning of the Middle Precontact Period, there are a variety of dart point styles that have been recovered from all over the region, suggesting that different cultural groups were producing their own stylistic variation. All of these points have been grouped under the Mummy Cave complex (7,500-5,000 BP). Many of these sites have been found near rivers and other permanent sources of water, possibly indicating that it was necessary to be in close proximity to water during the drier periods. The most notable Mummy Cave sites include the Gowen and Norby sites located close to Saskatoon.

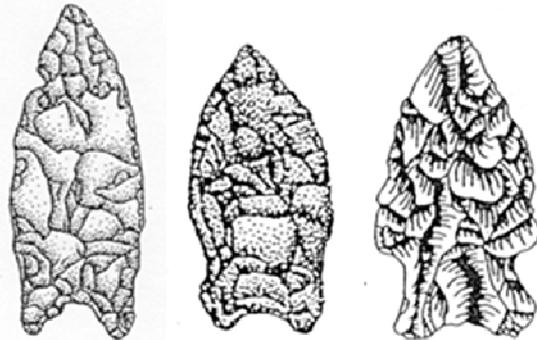
Following the Mummy Cave complex is the Oxbow culture (4,700-3,800 BP). Sites with an Oxbow component are found all across southern Saskatchewan and the points have a recognizable “eared” appearance because of their concave bases. The oldest known tipi rings in the province date to this cultural period and some of these habitation sites include the



OxbowPage | 3

Harder, Moon Lake, and Amisk sites. Some of these sites produced copper fragments signifying trade connections to the Great Lakes region. The dominant food source still appears to be bison, but there have also been remains found of smaller game species.

The McKean culture (4,100-3,100 BP) is partially contemporaneous with Oxbow. The McKean culture includes three different styles of projectile points: McKean, Duncan, and Hanna. The McKean point has no side-notching, but does have a concave base, while the Duncan projectile point has both a concave base and shallow side notches. Hanna projectile points have wide corner notches. There is little known or understood about the relationship between these three point styles. McKean sites in the United States, in particular Montana and Wyoming, are associated with pit houses and grinding tools. The McKean culture is viewed as being intrusive, with some archaeologists believing that McKean people migrated from the American southwest. Two of the largest occupations sites found Saskatchewan are located in Wanuskewin Heritage Park, the Red Tail and Thundercloud sites.



McKean · Duncan · Hanna

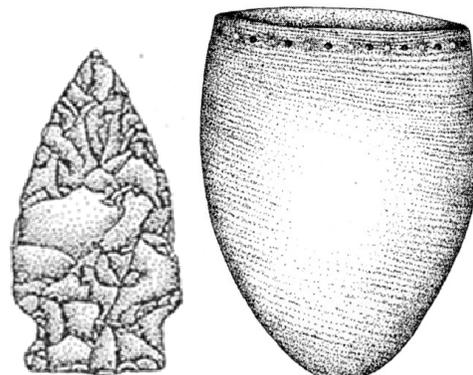


Pelican Lake

The Pelican Lake culture, which dates to 3,300-1,850 years BP, is associated with distinctly shaped corner-notched projectile points. The small size of some of these points suggests that bow and arrow technology may have been used in conjunction with dart points, thus indicating the earliest use of this new equipment. The Pelican Lake culture was first identified at the Mortlach site in 1955, but is also present at the Walter Felt and Sjovold sites. Artefacts recovered from Pelican Lake sites include a variety of foreign materials, such as Knife River Flint from North Dakota, shells from the Pacific coast, and copper from the Great Lakes region. These items would have been brought to the Plains region via extensive trade networks.

3.1.1.3 The Late Precontact Period (2,000 – 170 BP)

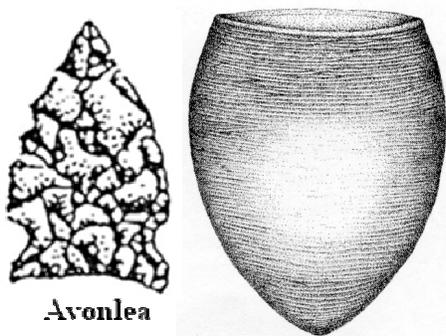
The Late Precontact Period exhibited climatic conditions much like today with a mixture of cooler/moister and warmer/drier episodes. During this period there was a significant change in technology, with the use of the bow and arrow, as well as the introduction of pottery. The Late Precontact Period begins around 2,000 years BP and ends when European



Besant

contact became consistent, approximately 170 years BP.

