



The Hawken Site

*Spirit of the
High Plains*

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The Hawken site is located in northeast Wyoming and was excavated in 1972 and 1973. It had been discovered earlier and much of the site was lost by artifact hunters digging into the bone bed. The site is a classic arroyo bison kill site. A large gathering area for animals is located adjacent to a series of sandstone bluffs. Drainage channels from the slopes extend into the gathering area forming ideal paths for moving animals into the arroyos. As the gradients of the arroyos increase, their sides become steeper and higher so that eventually the animals are unable to climb out. When a headcut (or knickpoint) is reached so that the animals cannot advance further up the arroyo bottom, the animals are trapped. This was the case at the Hawken site.



Early side-notched projectile points from the Hawken site.



Hawken site bison bone bed.

The remaining part of the site was exposed in the side of the arroyo. After the site was used, the bison skeletal remains formed a barrier and forced the arroyo channel to move to the east. Subsequent to this, the new channel down cut leaving part of the old channel with the bison bones still intact. There were three levels of bison bone and only the top level was exposed in the arroyo bank. The artifact hunters dug into the top level. This was fortunate for the archaeology of the site since they were apparently unaware that there were still two more levels below.

The Hawken site was first thought to be of Late Plains Archaic age until a close look at the bison horn cores indicated they were too large for *Bison bison*. In addition, the associated projectile points appeared different from those known from either the Middle or late Plains Archaic. Radiocarbon dates indicated the site was about 6500 years old and further study of the bison bones indicated they were intermediate in size between the 10,000 year-old *Bison antiquus* at the Casper site and

Bison bison that were present on the Plains by about 5,000 years ago and have been classified as *Bison occidentalis*. My own opinion is that the projectile points at the Hawken site are a Late Paleoindian lanceolate type with side notches added. They are referred to as "Early Side-Notched" with no attempt as yet to assign them a specific type name.

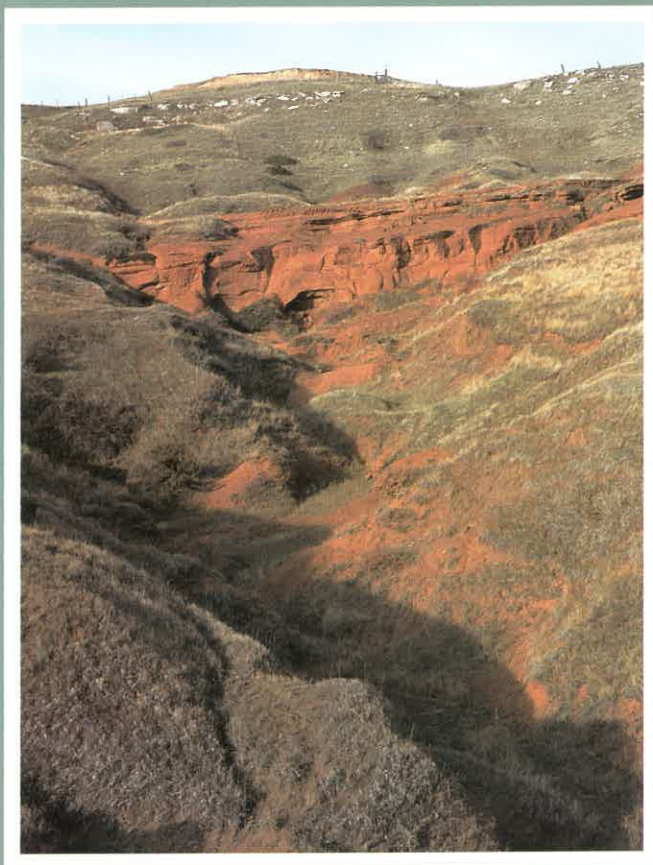


Bison skull and articulated vertebral column.



Hawken site male bison skull.

To date, the Hawken site bison comprise the only large study collection of the intermediate size bison known from the interior of the plains. There are at least two other sites in the same locality with intermediate bison present. One of these has the potential to be a large site and should be preserved for future research. We are deeply appreciative that the Hawken family has been very supportive of our research there in the past and we hope to maintain this relationship in the future.



View of the modern arroyo toward the Hawken site.

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