

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name White Eagle Park {Traditional Cultural Place}

other names/site number Ponca campground

2. Location

street & number N/A not for publication N/A
city or town White Eagle vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Kay code 071 zip code 74601



3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X nationally ___ statewide ___ locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] _____ Date April 27, 2007

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register [Signature] 4/2/2007
___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined eligible for the
National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined not eligible for the
National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain):

[Signature] _____
Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub: <u>camp</u>
<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>religious facility</u>
<u>RECREATION/</u>	<u>music facility</u>
<u>CULTURE</u>	
<u>RECREATION/</u>	<u>sports facility</u>
<u>CULTURE</u>	
<u>LANDSCAPE</u>	<u>park</u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub: <u>camp</u>
<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>religious facility</u>
<u>RECREATION AND</u>	<u>music facility</u>
<u>CULTURE</u>	
<u>LANDSCAPE</u>	<u>park</u>

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/no style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

roof _____

walls _____

other STONE/sandstone

WOOD/plywood/particle board

CONCRETE

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/NATIVE AMERICAN

RELIGION

PERFORMING ARTS

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PLACE

Period of Significance 1878- present

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8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Dates 1878
c. 1938

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Southern Plains Regional Office, Anadarko, Oklahoma

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreeage of Property approximately 26 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
A	14	<u>672310</u>	<u>4052940</u>	C	14	<u>672430</u>	<u>4053370</u>
B	14	<u>672310</u>	<u>4053370</u>	D	14	<u>672710</u>	<u>4052940</u>

N/A See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Dr. Mary Jane Warde

organization _____ date _____

street & number 3523 Willow Park Circle telephone (405) 377-0412

city or town Stillwater state OK zip code 74074

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====
Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma

street & number 20 White Eagle Drive telephone (580) 762-8104

city or town Ponca City state OK zip code 74601

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White Eagle Park
name of property
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SUMMARY:

White Eagle Park is a roughly triangular area of approximately twenty-six acres lying just north of the Ponca Indian community of White Eagle in Kay County, Oklahoma. The setting is rural with cultivated prairie on the north and east, the Salt Fork River forming the west boundary, and the Ponca Indian tribal complex adjacent on the south. The park has been in use by the Ponca Indians as a campground and the site of traditional ceremonies and dances since 1878; however, it is largely undeveloped. The main features of the park site are a walled spring and two dance arenas still used for ceremonies, social activities, and the annual Ponca Powwow. The smaller South Arena, in use since the late 1870s, is simply an open grassy area surrounded by trees. The larger North Arena, in use most of the twentieth century, lies on open ground in a circle of bleachers. Four of the bleachers are cut sandstone and date from the 1930s. The nearby spring, a major factor in the selection of this site for Ponca resettlement, was walled and topped by a gazebo in the 1930s. The structure is now in ruins. The park site, the two dance arena sites, and the spring structure are all contributing resources. Owned by the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma, White Eagle Park is an excellent example of a traditional cultural property associated with an American Indian tribe. It has retained a high degree of integrity.

DESCRIPTION:

White Eagle Park is located in the White Eagle community on lands assigned to the Ponca Indians as a reservation after their removal from Nebraska in 1877. The park consists of approximately twenty-six acres in the southwest corner of the southwest corner of Section 27, Range 2 East, Township 25 North in rural Kay County, Oklahoma. The surrounding area is mostly open rolling prairie used for grain crops, grazing, and oil extraction. The nearest city is Ponca City, Oklahoma about six miles north on U.S. Highway 177. It passes the park one-quarter mile east. The park is roughly shaped as a right triangle, truncated at the top, and with its base along White Eagle Drive and continuing west along the section line to the Salt Fork River. The timber-lined river flows northeast to southwest in a nearly straight line, forming the west boundary of the park before looping back to join the Arkansas River two miles east. Level cultivated land lies along the mostly unfenced east and north boundaries, which are irregularly marked by narrow bands of trees. A Christian mission and Ponca tribal housing are adjacent on the south. The Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma owns the park and maintains it well.

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

The White Eagle Park site:

The White Eagle Park site, simply called the "campground" by many Ponca people, is the primary resource in this property. It is a natural landscape with relatively little development, no signage, and minimal barbed wire fencing along east half of the south boundary. The topography slopes downward from the south to the north and from the east

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toward a steep low bluff above the Salt Fork River. There is another low bluff extending along a north-south line from the southern boundary. It ends near the South Arena. A mix of pecan, elm, and other deciduous trees with little undergrowth lines the river bank and the north boundary. Generally the west half of the site is timbered. The timber thins toward the middle of the site, leaving most of the east side and the southeast corner open and grass-covered. Two-lane curving, asphalt-paved roads from three entrances off White Eagle Drive provide access to all areas of the site. Although much of the site has served the Ponca people as a campground since 1878, camping spaces, which have been assigned to specific families for generations, are indistinguishable. A few trees have simple hand lettered boards giving the family name of the camp. Cut branch supports for temporary arbors or shelters remain in place at two camps. Some of the utility poles scattered throughout the park have been painted white from the base to about four feet up. A few have multicolored bands above the white paint.