The Besant culture was present in Saskatchewan from 2,000-1,150 years BP and the projectile points are side-notched dart tips. This time period marks the first use of pottery on the Plains. Besant pottery vessels are conoidal in shape, include a row of punctates along the rim, and were manufactured using the paddle and anvil technique. People lived in tipis during this time period and these can be identified at archaeological sites by circular configurations of large stone cobbles. The rocks were used to hold down the edges of the hide covering. There is evidence to support communal bison hunting techniques used by the Besant people, such as natural landform traps and large corrals, also known as “pounds.”



Avonlea

The Avonlea culture (1,800-1,150 BP) began slightly later than Besant, but by 1,800 years ago, both cultural groups were contemporary. Avonlea people are known for making small and delicately-made, side-notched projectile points. Pottery is also seen in Avonlea artefact assemblages and there are three associated styles. The first is net-impressed vessels that are marked with either rows of punctates or parallel incised lines at the rim. The second style has simple stamped exteriors with spiral grooves, while the third style has smooth exteriors. The

archaeological type site for this cultural group is the Avonlea site in southern Saskatchewan. Avonlea people used bison jumps as a communal hunting strategy and a classic example is located at the Gull Lake site.

The last 1,000 years before contact with Europeans was a very dynamic time in the Precontact Period with technological and cultural developments across the northern Plains. People in the Missouri River area, in North and South Dakota, adopted horticulture (growing corn) and also began to live in permanent earthlodge villages. There is evidence of population increases, the movement of people, and the transport of goods through trade networks across the Plains. At the time, people of southern Saskatchewan were influenced by other cultural groups in the surrounding area, including Manitoba, northern Ontario, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and northern Saskatchewan.

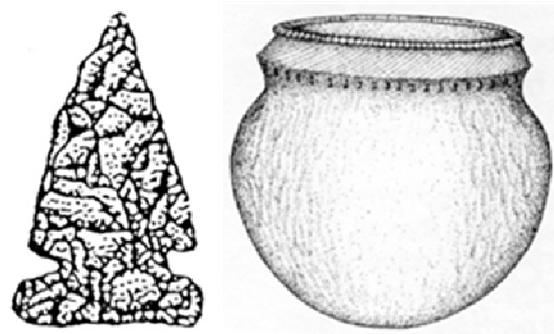
The Old Woman's culture (1,200-550 BP) can be seen at archaeological sites all across southern Saskatchewan. This widespread cultural group employed Prairie Side-notched projectile points (1,200-550 BP). The pottery found at Old Women's sites is recognized by its thick and coarse appearance; the exterior surface is cord-roughened, and is usually decorated with



Old Woman's pottery : Prairie Side-notched

finger-pinching, rows of punctuates, and/or cord-wrapped tools. Some of the notable Old Women's sites include the Gull Lake bison jumps, the Estuary bison trap, the Walter Felt site, the Garratt site, the Sjovold site, and the Tschetter bison trap. As can be seen from this list of sites, bison jumps and traps were still used by Old Women's people for hunting bison.

Following the Old Women's culture is the Mortlach culture (450-250 BP) and the archaeological sites associated with these people are located mainly south of the Qu'Appelle River Valley. The projectile points dating to this time period are known as Plains Side-notched (550-170 BP), similar in size to the Prairie Side-notched points, but due to their square bases and higher positioned notches, they have a more distinct triangular appearance. Mortlach pottery is also quite unique, displaying stylistic influences from northern Selkirk pottery and Middle Missouri vessels.



Plains Side-notched : Mortlach pottery

The pottery assemblages contain fragments that have smooth fabric impressed exteriors with cord-wrapped tool impressions on the lip and/or a row of punctates around the rim. Other fragments have incised and check-stamped impressions on the exterior surface. Mortlach culture artefacts have been recovered from the Lake Midden site near Bulyea, the Stony Beach site near Regina, two sites within the city of Saskatoon.

The Moose Jaw culture (400 BP) existed at the same time as the Mortlach culture, but their geographic range extends from north of the Qu'Appelle River valley to the parkland region. These sites are characterized by Wascana-ware pottery, which is fabric-impressed, cord-roughened, or plain exteriors. The decoration is positioned on the lips and rims with cord-wrapped tool impressions, notches, or punctuates.

