

During the planning phase of a highway expansion in the Little Sioux River Valley near Correctionville, an ancient culture's presence more than a thousand years ago influenced how the project would proceed in the 21st century.

It's commonly known among many longtime Correctionville residents that troves of archeological artifacts are brought to the surface yearly by the farmer's plow or quarry machinery mining the gravel rich bottomland in the Little Sioux River valley. In the year 1999, initial field samples were taken from random test holes along a strip of land destined to become the westbound two lanes of U.S. 20 near town. The samples contained stone tools and earthenware objects that caused Department of Transportation engineers to go back to the drawing board.

The DOT project would be the first new millennium upgrade on this portion of US20 since the initial cut through the valley in 1955. Prior to 1955 US20 was a two-lane concrete highway that delineated the town's southern edge, then spanned the Little Sioux River and followed a steep, narrow and twisting path up and out of the valley. After years of false starts on the highway, most due to budget shortfalls, the 1999 test hole samples weren't analyzed until 2006. That data brought focus to a specific location near the valley's western rise.

The highway expansion was scheduled to start excavating in 2012 and was to be the last 40 mile segment remaining to upgrade Iowa's two lane section of US20 into a 4 lane. Current engineering practices dictate a large swathe of land taken on either side of the paved roadway as safe runout for high speed traffic and wind scouring of snow from winter blizzards common to the area. The expansion involved smoothing the hills by removing countless truckloads of soil from the high places and piling it in the low areas.

The needed strip of land lay on softly rolling hills devoted almost entirely to agriculture. Right of way was purchased per acre from landowners at the current going rate.

Approaching Correctionville on highway 20 from the west, one first encounters a large stand of woodland on either side of the highway. Rather quickly the roadway drops into a wide notch cut into the river's west bank, before rolling down into the valley.

In June 2013 an extensive archeological data recovery project began at a location west of Correctionville. An area approximately the size of a baseball infield was carefully skimmed with hand tools. Surveyors meticulously sifted through two feet of deposition revealing outlines of small houses, in-ground food caches, roasting pits, hearths, middens, stone tools and many tiny stone and pottery fragments. The pottery was decorated with distinctive cord patterning indicating pre columbian activity by people of the early Late Woodland era. Carbon dating of materials set the approximate beginning of habitation to the year 200 CE. Interpretation of sets of evidence and weaving together data and observation is part science and part art, but it was very clear that humans had spent accumulated centuries at this site.

In mid August the removal of a layer of soil revealed staining indicative of gravesites. Activity was halted. A meeting was called at the site with representatives from organizations including; the Iowa DOT, Federal Highway Administration, State Historical Preservation Office, the Iowa and Yankton Sioux Tribes, Office of State Archeologist, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and Federal Highway Commission personnel. Federal code section 4(f) stipulated that disturbing significant archeological sites was to be avoided at all costs. Costs would soon pile up with a work stoppage. Luckily, a hold on the construction project was only momentary. The engineering department came up with a fix to increase the depth of roadbed by accumulating thousands of cubic yards into the trough, which would make a wider steeper incline and bring the four lanes closer together.

That's how an ancient community's activity influenced a modern project and how a modern community came together to find a solution to that problem. The findings from the site are considered archeologically significant and rare, making the area eligible for inclusion in the National Registry of Historic Places.

The following is excerpted from a report filed by Bear Creek Archeology:

Data Recovery

Data recovery began on June 24, 2013. In July data recovery continued along and the first signs of house loci became evident in the upper most stratum of the site. By the end of July almost 8,000 artifacts had been individually plotted and 20 features had been mapped. No evidence of burials or human remains had been observed during this part of the data recovery project. As of July the data being collected by the Phase III effort was confirming the earlier assessments about the site as they were consistent with Late Woodland habitation.

On August 15, 2013, BCA staff contacted the Iowa DOT via phone call and email to inform that the field crew had encountered a cemetery. Three oblong soil stains had been observed measuring .5 x 1.5 m (1.6 x 4.9 ft). All three stains were oriented east to west. No human remains were identified, but upon recognizing the pattern of soil stains the field crew halted work in the area and contacted Iowa DOT. Later that same day phone and email contact was made with all MOA signatories, additionally, Tribal consulting parties who had indicated an interest in Iowa DOT/FHWA projects, and had not elected to be party to the MOA were also contacted. Information was provided about the find and an on-site meeting was scheduled for August 21, 2013. Following a request from a

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Tribal representative the Iowa DOT halted excavation at the site until the meeting was held.

On August 21, 2013, representatives from the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Yankton Sioux Tribe, Iowa Division of the FHWA, Iowa DOT, SHPO, OSA, and BCA met to discuss the project and appropriate treatment of the site. After discussing the history of the project and some of the details of the MOA in Correctionville, meeting participants traveled to the site to review the finds (Preface Figure 2). Once on-site discussion about Tribal monitoring was presented and all agreed that

sampling of one burial was necessary and should be completed with Tribal monitors present. The Iowa DOT also stated that work would begin with the highway design team to look for design/build options that would allow the site to be avoided by the project. In the following days monitoring agreements were reached with Tribal representatives and on August 27, 2013, Tribal representatives were on-site. On August 28, 2013, the first oblong soil stain was sampled, results shared noted that no human remains were present. An on-site decision was made between the Tribes and the Principal Investigator that a second oblong feature would be sampled. Results of that sampling also revealed no human remains. The pH testing completed by the Principal Investigator revealed that soil chemistry in these features was conducive of bone preservation as was consistent with other data from across the site. It was agreed by all on the site that these two features did, at one time, contain human remains, but that they had been intentionally removed by site occupants. All matrix and the limited artifacts recovered in both features were promptly and properly replaced and the two features were backfilled.

While not all three burial features were sampled, the data had proven what had long been suspected about, that human interments had been present, at least in the past. Despite intensive Phase I and Phase II sampling approaches, which were beyond the Association of Iowa Archaeologist guidelines, burial features were present on-site. Discussions that followed the results of the burial feature sampling centered on the possibility for additional burials. At this time all parties involved with the project had agreed that the site had a proven concern for additional burials.