Distributed through the center of the site are a number of tables Ponca campers have traditionally used for meals and playing dominos and card games. Four complete tables and the supports of one other are all that remain of twenty-one built during the 1930s. Ponca informants believe they were constructed by crews from either the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division. The tables are consistent with the rustic style associated with known projects completed by these groups. The four surviving complete tables are in good to fair condition. They have rectangular cast concrete tops with beveled edges. Each is twelve feet long and three and a half feet wide. Each stands on two cut sandstone rectangular supports about two-feet high. These tables fall within the period of significance and contribute to the resource. In addition, there are four tables built as a CETA project in the late 1970s. They are similar in look to the 1930s tables in that they are rectangular and stand on two supports. However, they have cast concrete tops and concrete bases. These tables are seven feet long, three feet wide, and approximately two and a half feet high. Some tables have been painted and are in good condition. They post-date the period of significance and do not contribute to the resource.

See photos with Photographic Orientation Map reference numbers 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 13

The South Arena site:

The South Arena site lies within the White Eagle Park site. The Ponca have used it for traditional ceremonies and activities since their arrival at this location in 1878. It is a contributing resource with a high degree of integrity. The South Arena is situated on level ground just southwest of the center of White Eagle Park. Set among the trees, it is nearly indistinguishable from its immediate surroundings, which are used mostly for camp spaces. The South Arena is a circular clearing approximately one hundred feet in diameter. A metal flagpole marks the east entrance the dancers traditionally use to come into the arena. There are four partially painted utility poles set on the circumference. On the west side opposite the entrance is a small caller's (emcee's) booth facing the arena. It is eight feet by eight feet and open-sided. The stand has a wood shed roof, seven feet high at the rear and seven-and-a half feet at the front. It rests

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on a metal pole frame. The floor is plywood. The caller's stand is a recent addition to the site. It is in poor condition and does not contribute to the South Arena site.

See photo with Photographic Orientation Map reference number 7

The North Arena site:

The most visible resource within the White Eagle Park site is the North Arena. It is the location of public events held during the four-day Ponca Powwow each August. It is located near the center of the park at the north end and northeast of the smaller South Arena. The setting of the North Arena is open and level. The North Arena is a bare dirt circle approximately 132 feet in diameter. Widely spaced bleachers provide audience seating outside the circumference. Thought to have been built in the 1930s as a baseball diamond for the short-lived Ponca Indian team, the North Arena has two large permanent bleachers on either side of the concrete-paved entrance. It faces east, maintaining the Ponca tradition for their dance grounds. The style of these permanent bleachers is very plain, functional, and consistent with contemporary construction projects of the Works Progress Administration and the Civil Conservation Corps Indian Division. Each permanent bleacher is built of cut sandstone blocks with an overlay of concrete. Each is approximately seven feet high and twelve feet across the base on the side. Each has five levels of seating with sixteen inch risers. From a vantage point facing the bleachers and looking west, the northwestern-most permanent bleacher is forty-one feet long. There is a matching permanent bleacher to the right of the entrance. The southeastern-most permanent bleacher is seventy-four feet long and angles slightly inward at the west end. The permanent bleacher to the left of the entrance matches those on the right. It is approximately forty feet long and has a flight of stairs with two-foot wide steps built into the right end. They provide access to a caller's stand resting on seven metal pole supports at the back right corner of the bleacher. The stand is ten feet wide and eight feet deep. It has a flat wood roof, wood half walls, and a metal floor. Built outside the period of significance, the caller's stand does not contribute to the resource. While the four large sandstone bleachers contribute to the resource, the six smaller, movable three-tier wood and metal bleachers that complete the circle of seating around the North Arena do not. Ranging in length from fourteen feet to twenty feet, the five wood and metal bleachers were moved to the site outside the period of significance.

See photos with Photographic Orientation Map reference numbers 1, 2, 11, 12

The spring structure:

A structure very near the center of the White Eagle Park site covers the spring that was a major factor in the Ponca selection of this location as their new home in 1878. The spring is located at the end and on top of the low bluff that extends through the center of the park from the south boundary. In the 1930s, according the Ponca oral history, workmen thought to be from the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division

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walled the spring. They built a gazebo over it with seating along the sides, as well as a stairway providing easier access to the riverside camp spaces and the South Arena. All that remains of the spring structure is the foundation of the gazebo and the associated stairway. The gazebo foundation is approximately seven feet by seven feet and one foot high. It is constructed of cut sandstone blocks with an overlay of concrete. An open round concrete-walled hole provides access to the spring. Associated with the foundation about ten feet away, the stairway is situated on the west face of the bluff. It is about five feet high and approximately ten feet wide. It is constructed of cut sandstone blocks. The gazebo foundation with the walled spring and the stairway are in ruins. However, they fall within the period of significance and are contributing.