The Late Precontact Period in southern Saskatchewan can also be linked to several boulder alignments and monuments that have been identified across the prairie landscape. These include sites with medicine wheels, and animal and human effigies. Some examples of these types of sites include the Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel, the Minton Turtle Effigy, and the Cabri Effigy. These monuments have religious and ceremonious affiliations, but some may even serve as geographical markers. There are also several rock art sites across the southern portion of the province. Pictograph and petroglyph sites in the grassland region are not as abundant as compared to northern Saskatchewan, and this is due to the lack of rock outcrops. St. Victor's petroglyph site is an example of a rock art in southern Saskatchewan.

3.1.2 Northern Saskatchewan

The archaeology of northern Saskatchewan can be divided into geographic areas: a southern and northern area. The southern mixed wood-Boreal forest zone includes the areas associated with the Saskatchewan, Beaver, Sturgeon-Weir, Churchill, and Reindeer Rivers. The

far northern zone comprises the areas around Lake Athabasca, Black Lake, Cree Lake, Wollaston Lake, and Reindeer Lake. (Refer back to 3.1.1 Southern Saskatchewan for illustrations of the projectile points).

3.1.2.1 Mixed Woods-Boreal Forest Zone

This area in northern Saskatchewan encompasses the Boreal forest, the Mixed Woods forest, and some of the Coniferous forest section. People living in this region were hunter-gatherers who hunted moose and caribou, but also subsisted on smaller mammals such as beavers. Fish and waterfowl made up a considerable portion of their diet. Plants such as roots, tubers, and berries supplemented their food intake. The archaeological discussion about this area of the north is divided into three time periods: the Early Precontact Period (9,500-7,500 BP), the Middle Precontact Period (7,500-1,000 BP), and the Woodland Period (1,000-170 BP).

3.1.2.2 The Early Precontact Period (9,500 – 7,500 BP)

The first people living in northern Saskatchewan moved into this area after the retreat of the last glacial episode. At about 10,500-9,500 years ago, people of both the Agate Basin and Hell Gap culture were present, and their associated projectile points have been found north of the Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan Rivers. So far, this is the most northern extent of these cultures in the province.

The glacial ice sheets continued to retreat and by 9,500 years ago, some parts of northern Saskatchewan were ice free. The area of land between the North Saskatchewan and Churchill Rivers was covered by deciduous forest, and this is where projectile points from the Alberta culture (9,500-9,000 BP) and the Cody culture (8,800-8,400 BP) have been found. Between 8,400 and 7,500 years ago, the deciduous forest had moved further north towards the Churchill River and the glacier had receded almost completely out of Saskatchewan. Regarding this time period, there has been little research, in terms of excavation, in northern Saskatchewan. However, Angostura projectile points have been found as far north as the Churchill River. Unfortunately, archaeologists know very little about how people lived during the Early Precontact Period because of the shortage of identified sites.

3.1.2.3 The Middle Precontact Period (7,500 – 1,000 BP)

The Middle Precontact Period in the Mixed Woods-Boreal Forest Zone was a time when people moved away from hunting large game animals to a lifestyle characterized by longer occupation in certain regions. The environment between 7,500-1,000 years ago was much cooler than what it is today, and as a result, this placed the border of the deciduous forest just south of the Churchill River. The climate and environmental changes during this period may have altered the movement of animals and people. People from the prairie region may have followed bison

further north and this could be a reason for the projectile points of northern Saskatchewan to be similar to those found in the southern portion of the province.

Projectile points characteristic of the Mummy Cave culture (7,500-5,000 BP) have been found at the Near Norbert site, which is at the confluence of the Norbert and Haultain Rivers. This type of point was propelled using an atlatl and this type of hunting technology is distinctive of the Middle Precontact Period. The archaeological cultures following Mummy Cave are Oxbow, McKean, Hanna and Pelican Lake, ranging in time from 4,000 to 2,000 years BP. However, the presence of these people is only evident in surface collections of artefacts; there have been no excavations of sites dating to this time period. By 2,000 years BP, the boreal forest edge had moved further south to its present location, shifting the parkland region even further south.

3.1.2.4 The Woodland Period (1,000 – 170 BP)

The cultures of the Woodland Period are recognized by the introduction of pottery in the artefact assemblages. The earliest pottery styles seen in the Woodland Period are present in the area between the Saskatchewan and Churchill Rivers. The first of these is Laurel pottery, which can also be found in northwestern Minnesota, northern Ontario, and Manitoba. It is seen predominantly at sites around the Churchill River, but has also been collected from around Reindeer Lake. Laurel pots are conoidal shaped vessels and were constructed by coiling. The exterior surface was smooth, but highlighted by decorative rows of punctates and dentate impressions that extended from the lip down to the shoulder region. Fragments of Laurel pots have been found at several sites in northern Saskatchewan, but the time period associated with this culture remains unclear. One piece of evidence from the Spruce Rapids site has been thermoluminescence dated to ca. 1000 BP.



