



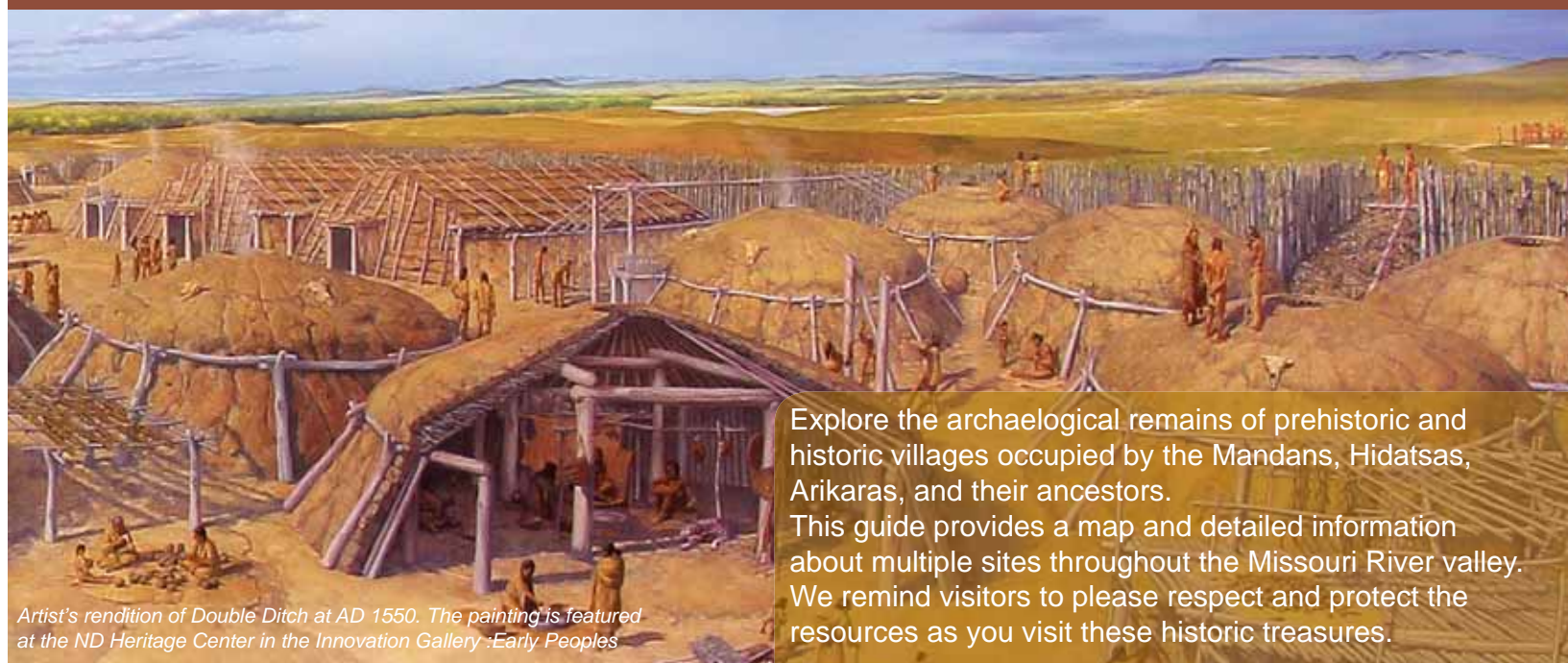
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## Legend

- 1 Menoken Indian Village
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- 3 Double Ditch Indian Village
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- 6 Cross Ranch Preserve
- 7 On-A-Slant Village
- 8 Huff Indian Village



# HIGHWAYS TO PREHISTORY



Artist's rendition of Double Ditch at AD 1550. The painting is featured at the ND Heritage Center in the Innovation Gallery: Early Peoples

Explore the archaeological remains of prehistoric and historic villages occupied by the Mandans, Hidatsas, Arikaras, and their ancestors. This guide provides a map and detailed information about multiple sites throughout the Missouri River valley. We remind visitors to please respect and protect the resources as you visit these historic treasures.

## Highways to Prehistory

Central North Dakota is rich in archaeological remains of prehistoric and historic villages occupied by peoples known today as the Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras.