See photos with Photographic Orientation Map reference numbers 8, 9

ALTERATIONS:

Alterations to the White Eagle Park site have been minimal and unobtrusive. In recent years, some trees have been cut back and dead trees removed, most notably near the South Arena. Historic photographs from the 1940s show a few trees growing in the middle of the arena. Today the space is open but still surrounded by large trees. Photographs of the camp spaces from the 1940s show little change. According to a Ponca informant, the roads through the site follow historic paths but have been shifted slightly in some places and paved. A fence of welded metal pipe now separates the North Arena from the encircling roadway except directly behind the permanent bleachers. Supplementing the permanent bleachers with the movable wood and metal bleachers for powwow seating continues a long-standing custom, according to a Ponca informant. The majority of the 1930s concrete and sandstone tables have disappeared, but four new tables have been added. The spring has experienced the most alteration, first with the addition of the gazebo in the 1930s, within the period of significance, and then with its removal outside the period of significance. The drainage northward toward the Salt Fork River has been channeled underground, reducing wet areas in the park.

The White Eagle Park site is endangered due to encroachment of the Salt Fork River along the west boundary. The Ponca Tribe is attempting to alleviate undercutting of the bluff by placing broken concrete slabs on the exposed surface.

Given the size of the White Eagle Park site, approximately twenty-six acres, the few alterations are relatively small in scale. They have not changed the landscape or the Ponca people's traditional usages of the place and sense of identification with it. Therefore, the White Eagle Park site has retained a strong degree of integrity.

See photos with Photographic Orientation Map reference number 5

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SUMMARY:

White Eagle Park is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property because it has been the site of cultural practices of the Ponca Indians for 128 years. It is rooted in that community's history and is still integral to their tribal identity. White Eagle Park is eligible under Criterion A because it has been the site of Ponca tribal historical events since their resettlement at this location in 1878, following their forced removal from their Nebraska homeland in 1877. It is also eligible under Criterion A because throughout the 20th century the Ponca Powwow held annually at White Eagle Park disseminated elements of Ponca culture to other tribes, establishing the template for the intertribal contest powwow now practiced nationally.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

White Eagle Park is the site identified by members of the Ponca Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma¹ as the most important to their culture and identity as a community. Their use of the White Eagle Park site since 1878 is verified both by their oral history and written documentation.

The Ponca people were removed to the Indian Territory as the result of federal Indian policy in the post-Civil War period. It is believed the Ponca, who are linguistically Siouan, migrated from the Ohio River Valley onto the Great Plains by way of the Missouri River. They settled eventually in stockade villages near the mouth of the Niobrara River in northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota. They were farmers, but by the mid-1700s also used horses and tepees when following the bison herds. The Ponca honored their warriors and fought well when attacked, but they usually lived peacefully with their neighbors, including the French and Anglo-Americans. Unfortunately, in the first half of the nineteenth century better armed Lakota and Pawnee raiders threatened Ponca villages and made hunting and tending crops difficult. Treaties with the United States in 1858 and 1865 defined a Ponca reservation and should have made them more secure. However, the Ponca were shocked to learn the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie had granted their reservation to the Lakota. Rather than rectify the situation, Congress appropriated funding to remove the approximately eight hundred Ponca to the Indian Territory by force if necessary.²

¹ A transition is currently underway toward the designation "Ponca Nation." Joseph H. Cash and Gerald W. Wolff, *The Ponca People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1975), 2-6, 10, 20-22, 24-34.

² *Ibid.*, 34-45; Thomas Brown, "In Pursuit of Justice: The Ponca Indians in Indian Territory, 1877-1905," in *Oklahoma's Forgotten Indians*, ed. Robert E. Smith, The Oklahoma Series (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Historical Society, 1981), 53-56.

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In mid-summer 1877, the reluctant but unresisting Ponca, led by their hereditary Chief White Eagle, arrived under military guard at Quapaw Agency in today's northeast Oklahoma. Already sick and exhausted from the long, miserable march south, they found none of the promised provisions and no new lands assigned to them. Refused permission to go back to Nebraska, some slipped away to join tribes in the north. In December 1877, Chief White Eagle and other Ponca chiefs traveled west into the Cherokee Outlet with Indian Inspector General John McNeil to choose land for a reservation and the location for the new Ponca Agency. The site chosen for the agency, which includes today's White Eagle Park, was about two miles west of the confluence of the Arkansas River and its Salt Fork. In July 1878 the remaining Ponca were finally allowed to make the 185-mile trip to their new homeland.³

This new Ponca reservation consisted of nearly 101,900 acres of prairie and river valleys in today's Kay County, Oklahoma. Ponca Agent William H. Whiteman wrote that the agency site was "well located in point of health, beauty, and convenience to wood and water." The sandy soil supported sage and buffalo grass that made fine grazing for the cattle herds then roaming Cherokee Outlet lands under lease from neighboring Indian tribes. Whiteman concluded, "We have a bountiful supply of water, cool and sweet, furnished by the many springs which run out along the river bluffs."⁴ Harry Buffalo Head, a Ponca elder said in 1958, "The white people has different stories of how we got here, but what my grandpa told me is a lot different. And he told me, he says Jesus Christ brought us here....Them people over there wanted to do away with us...the Lord took mercy on us and brought us to this good country, lots of good water, wild game, anything we wanted was here."⁵

Agent Whiteman reported in August 1878, a month after their arrival, that the Ponca were living in a single large village adjacent to the site selected for his agency buildings. Ponca oral history identified the village site as today's White Eagle Park, which they still call simply "the campground." The Ponca had chosen to set up their tepees on a low timbered bluff on the east side of the Salt Fork River. The pecan, oak, and elm trees provided shade from the late summer heat and wood for fires. On a small bluff just east of the main campground, there was a good spring that provided fine, cool water. The Ponca regarded the spring as a special place and a gift to living creatures that should always be treated with respect.⁶ The camp was supposed to be temporary, and the agent expected the Ponca to break

³ Brown, "In Pursuit of Justice," 54-58; Agent William H. Whiteman to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 31, 1878, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1878* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1878), 64.

