

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NHL

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Pictograph Cave (24-Y1-1)

AND/OR COMMON

Pictograph Cave, Inscription Cave

**2 LOCATION**

(NE 4, NE 4, sect. 19, T 1S, R 27E)

STREET & NUMBER approximately 1.5 miles east of Billings on hi. 312, 5 miles south on Coburn road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Billings

VICINITY OF

Third

STATE

Montana

CODE

30

COUNTY

Yellowstone

CODE

002

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Recreation and Parks Division, Montana Department of Fish and Game

STREET & NUMBER

Mitchell Building

CITY, TOWN

Helena

VICINITY OF

Montana

STATE

59601

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Yellowstone County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Billings

STATE

Montana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Montana Archeological Survey, and WPA Project 1552

DATE

between 1937 and 1941

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Department of Anthropology, University of Montana

CITY, TOWN

Missoula

STATE

Montana

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Pictograph Cave, located in extreme southern Montana, is the easternmost of three rockshelters which are situated within a ~~canyon~~ called Empty Gulch on the north-east side of Bitter Creek, approximately three and a half miles from its confluence with the Yellowstone River. The cave recess is around 160 feet wide and 85 feet deep. Cultural deposits (which were present also in Ghost Cave but absent in Middle Cave) extended from within 8 feet of the ceiling to as deep as 23 feet; however, the actual depth of the fill remains unknown, as the floor of the cave was never reached during excavation. Because some of the cultural deposits have been found in places on the talus slopes in front of the caves, the boundary is extended outward to the point where these slopes meet the creek alluvium in order to protect any potentially buried evidence of associated cultural activity. On the other hand, as the area above and behind the caves evidently has been under active erosion for some time, the boundary includes only a small zone adjoining the cliff edge.

The surrounding landscape is represented by highly dissected flat uplands, which possess small stands of juniper and pine along the bluffs and drainage channels, and the Bitter Creek floodplain, which supports a limited number of cottonwood trees along its channel. Within the site short grass predominates, as in the surrounding area, with spotty occurrences of pine and juniper being confined to the bluff margins and the steepest portion of the talus slopes immediately below. A few cottonwood trees can be found where the southwest corner of the site meets Bitter Creek.

The archeological boundary begins 60 feet west of the northwest corner of the present park boundary at a point approximately 1640 feet west and 400 feet south of the northwest corner of section 19. It proceeds 1360 feet east to a point which clears the scarp of a short, narrow ravine southeast of Pictograph Cave and turns south 1160 feet to a point on top of the peninsula immediately south of this ravine. The boundary extends west 1360 feet to a point well inside the creek alluvium and then rejoins the original point 1160 feet to the north.

### Investigations

Pictograph Cave may have received its first visit professionally in the late 1920's by Willem Wildschut who reportedly was collecting artifacts for the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian in New York City, although no published report has been located describing his activities and finds. Credit for its discovery, however, has been given to H. S. Barringer and Mr. and Mrs. Jim Browne of Billings and Oscar Lewis of Glendive, who after sampling the cave's deposits in 1937 reported their finds to the Montana Society of Natural History. Upon being asked by the society to

(Continued)

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

see signif. statement

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary and Importance

Pictograph Cave, located along a tributary of the Yellowstone River in extreme southern Montana, was excavated first by H. Melville Sayre of the Montana School of Mines between 1937 and 1939 and subsequently between 1940 and 1941 by William Mulloy who published his University of Chicago Ph. D. dissertation on the site in 1958. These excavations, producing cultural material to a depth of 23 feet, were carried out in the cave itself, the talus slope deposits both in front of the cave and southeast of it near a spring, and at nearby Ghost Cave in which only the Pictograph Cave III cultural deposit was represented. Four cultural deposits were recognized--Pictograph Cave I, characterized by both lanceolate and corner-notched spearpoints; Pictograph Cave II, characterized by corner-notched spearpoints; Pictograph Cave III, characterized by side-notched arrowpoints abundant perishables, and shaft smoothers; and Pictograph Cave IV characterized by metal arrowpoints and tools, and ceramics. Ghost cave was represented by only one of these deposits--Pictograph Cave III. The completeness of the Pictograph Cave stratigraphic sequence for the region coupled with the separation of cultural strata by almost sterile zones served as the basis for Mulloy's historical outline for the Northwestern Plains, in which four of his five periods corresponding respectively to Pictograph Cave I, II, III, and IV are represented at Pictograph Cave--the Early Middle Prehistoric from 2600 B.C. to 1350 B.C., the Late Middle Prehistoric from 1350 B.C. to 500 A.D., the Late Prehistoric from 500 A.D. to 1800 A.D., and the Historic after 1800 A.D.