Most of these sites were communities where people lived from the AD 1200s until the 1800s. Populations numbered between 300 to 2,000 or more people depending on the village and period in time.

Together, these villages chronicle the history of the tremendously rich farming and bison hunting cultures that once dominated the Missouri River valley. This way of life eventually gave way to the tide of change brought by Euroamerican explorers, traders, and settlers. Prehistoric village sites along the Missouri River number in the hundreds. On their infamous journey, Lewis and Clark spent the winter of 1804-1805 near the last five independent Mandan and Hidatsa settlements at the Knife River, and the ruins of several older Mandan villages near the Heart River. Several of these significant sites are now preserved on state or federal land and are open to public visitation. We encourage you to use this guide as you travel along your historic journey.

To travel the Highways to Prehistory, two routes are suggested, the **Northern Tour** and the **Southern Tour**. All sites are easily accessible by highway. Both tours begin at **Menoken Village** followed by a visit to **Chief Looking's (Ward) Village** in northwest Bismarck.

For the **Northern Tour**, from **Chief Looking's (Ward) Village** proceed to **Double Ditch Indian Village**, then **Fort Clark**, and finally to **Knife River Indian Villages**. For variety and a beautiful view of the last unflooded segment of the Missouri River valley, you may return to the Bismarck/Mandan area by way of Highway 1806 that passes through **Cross Ranch Nature Preserve** on the west side of the river. This tour can easily take a full day, or two if you wish to hike at Cross Ranch.

For the **Southern Tour**, after leaving **Chief Looking's (Ward) Village** take I-94 to Mandan (exit 155), go south on Highway 1806 (6th Ave NE) within the city of Mandan, and visit **On-A-Slant Village** and then **Huff Indian Village**, farther south. Plan on at least a half-day to see these two sites, and longer if you wish to visit the cavalry and infantry posts at **Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park**.