⁴ Whiteman to the Commissioner, August 31, 1878, 64.

⁵ Interview of Harry Buffalo Head by Irving Peithman, White Eagle, Oklahoma, August 30, 1958.

⁶ Interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Edward Hara by Mary Jane Warde, Stillwater, Oklahoma, December 19, 2006.

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up into bands or families and move away from the agency. However, they chose to remain in their camp on the bluff, which concerned Agent Whiteman. He wrote, "the tribal village is one great source of trouble...It is there that the mischief-makers sow the seeds of discontent..."⁷

Indeed, there was discontent in the camp because promised supplies and new farming implements had not arrived. Also, the Ponca were unused to the hotter, more humid Southern Plains climate. Many were sick, some were seriously ill from malaria, and the death rate was climbing. Among the fatalities was Bear Shield, the twelve-year-old son of Chief Standing Bear, who died in the camp in today's White Eagle Park in December 1878. While most of the Ponca agreed with Chief White Eagle that they must stay in this new land, some agreed with Chief Standing Bear, who advocated returning to Nebraska even without federal permission. In January 1879, Chief Standing Bear and about thirty followers slipped away from a camp further west, intending to return his son's remains to Nebraska for burial. Their journey home, attempt to settle among the Omaha tribe, and arrest for leaving their Indian Territory reservation without the agent's permission received extensive publicity in the nation's newspapers. National attention on the federal government's treatment of the Ponca prompted wide-spread calls for Indian policy reform. Still, even though Standing Bear and his followers were allowed to stay in Nebraska, the Ponca majority chose to remain on their new Indian Territory reservation.⁸

In spite of their agent's attempts to get the Ponca to disperse, the Ponca Agency buildings and the camp by the river became the nucleus of the White Eagle community, still the largest on the former Ponca Reservation. In 1879 promised supplies, farm implements, and livestock arrived, and the agent oversaw the construction of seventy log houses for the 530 Ponca on the reservation. Ponca families eventually settled on both sides of the Salt Fork River. The first White Eagle School began operations as a day school for about fifty students, also in 1879. Perhaps staying near their children attending the school combined with a preference for their traditional communal way of life to keep some Poncas camped permanently there by the river. According to Ponca oral history, some families lived in tents on the camp ground that became White Eagle Park into the middle of the twentieth century.⁹

⁷ Whiteman to the Commissioner, August 31, 1878, 64-65.

⁸ J. Stanley Clark, "The Killing of Big Snake," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 49 (Autumn, 1971):304-305; Cash and Wolff, *The Ponca People*, 51-60; interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 93-96.

⁹ Ponca Agent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 31, 1879, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1879* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 72-73; interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Paul Little Voice by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 11, 2006; interview of Henry Lieb by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006.

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In the 1880s the Ponca's close association with their neighbors George W. Miller and his sons Joe, Zach, and George Lee became a strong factor in the tribe's subsequent history and use of White Eagle Park. By some accounts the senior Miller and his son Joe were instrumental in the Ponca chiefs' selection of their Indian Territory reservation lands. Miller, a Kansas-based rancher who leased grazing lands in the Cherokee Outlet, knew the country. He was said to have recommended the site chosen for the Ponca Agency in large part because of the fine spring frequently used by travelers and trail herds. About the time the Ponca arrived on their new reservation, he founded what became the 101 Ranch nearby along the Salt Fork River. At its height, the Millers leased most of its 110,000 acres from individual Poncas after their reservation was allotted in the 1890s as a result of the Dawes Act.¹⁰

Miller also understood the lure the Wild West image held for the Anglo-American public. In the 1880s he produced entertainments on his ranch and in nearby Kansas towns that featured cowboys and Indians. In 1883 Joe Miller escorted Chief White Eagle and several Poncas to the Alabama State Fair. They performed their traditional dances for a very appreciative public. The Millers scored an even larger success in 1905 when they lured the National Editorial Association convention to the 101 Ranch. The ranch headquarters near Bliss (today's Marland), Oklahoma was about five miles northwest of the White Eagle Park campground. Ponca men, women, and children as well as Indians from neighboring reservations were important performers in the Wild West-style extravaganza the Miller family produced for the convention. They went on to create the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West Show. Hundreds of Ponca Indians toured the United States and Europe with the show from the 1910s through the early 1930s and performed in the large ranch arena not far from the White Eagle community.¹¹

Although some Ponca performed and toured with the Wild West show, life changed slowly in the White Eagle community in the early twentieth century. Even after the Miller brothers and Ponca City businessman E. W. Marland began exploiting rich oil reserves on the 101 Ranch in 1909, Ponca income from grazing and mineral leases was meager. Nor was there much opportunity for employment except as performers in the 101 Ranch shows. Some Ponca joined the Native American Church, and others became devout Christians as a result of Baptist, Methodist, and Nazarene missionary activity in the White Eagle community. Ponca children attended White Eagle School or were taken away to Indian boarding schools. Some of the young men left to fight in World War I and came back as honored

¹⁰ Charles Leroy Zimmerman, *White Eagle, Chief of the Poncas* (n.p., 1941), 238; Wallis, *The Real Wild West*, 110-1131.