Laurel

The second of these early pottery styles is known as River House and some of these fragments have dated from 1,220 to 850 years BP. The River House culture has been found in an area stretching from the lower North Saskatchewan River into west central Manitoba. There are two varieties of River House pottery with one being similar to Laurel pottery and the other is net impressed. The decoration on River House vessels is cord-wrapped tool impressions instead of the dentates and punctates that are seen on Laurel pottery. Aside from pottery fragments, River House artefact assemblages also include small triangular, side-notched projectile points and small ground stone tools.



River House



Blackduck

Narrows and Peter Pond Lake. conoidal pottery vessels, but their roughened. This would be created paddle. The resulting pattern is Their lip and rim decoration consists Narrows pottery assemblages also notched projectile points.

Later Woodland Period cultures include Blackduck, Narrows, and Selkirk. Blackduck pottery is estimated to date to 1,000-650 years BP and temporarily appeared at sites along the lower Churchill River as well as the Reindeer Lake region. The pottery vessels are globular in shape, decorated with cord-wrapped tool marks.



Narrows

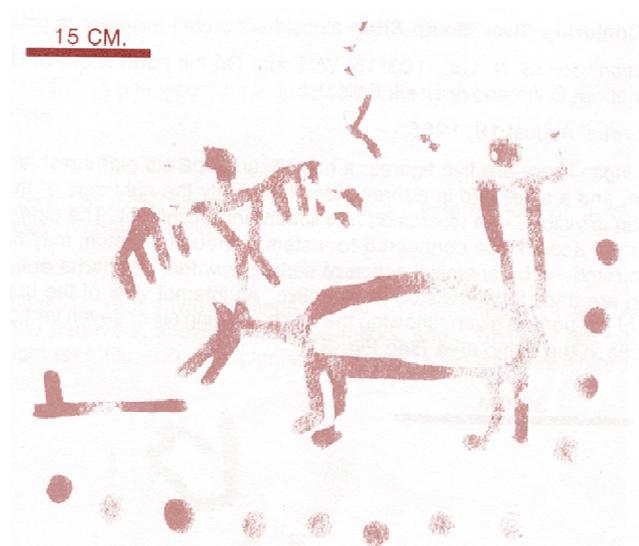
Narrows pottery has been recovered from sites on the western edge of the province around places such as Buffalo These too, are globular or exteriors are cord-by using a cord-wrapped horizontally-oriented. of a row of punctates. include small side-

From about 600-300 years ago, people of the Selkirk culture occupied the mixed woods-boreal forest zone in northern Saskatchewan. The pottery vessels are characterized by their globular shape and fabric impressed exteriors. The decoration is similar to that of Narrows pots with a single row of punctates and cord-wrapped tool impressions, but sometimes there are incisions on the lip. The rest of the archaeological assemblage of the Selkirk culture includes small side-notched projectile points, ground stone axe blades, and bone tools. The Selkirk people are believed to be the ancestors of the present day Woods Cree.



Selkirk

Rock painting sites have been located on various cliff faces in northern Saskatchewan and many have been associated with the Selkirk, Laurel or Blackduck cultures, although exact dates cannot be determined. These sites are positioned on rock exposures, usually at the mouths of rivers or near rapids. The paint was made from a mixture of red ochre and fat, and the paintings depict images such as animals and spirit beings.



Reproductions of rock paintings (pictograph) at Uskik Lake on the Churchill River, Face II (from *The Aboriginal Rock Paintings of the Churchill River* by Tim E.H. Jones (2006)).

3.1.3 The Far Northern Zone

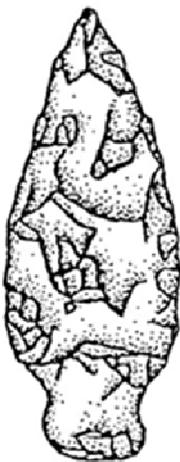
The landscape in the far northern region of Saskatchewan is dotted with lakes, the largest of which include Athabasca, Black, Cree, Wollaston, and Reindeer Lakes. Subsistence strategies focused on hunting Barren-ground Caribou that are migratory in this area. The archaeological culture history the Far Northern Zone closely follows those of the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and northern Manitoba.