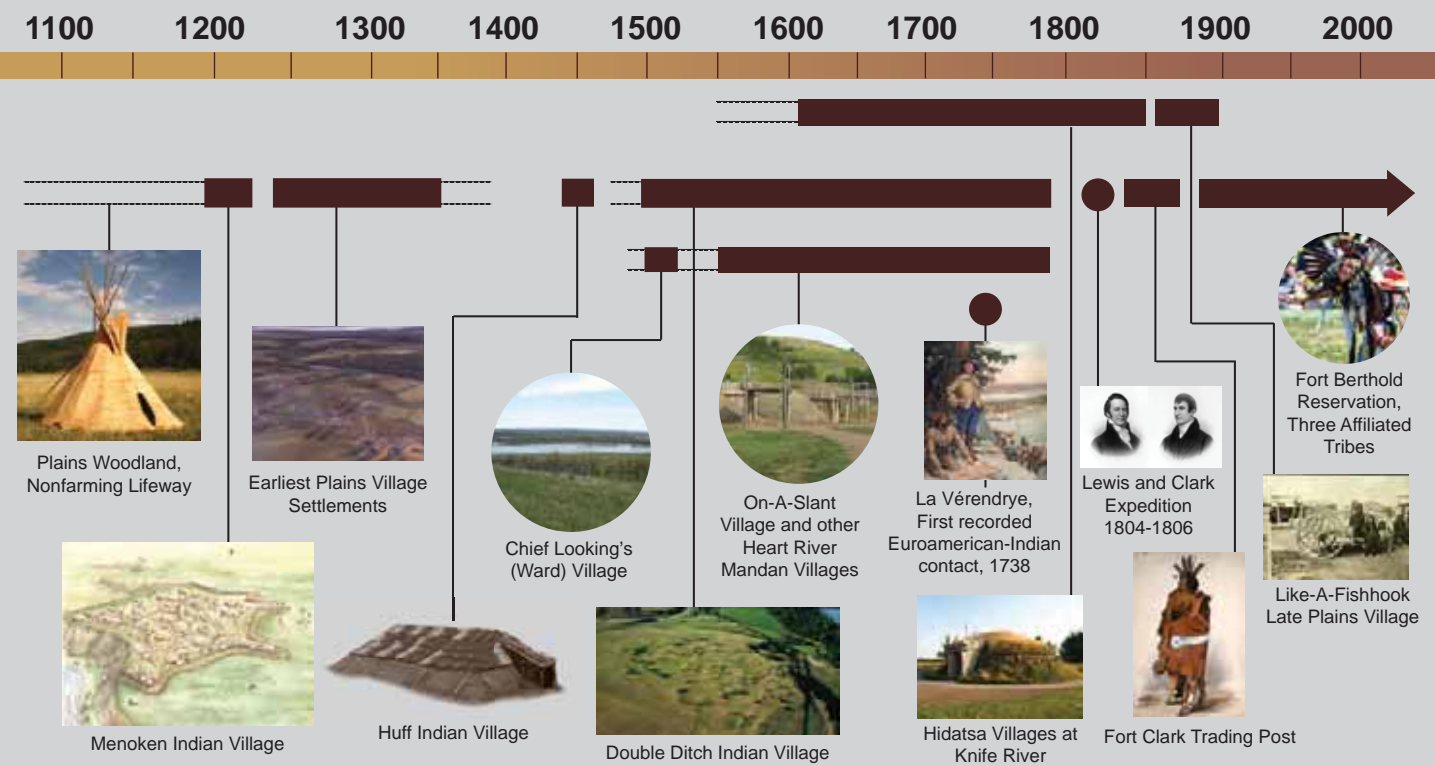
### Northern Tour

- 1 Menoken to 2 Chief Looking's (Ward) Village — 15.5 miles
- 2 Chief Looking's (Ward) Village to 3 Double Ditch — 8.6 miles
- 3 Double Ditch to 4 Fort Clark — 45 miles
- 4 Fort Clark to 5 Knife River — 10.5 miles
- 5 Knife River to 6 Cross Ranch Preserve — 31 miles
- 6 Cross Ranch Preserve to I-94/Mandan — 29.6 miles

### Southern Tour

- 1 Menoken to 2 Chief Looking's (Ward) Village — 15.5 miles
- 2 Chief Looking's (Ward) Village to 7 On-A-Slant Village — 2.5 miles
- 7 On-A-Slant Village to 8 Huff Village — 15.3 miles

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS AND SITE OCCUPATION SINCE AD 1100



### Menoken Indian Village State Historic Site 1

This small settlement is tucked away on a bluff overlooking an abandoned meander of Apple Creek, a small tributary of the Missouri River. The most prominent feature at the site is a fortification ditch that encloses a small group of lodge depressions. The ditch forms a highly regular arc around a center point at one corner of the village, and has four prominent bastions along its arc. Oval-shaped lodges occur in the village, and we know from recent study that many lodges burned at the time of abandonment. Once thought to have been the site where the French explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de la Vérendrye, first made contact with the “Mantannes” in December 1738, Menoken Village is now known to date in the AD 1200s. Menoken is one of the oldest fortified sites in the region. Research has revealed important details about the origins of the Plains Village lifeway in the Missouri Valley.

*Access- The site is directly off I-94, 11 miles east of Bismarck. At Exit 170 on I-94, go north, then immediately right (east) on the frontage road (30th Ave NE); go one mile, then turn left (north) on 171 St NE; proceed 0.1 mile and turn right (east) at the sign for direct access to the site.*

*On-Site Interpretation- Interpretive signs relate findings from excavations. This site is open to the public year-round.*



Aerial photo of Menoken Indian Village State Historic Site

### Chief Looking’s (Ward) Village 2

This village is preserved within Pioneer Park in the city of Bismarck. The settlement is on a prominent hilltop with a breathtaking view of the Missouri River below and the city of Mandan to the west. This village is a prehistoric Mandan settlement dating around AD 1500. The village is well protected on all sides by a combination of a ditch with bastions and steep drop-offs into ravines. A row of house depressions that appear to be rectangular in form is on the north side of the village, and circular house depressions exist elsewhere throughout the site. Chief Looking’s (Ward) Village may hold the key to understanding the timing of change from the rectangular lodge (early) to the circular house form (late) and other related changes in Mandan culture triggered by population growth and outside influences.