¹¹ Wallis, *The Real Wild West*, 140-143, 227-228, 248-250.

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veterans to found Little Standing Buffalo Post 38, the first all-Indian American Legion post in the United States. Still, Ponca culture remained strong, particularly in the small all-Ponca White Eagle community, which had only about one hundred people into the mid-1950s.¹²

Ponca elders still recall life in that community in the 1920s and 1930s. Henry Lieb, who was born in 1927, grew up in the camp in today's White Eagle Park. There everyone spoke Ponca. They addressed each other by their Ponca rather than English names and by the Ponca term that denoted the speakers' relationship. The practice, in his opinion reinforced and sustained their Ponca identity, as did the social and ceremonial dances on the tree-shaded dance ground now known as the South Arena. Families that camped there permanently still lived the traditional Ponca communal way of life, passing their time in gathering supplies for the winter, taking part in hand games, and playing dominos and card games. Even some who had lands and houses elsewhere lived at the camp in tents and brush arbors no matter how cold the winter weather became. Each family occupied the camping spot that had been assigned to them by the elders at least a generation before. Chairman Jones speculated that the assignment of camping spaces might reflect tribal relationships and organization dating back to ancient times. Henry Lieb remembered that each time the truck from Pawnee Boarding School returned him and the other Ponca students to White Eagle, he knew exactly where to find his family, because they would be camped in the same spot there under the pecan trees by the river.¹³

The campground in White Eagle Park was also the location for one of the most important, unifying, and enduring Ponca traditions, the Ponca Powwow. Ponca people believe and historians of powwow culture acknowledge that today's intertribal contest powwow originated in Ponca gatherings and activities at the White Eagle powwow ground and quickly spread to other tribes.¹⁴

Long before their removal to the Indian Territory, the Ponca had developed their own dances, which included the Hethushka, or War Dance, practiced by several Plains tribe. The Ponca were known for their excellence as singers and makers of songs. These songs carried and maintained basic elements of their culture, especially language, history,

¹² Ibid., 470-478. James H. Howard, *The Ponca Tribe* (Lincoln, Neb.: Bison Books, University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 60.

¹³ Interview of Henry Lieb by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Paul Little Voice by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 11, 2006..

¹⁴ Interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006. See also Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 2003). "Powwow" became the generic term for this type of celebration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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values, and beliefs. They also, according to Ponca singer and song maker Lamont Brown, could bring physical and spiritual healing. Brown said in 1968, "The old Indians say that when you are sick, you want to get in the rhythm of the drum. You forget all your pains and aches. You forget about the sickness.... I kinda believe I've made a lot of bone aches get away from me singing around the drums and bringing out the old Indian songs with Ponca words.... The old Indians believe strongly in these songs and they got a lot of relief out of 'em." ¹⁵ Members of other tribes also appreciated Ponca songs because, according to Paul Little Voice, "Ponca songs touch the heart." ¹⁶

The songs sung around the drum were integral to Plains tribes' dances and with them underpinned tribal cultures. James H. Howard estimated that as much as one-third of a Ponca's time in the nineteenth century was spent preparing for or participating in a ceremonial or society dance. According to Clyde Ellis, Plains Indian dances "reflected deep ties of fictive and biological kinship, and thus knit together families, bands, and moieties." ¹⁷ Participating in a dance was a public and personal acknowledgment of one's identity and membership in the society or community. When federal Indian policy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attempted to eradicate dancing, the Ponca continued to sing and hold their dances. At the same time, employers such as the 101 Ranch Wild West Show encouraged the Indian dancers who attracted audiences to their arenas. ¹⁸

The campground at White Eagle Park was a preferred location for Ponca warm weather dances, and the Ponca had created a dance ground, now the South Arena, for that purpose soon after their arrival. The dances held there included the Hethuska Society dances, as well as the Scalp Dance, Wolf Dance, Veterans' Dances, and family dances. According to Ponca oral history, they held an annual dance, or "powwow," for the whole tribe in late summer every year after 1878. Sometimes, as in 1921, the 101 Ranch advertised a Ponca powwow as part of their Wild West entertainments. However, Ponca oral history placed their annual powwow always in the South Arena at White Eagle Park. ¹⁹

In the early 1900s Plains Indian dancing generally, perhaps inspired by Indians' Wild West show experiences, took on a more performative rather than ceremonial character. Dance contests, which many believe began at the Ponca Powwow, had appeared by the end of World War I and began spreading from tribe to tribe. This became apparent in the widely

¹⁵ Interview of Lamont Brown by Leonard Maker, December 1, 1968, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, microfiche, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

¹⁶ Interview of Paul Little Voice by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 11, 2006.