The oldest cultural group living in these far northern areas is an Early Precontact group known as Northern Plano (8,000-7,000 BP). The projectile points are very similar to those of the Agate Basin culture found in southern Saskatchewan. There is also a possibility that this influence may have been from Alaska, where an Agate Basin site dates to 10,500 years ago.

There is a gap in the culture history after the Northern Plano culture. It is not until 3,500 year BP that the Arctic Small Tool culture appears and they are present until about 2,600 BP. This culture has also been found in Alaska and in coastal regions of Arctic Canada. Both inland and coastal sites would have been occupied by these people because they were following the migratory patterns of the caribou.



Arctic Small Tool



Taltheilei

Unfortunately, there have not been any excavated sites dating to this time period in northern Saskatchewan; evidence of the Arctic Small Tool tradition has only been found as surface collections around Lake Athabasca, Black Lake and Reindeer Lake.

Following, is the Taltheilei culture (2,600-250 BP), which is also present in Nunavut and the eastern parts of the Northwest Territories. There are different styles of projectile points associated with Taltheilei, some being larger stemmed points and others are smaller atlatl sized points. Another characteristic tool is a disc-shaped scraper called a chithos. Taltheilei artefacts are found in the far northern part of the province, but have also been collected from areas around the upper Churchill River.

3.2 Contact Period

Before the arrival of Europeans on the prairies, trade goods from eastern Canada filtered into Saskatchewan through trade networks around the mid 1500s. This period, until the time of a consistent European presence, is known as the Protohistoric Period. Over the next 200 years,

European settlement continued to increase in Rupert's Land and by the mid 1700s, fur traders had established permanent trading posts in western Canada. This is the beginning of the Contact Period.

English and French fur trading companies were in direct contact with First Nations people in the mid 1700s. Beaver pelts were highly sought after by European countries to be made into men's hats. Furs of other animals were also valuable and were often made into coats and other types of clothing. The two largest, and very competitive, companies were the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company (NWC). The HBC first established posts on Hudson's Bay and used the strategy of First Nations people bring furs to these posts. French companies positioned themselves in Manitoba and then began to build posts along the Saskatchewan River (sites known as François-Finlay, Thorburn's House, and Grant and McLeod sites). This forced the HBC to move further inland, and as a result, Cumberland House was founded in 1774 on the Saskatchewan River. This rivalry ultimately ended in 1821 when the two companies merged under the HBC name. The HBC still survives today – you may know it better as The Bay. Hundreds of fur trade posts existed in Saskatchewan and many of these have undergone archaeological investigations. Some of these include Fort Pelly, Fort Carlton, and Fort Pitt. These can be visited by the public, as some have interpretive signs and/or reconstructed buildings.

As years passed, the buffalo became targeted for their hides, while the hunting and trapping of beaver and other small game decreased over time. American trading companies were profiting from the buffalo robe trade in the United States. Métis people from Red River (Winnipeg) in Manitoba became heavily involved in the buffalo robe trade and soon bison numbers were very limited in this area. As a result of this, Métis people moved further west into Saskatchewan to take advantage of the large bison herds. The further west these groups travelled, the further away they were from home, forcing Métis families to setup wintering villages in several areas of southern Saskatchewan. An example of this type of settlement is Petite Ville, a provincial historic site, situated on the South Saskatchewan River just south of Batoche.

By the mid to late 19th century, there was an increased presence of European and American traders in Saskatchewan. Some American traders even worked out of fur trade posts in Canada, such as Farwell's and Solomon's posts, who became involved in the Cypress Hills Massacre. The West continued to become dangerous and out of control, and finally in 1875, the North-West Mounted Police setup their first post at Fort Walsh. This important site in Saskatchewan history is designated as a National Historic Site.



By 1870, there were major changes concerning the people living in Saskatchewan. The bison had almost disappeared from over-hunting and Treaties were signed by the government of Canada and First Nations people. This essentially ended the traditional lifestyles lead by First Nations people.

The early 1900s was a time when settlers began to establish homesteads across the southern portion of the province. Immigrants came from many different countries, including: Ukraine, France, Russia, the United States, Belgian, and Hungary, to name a few. Many of these people congregated in settlements, such as Kirilowa and Ospennia, both Doukhobour villages, and the colony at Cannington Manor, an English community. These sites, and several others, have been explored archaeologically to better understand how people lived, how they adapted to living in a different country, and how they maintained their cultural identity.