*Access- The site is off I-94, within the city of Bismarck. At Exit 157, go north (right) on Tyler Parkway, then left (west) on Burnt Boat Drive. Proceed 0.3 miles, turn left at the sign “Mandan Indian Village Site” and follow the road to the site.*

*On-site Interpretation- Interpretation includes a walking path with markers. The site is open to the public from early spring to late fall.*

### Double Ditch Indian Village State Historic Site 3

Double Ditch Village is possibly the most spectacular archaeological site in the Northern Plains. The site sits on a high terrace overlooking the Missouri River, with a commanding view downriver toward the mouth of the Heart River and upriver to Square Buttes, a feature that marked the traditional boundary between Mandan and Hidatsa territory. This settlement covers about 22 acres. Vast refuse piles, some standing more than ten feet in height, attest to a very long period of occupation. It is estimated that this settlement was occupied continuously for nearly 300 years. At its peak, perhaps 2,000 people lived here. Two prominent fortification ditches and recent evidence for two more attest to the fate of this thriving community, which shrank dramatically as diseases of European origin and assaults from enemies devastated its population. Double Ditch Village lay in ruins when Lewis and Clark passed this point in 1804 and 1806; making grim notation in their map that the village had been “killed by the Sioux.”

*Access – From Chief Looking’s (Ward) Village turn left on Burnt Boat Drive and turn right at the stop sign on River Road. Follow this road for 4.7 miles and then turn left on ND Hwy 1804. Follow Hwy 1804 for 3.9 miles; Double Ditch is on the west (left) side of the highway.*

*On-Site Interpretation – Signs are in place. The site is open to the public year-round. Visitors to this site will find the view magnificent and the sense of history profound.*



Double Ditch State Historic Site

### Fort Clark State Historic Site 4

Here, is the location of one of the most significant historic locations in the Northern Plains. After the Mandans left their homeland at the Heart River, they resettled near the Hidatsas at the Knife River. One Mandan subgroup established the village of Mih-tutta-hang-kusch, known to us as Fort Clark Village, at this location in the early 1820s. They resided there until decimated by smallpox in 1837. The abandoned Mandan village was taken over in 1838 by the Arikaras, who lived here until 1861. Fort Clark Trading Post, one of several important Upper Missouri trade centers, was built near the Mandan village by 1830 and was supplied by steamboats from St. Louis until it burned in 1860. A second trading post-Primeau’s Post-was also built near the village. On the site grounds are remains of 86 circular earthlodges, probably from the Arikara period of occupation, portions of a fortification system, trails, and the foundations and outlines of structures and enclosures that were part of each trading post. For many of the lodges, remains of the entryways are visible on the ground. Like many earthlodge villages and historic sites, this location should be respected as a cemetery, containing the remains of hundreds of people who lived and died there.

*Access – From Double Ditch turn north (left) on ND Hwy 1804 for 22.9 miles. At ND Highway 83 turn left; Washburn is 7.1 miles from this point. Turn left on ND Hwy 200; proceed west for 14 miles. Turn right (north) on the access road; Fort Clark is one mile north.*

*On-Site Interpretation – Interpretation includes signs with information from past and recent excavations. The site is open to the public year-round.*

### Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site 5

This 1,700-acre archaeological park is managed by the National Park Service. Congress created this historic site in 1974 for the purpose of preserving, studying, and interpreting the rich archaeological remains at the mouth of the Knife River. Three historically significant settlements established by ancestors of modern Hidatsa peoples are within the park, along with more than 50 less-visible sites including older villages, trails, cemeteries, and a linear mound complex. Of the three large villages, Lower Hidatsa Village is the oldest, preserving the remains of about 60 earthlodges rebuilt many times over a period of 250 years. The Hidatsas abandoned Lower Hidatsa Village, and eventually resettled at nearby Sakakawea Village around 1795, living there in about 40 lodges until it was sacked by the Sioux in 1834. Big Hidatsa Village was established by the “People of the Willows” around AD 1600, when this subgroup of the Hidatsa moved upriver after living for a time with the Mandans at the Heart River. Big Hidatsa village is the largest settlement in the park, with visible remains of 113 earthlodges, as well as trails and mysterious linear ridges that emanate like spokes from the village. Lewis and Clark visited Sakakawea and Big Hidatsa villages in 1804-1806 as did George Catlin, Prince Maximilian, and Karl Bodmer nearly 30 years later.