¹⁷ Ellis, *A Dancing People*, 29-30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

¹⁹ "White Eagle Park," Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory Form, Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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publicized Haskell Institute Homecoming of 1926. It drew more than ten thousand spectators to the Kansas Indian school campus. The fancy war dancing contest was billed as the national championship. August "Gus" McDonald, a Ponca from the White Eagle community, took the title. Thereafter, with McDonald and other champion dancers competing at White Eagle, the annual Ponca Powwow legitimately claimed the "world champion fancy dance contest." It became *the* place to compete in Indian dancing. The new fancy dance, with its elaborate dance clothes, adopted and modified from the Hethuska Society regalia, and athletic, acrobatic movements, stole the show.²⁰ By the mid 1920s, the neighboring Sac and Fox, Pawnee, and Otoe-Missouria tribes were also holding annual tribal powwows in Oklahoma. As automobile travel became easier, Indian dance competitors traveled from event to event, establishing the powwow circuit first in Oklahoma and then expanding out of state.²¹

By 1938, the annual Ponca Powwow had grown to a four- or five-day event with large crowds converging on the campground at White Eagle Park to watch or participate in the dances. They could also view exhibits of Ponca crafts and watch baseball games featuring the Ponca Indian Cyclones. A powwow princess was chosen on the opening Thursday night, a list of dance contestants was announced, and a schedule of events through Sunday night was advertised in the newspapers. Earlier in the 1930s, a New Deal program, thought to be the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division, had walled the spring. Workmen had built a gazebo over it and a stairway for easier access from the camping areas. There were also twenty-one new concrete and stone tables for meals or domino and card games. The old campground had taken on a more park-like appearance. Workmen had also constructed three large five-tiered stone and concrete bleachers on level ground at the north end of the park. The bleachers provided audience seating for a space that served as both a baseball diamond and a large, lighted dance ground now known as the North Arena. At the 1938 Ponca Powwow, McKinley Eagle, master of ceremonies, and Louis McDonald used a public address system to announce and explain the activities to the audience. Publicity in local and state newspapers made it clear the non-Indian public was invited to the Ponca Powwow to be entertained by a performance as well as to view important components of Ponca culture.²²

²⁰ *The Daily (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) Oklahoman*, August 26, 1921; Ellis, *A Dancing People*, 105; Benjamin G. Rader, "'The Greatest Drama in Indian Life': Experiments in Native American Identity and Resistance at the Haskell Institute Homecoming of 1926," *The Western History Quarterly* 35 (Winter 2004): 429-450; interview of Douglas G. Eagle, Sr. by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 19, 2006.

²¹ Interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Douglas G. Eagle, Sr. by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 19, 2006; Ellis, *A Dancing People*, 11, 119-124.

²² *The Ponca City (Oklahoma) News*, August 22, 23, 28, 1938; interview of Douglas G. Eagle, Sr. by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 19, 2006; interview of Paul Little Voice, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 11, 2006. Ponca informants no longer are sure which New Deal program constructed the facilities at White Eagle Park. These facilities are not listed on previous studies of

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An event the size of the Ponca Powwow required organization, and the Ponca drew on their traditions for that expertise and pattern. According to Ponca informants, their primary source was the Hethushka, or War Dance, Society, with its formal organization, standard dance styles and clothing, and strict rules of procedure and behavior. As Abe Conklin, former Nudahonga, or headman, of the society wrote in 1994, "The powwow was held in the ways of the He-thus-ka."²³ The "caller" who directed Hethushka activities became, in the powwow setting, the master of ceremonies, or "emcee." Traditionally a "whip man" stood on either side of the east entrance into the Hethushka dance circle and ushered the line of dancers inside to their assigned seats, while maintaining order and silence. In the powwow setting, this procession became the "parade in" or "grand entry." The whip men in the powwow setting became the "arena directors," who brought in the dancers by competition category and directed them around the center drum. Also in the powwow setting, a color guard of veterans brought the United States flag or eagle staff into the arena, ahead of the powwow princess, who was followed by the dancers. This order, Ponca informants believed, reflected both Ponca respect for warriors and the Hethushka pattern, while recalling another Ponca tradition: When the tribe migrated, the pipe carrier, a young woman whose role was to select campsites, went ahead, flanked by three of the best warriors. In the powwow setting, the "princess" was modeled on the pipe carrier and the veterans her guard of warriors. Thus the organizational pattern for conducting a powwow had real meaning for the Ponca people, based as it was on their traditions and one of their major societies. As other tribes revived their dance traditions in the early twentieth century and adopted the intertribal contest powwow, the Ponca pattern established in the arenas at White Eagle Park became the template adopted across Oklahoma and then the nation.²⁴

Through the twentieth century, the Ponca Powwow and associated activities in White Eagle Park remained a primary vehicle for retaining Ponca traditions, culture, and identity. While they opened the Ponca Powwow to outsiders early in the twentieth century, they retained Ponca ceremonial and traditional ways, separating them from more secular, public performance. The powwow committee set aside afternoons during the powwow for the Ponca people. They used the smaller, tree-shaded South Arena to honor specific groups and individuals, sing their songs, and hold "give-aways." The first afternoon was dedicated to the Hethushka, or War Dance Society. New members were brought into the arena, the singers sang their family songs, and there was a give-away in their honor. The second afternoon was for the elders, particularly the chiefs. Songs that recall specific chiefs and acknowledged the difficulties of leadership

Oklahoma projects, nor are federal records available in Oklahoma. However, the construction materials and techniques are consistent with documented New Deal-era projects at other sites in Kay County and throughout Oklahoma.

²³ Quoted in Ellis, *A Dancing People*, 35.

²⁴ Interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Kinsel Lieb by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006; interview of Douglas G. Eagle, Sr. by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 19, 2006.

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were sung. The elders and their organizations were honored as their family songs were sung, and the Hethushka Society danced with the families. On the third afternoon, Saturday, American Legion Buffalo Post 38 was host as all veterans were honored. Many veterans' songs that recognize individuals and their deeds from the pre-removal period through the twentieth century were sung. Sunday afternoon was set aside to honor Ponca leadership—the constitutional leaders, organization leaders, the powwow committee, and the powwow staff. Both the incoming and outgoing Ponca Powwow Princesses were honored.²⁵ According to Edward Hara, current powwow committee member, “History is told in the South Arena; memories are recalled as part of the tribal legacy.”²⁶

In addition to songs and ceremonies at the Ponca Powwow, other more mundane activities that took place conveyed the history and culture of the Ponca people, connecting them to pre-removal migratory days. Ponca was still the language spoken around the domino tables and in the family camps. Into the 1990s, the camp crier still walked through the campground, making announcements. Into the 1960s, cattle were brought to the campground and slaughtered. As had been done in pre-removal days, the women butchered the carcasses, using the ancient techniques to prepare the meat for special delicacies and dishes.²⁷

For generations of the Ponca people, particularly those who no longer lived in the White Eagle community in the late twentieth century, the Ponca Powwow and the return to the campground at White Eagle Park meant coming home. Henry Lieb recalled that it was the first place he went when he returned from military service during World War II.²⁸ Two generations later, Edward Hara remembered that during his service in the Navy, he gladly exchanged leave time at Christmas for the last week of August when the Ponca people would gather for the Ponca Powwow. Pressed by his crew mates as to why, he explained, “It’s powwow! It’s the time when everybody comes back....generally a lot of people...wherever they’re at, usually come back home. And even if they don’t go to the dance, if they’re at the gathering...it’s still homecoming. So you get to see lots of people because everyone else is doing it, too. That’s the perfect time to come back around and visit.”²⁹

Although in the last half of the twentieth century Ponca people no longer lived in the campground in White Eagle Park, the place still had strong meaning for them—even beyond the Ponca Powwow. It was the place they came to when they were removed from their Nebraska homeland and the place they could always go. Edward Hara recalled,

²⁵ Interview of Kinsel Lieb by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006.

²⁶ Interview of Edward Hara by Mary Jane Warde, Stillwater, Oklahoma, December 20, 2006.

²⁷ Ibid; interview of Chairman Daniel C. Jones by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006.

²⁸ Interview of Henry Lieb by Mary Jane Warde, White Eagle, Oklahoma, December 13, 2006.

²⁹ Interview of Edward Hara by Mary Jane Warde, Stillwater, Oklahoma, December 20, 2006.

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“It’s kind of a thing in our family—If we lose everything we can always go to the campgrounds and set up, and that’s our home. Just in the back of our heads that’s...also home.”³⁰

White Eagle Park is eligible for the National Register as a traditional cultural place because of its importance to the Ponca people historically and culturally from 1878 to the present. Although the Ponca danced at other grounds in warm weather and at round houses in cold weather, the arenas at White Eagle Park predated all of them and survived most.³¹ Although the Ponca practiced old and new ceremonies at other locations on their lands, no other place had the length of tenure, was used so universally by the Ponca people, or so strongly reinforced their sense of identity as a people. It is eligible under Criterion A because it was the place the Ponca resettled in 1878 after their forced removal to the Indian Territory as part of the federal government’s post-Civil War Indian policy. The campground at White Eagle Park provided living space for Ponca people from that time until the middle of the twentieth century, justifying 1956 as the end of the period of significance. As the site of the annual Ponca Powwow in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the impact of White Eagle Park widened even beyond its meaning to the Ponca tribe. It was the place the intertribal contest powwow began. Moreover, it provided the template, based on Ponca Hethuska Society practices, for the modern intertribal powwow that is now practiced by tribes and Indian organizations across the United States.

The White Eagle Park site has strongly retained its historical integrity and appearance. By 1938, the second significant date, the other being the arrival of the Ponca in 1878, the only permanent construction had been completed. This included the North Arena sandstone bleachers, the domino tables, and the walling of the spring along with related construction of the gazebo and stairway from the camp areas. It is also evident from newspaper accounts that by 1938 the public version and organizational pattern for the intertribal contest powwow held in the North Arena had been firmly established at White Eagle Park. Even then they kept some ceremonies and activities for the Ponca only in the old South Arena. Photographic documentation of White Eagle Park and the Ponca Powwow in 1947 demonstrates that the look, activities, and meaning of White Eagle Park have changed little in the last five decades.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Florine Collins Rice, “A 100-Year-Old Ponca Drum,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 46 (Spring 1988):105-109.