*Access – From Fort Clark, return to Hwy 200; proceed west (right) for 8 miles. Turn right on ND Hwy 31. The visitor center for Knife River Indian Villages is 2.5 miles north of this intersection, just past the town of Stanton.*

*On-Site Interpretation – Year-round, the National Park Service maintains an interpretive center within the park; contact site for hours. In the summer, a reconstructed, furnished earthlodge features interpretive programs, emphasizing historic Mandan Hidatsa lifeways. Walking paths lead through each of the major villages with interpretive markers.*



A reconstructed earthlodge at Knife River Indian Villages

### Cross Ranch Nature Preserve and State Park 6

The Nature Conservancy maintains a 6,000-acre nature preserve on the former Cross Ranch that contains expanses of native prairie, floodplain forests, and wooded draws bordering the Missouri River valley. The preserve has more than 100 recorded archaeological sites, including several major villages, bison kill and processing areas, linear mounds, cairns, effigies, and camp sites up to 6,000 years old. Archaeological studies have been published for several sites on the preserve.

*Access – From Knife River Indian Villages return to ND Hwy 200. Turn left (east) and proceed for 16.5 miles; then turn right and proceed 5.8 miles. Then turn left and proceed 4.6 miles. Turn left on ND 1806. The Nature Conservancy and Cross Ranch State Park are approximately 2 miles north.*

*On-Site Interpretation – Year-round, the preserve offers activities such as day hiking and cross-country skiing. Preserve pamphlets and nature trail brochures are available. For primitive camping, log cabins, and an interpretive center visit nearby Cross Ranch State Park.*

### On-A-Slant Village at Fort Abraham Lincoln 7

On-A-Slant Village is one of several traditional Mandan settlements occupied for many generations near the mouth of the Heart River. Studies indicate that On-A-Slant Village was settled in the AD 1500s and was occupied continuously for at least 200 years. Excavations here in the 1930s, the 1980s, and in 2000-2001 provide us with substantial information about Mandan history during the critical period of increasing contact with Euroamericans. Lewis and Clark camped across the Missouri River from this village on October 20, 1804, and again on August 18, 1806, and recorded that the settlement was in ruins, abandoned about 25 years previously. The Mandan Chief, Big White (Shahaka Sheheke), was born at On-A-Slant Village in the 1760s, and he accompanied Lewis and Clark on their return trip to Washington, DC. Lodge depressions are visible at the site, along with six reconstructed earthlodges built and rebuilt several times since the 1930s. Also within the park are the remains of the military posts Fort McKeen and Fort Abraham Lincoln (1872-91), headquarters of the Seventh Cavalry and the Sixth and Seventh Infantry.

*Access - From Chief Looking’s (Ward) Village return to I-94. Proceed west to Exit 155 (Mandan City Center); turn left on 6th Ave SE in Mandan. Follow this road (turns into ND Hwy 1806) for seven miles.*

*On-Site Interpretation and Facilities - In the summer, guided tours are offered at On-A-Slant Village. A very large circular earthlodge has been constructed at the site and is intended to convey the size of a community ceremonial structure. Five smaller reconstructed dwellings near it contain exhibits. Within the state park are a museum with exhibits about Mandan archaeology and several reconstructed military buildings. The park offers campgrounds and nature trails.*



Reconstructed earthlodges at On-A-Slant Village

### Huff Indian Village State Historic Site 8

This is a prehistoric Mandan settlement dating to about AD 1450, perhaps 200 years before Euroamerican influence reached the Missouri Valley area. The village is a very large, well-planned community where perhaps 1,000 or more people once lived. The site is in pristine condition, and the community layout is easily seen on the surface. Depressions marking the locations of more than 100 lodges are arranged roughly in rows, paralleling the river bank. The rectangular shape of the houses is still evident in the depressions on the ground. A large ceremonial lodge faces an open plaza near the center of the settlement. The entire settlement is surrounded by a massive fortification system consisting of a ditch more than 2,000 feet long with 10 well defined bastions. Huff Village was probably occupied for a short time (perhaps 10 to 30 years), as indicated by the clarity of the village plan and lack of evidence for rebuilding and trash accumulation. In this regard, it contrasts strongly with settlements such as Double Ditch Village.

*Access – Leaving Fort Abraham Lincoln turn left (south) on ND Hwy 1806. Proceed south for 15.3 miles. The site is on the east side of the highway just south of the town of Huff. On-Site interpretation- Interpretation includes signs with information about the site from excavations. The site is open to the public year-round.*