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“Garland Kent’s Bustle at Ponca Pow Wow Camp, White Eagle OK 1947. Tartoure Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society. Negative 19261_159



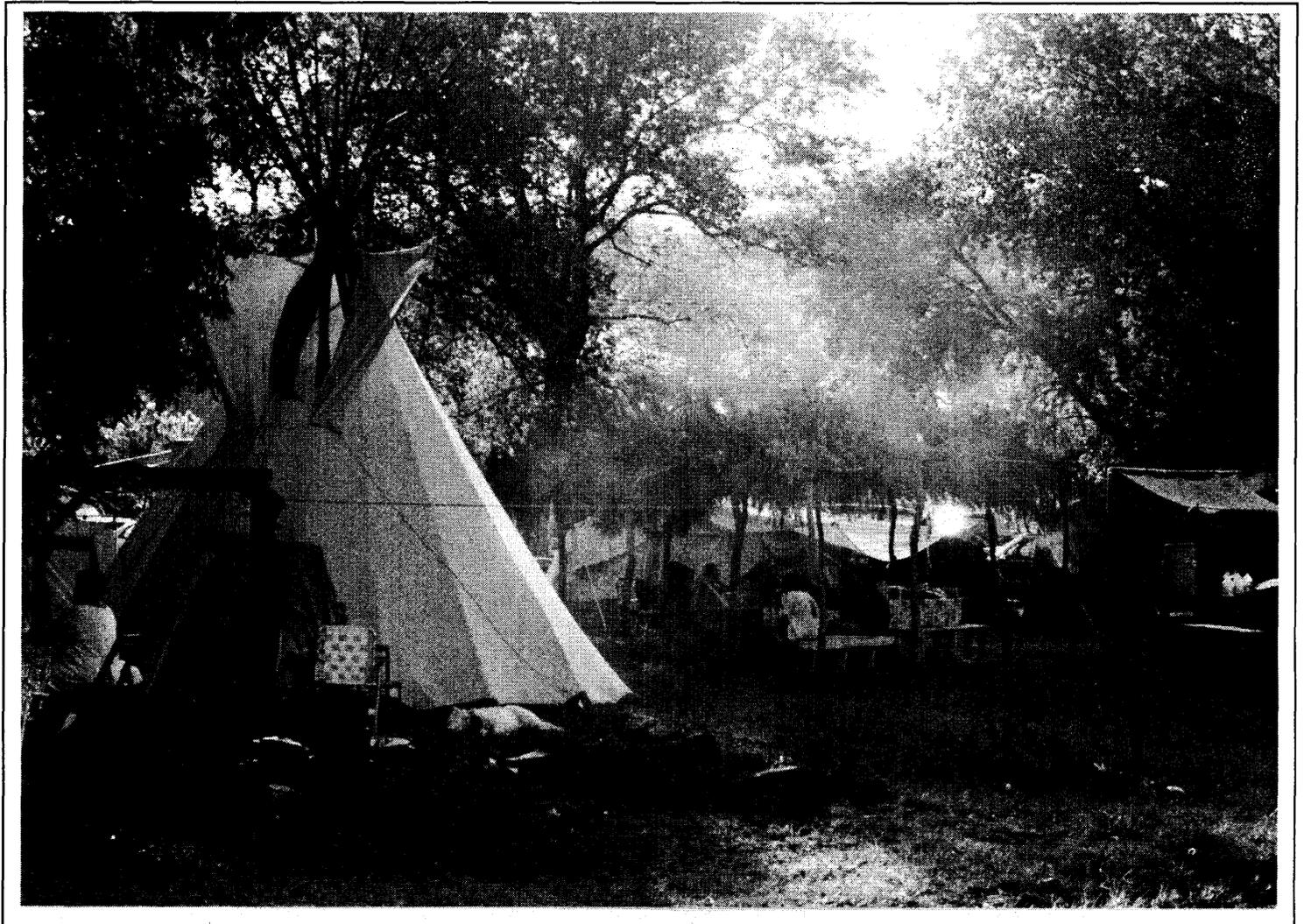
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Camping at 121st Annual Ponca Pow Wow 1997. Huffman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Negative 20823
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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA (continued)

Verbal Boundary Description:

From Point A, one-quarter mile east of U.S. Highway 177 on White Eagle Drive, go north one-quarter mile along the line between the southeast and southwest corners of the southwest corner of Section 27, Range 2 East, Township 25 North to Point B at the line between the northwest and southwest corners of the southwest corner of Section 27, Range 2 East, Township 25 North. From Point B go west approximately 400 feet along the line between the northwest and southwest corners of the southwest corner of Section 27, Range 2 East, Township 25 North to the intersection with the Salt Fork River at Point C. From Point C go southwesterly along the east river bank approximately 1000 feet to Point D, the intersection of the east Salt Fork River bank and the line between Sections 27 and 34, Range 2 East, Township 25 North. Go east approximately one-quarter mile on the line between Sections 27 and 34, Range 2 East, Township 25 North, continuing along White Eagle Drive to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

These are the boundaries that have traditionally been associated with White Eagle Park.