Over 100 pictographs, most likely representing activities of Pictograph Cave III and IV peoples, were discovered on the wall of the cave and recorded before most were destroyed by vandalism. The recovery of arrowshafts in various stages of manufacture and many other perishable items such as wooden skewers, basketry, firemaking equipment, and sewn leather from Pictograph Cave III in both Pictograph Cave and Ghost Cave has revealed much about the technology of the Late Prehistoric period inhabitants. A possible Crow house indicated by postholes, a firepit, a baked floor, and related ceramics, was found in front of Pictograph Cave. Evidence for several coal-warmed sleeping beds, attributable to either the Historic or Late Prehistoric period inhabitants or both, is reported from the earlier excavation as well as evidence perhaps for some form of cannibalism which consists of broken and human bone.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- 1937 H. Melville Sayre, Walter Vanaman, and Oscar J. Lewis, "The Archaeology of Incription Cave, Montana, and its Significance in Northeast Plains Cultures," Report to Governor of Montana, March 8, 1938. On file at Montana State College, Bozeman.
- 1938 Walter T. Vanaman, "Report on Indian Caves," on file with Stuart Conner, Billings.
- 1958 William Mulloy, "A Preliminary Historical Outline for the Northwestern Plains," University of Wyoming Publications, Vol. XXII, No. 1, Laramie.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 35.4

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,2	7,0,0	1,6,0	5,0	6,8	1,3,0	B	1,2	7,0,0	1,8,0	5,0	6,7	4,8,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			
C	1,2	6,9,9	3,6,0	5,0	6,7	4,6,0	D	1,2	6,9,9	3,6,0	5,0	6,8	1,1,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The archeological boundary begins 60 feet west of the northwest corner of the present park boundary at a point approximately 1640 feet west and 400 feet south of the northwest corner of section 19. It proceeds 1360 feet east to a point which clears the scarp of a short, narrow ravine southeast of Pictograph Cave and turns south 1160 feet to a point on top of the peninsula immediately south of this ravine. The boundary extends west 1360 feet to a point well inside the creek alluvium and then rejoins the original point 1160 feet to the north.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ronald C. Corbyn, Principal Archeologist, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, OAHP, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 "L" St., N. W.

(202) 523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington.

D. C. 20240

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Landmark

Designated: July 19, 1964  
date

Boundary Certified

Steve Jones  
March 7, 1979  
date

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

4/24/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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investigate the cave for them, H. Melville Sayre, an English professor at the Montana School of Mines, formed the Montana Archeological Survey and with the co-direction of Lewis began archeological excavation on July 15, 1937 under a WPA contract which continued until April, 1939. In October of 1940, the Montana Archeological Survey was reorganized under the sponsorship of Montana State University and the WPA, and the work was turned over to William Mulloy who directed excavation from December to July of 1941. In 1952 the full site report was completed by Mulloy as a dissertation at the University of Chicago, and in 1958 it was published in shorter but essentially the same form.<sup>1</sup> In 1966 Ken Feyhl, an amateur archeologist, published results of his limited tests in 1965 in advance of the construction of park sanitary facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Excavations were undertaken generally in four locations: Pictograph Cave, Ghost Cave, the flattest portion of the talus slope in front of the former, and the ravine area southeast of the former. Initially a stripping technique, at the sacrifice of vertical profiles of the cultural deposits, was employed in the caves by Sayre and Lewis. In this manner all of the Pictograph Cave III and IV deposits were removed, while about half of Pictograph Cave I and II was removed.<sup>3</sup> Pictograph Cave III was the only cultural deposit occurring in Ghost Cave and also was removed by stripping.

Finds

Over 7,000 specimens were recovered and cataloged in the excavation by Sayre,<sup>4</sup> and numerous other artifacts were recovered and cataloged in the excavation by Mulloy. Although rumor persists that many Pictograph Cave artifacts were either stolen, misplaced, or misappropriated, Mulloy, who apparently was able to pull together the previous finds for study during his excavation, is confident that almost all of the cataloged, recovered material from both excavations was shipped to and is still in the possession of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Montana.<sup>5</sup> Carling Malouf of the Department estimates, however, that only 50% of the collection is in their possession.<sup>6</sup>

In Pictograph Cave the lowest cultural evidence, at 23 feet below the surface, consisted of hearth remains over a 10 foot area, however no artifactual material was found in association. The Pictograph Cave I cultural deposit, averaging

<sup>1</sup>Mulloy, 1958- "A Preliminary Historical Outline for the Northwestern Plains," University of Wyoming Publications, Vol. XXII, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Feyhl, 1966- "Sanitation Salvage Archeology in Empty Gulch," Archeology in Montana, Vol. 7, No. 4, Mont. Archeological Soc., Bozeman.

<sup>3</sup>Mulloy, personal communication, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>Sayre, 1939, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Mulloy, personal communication, 1975.

<sup>6</sup>Malouf, p. 29, 1958.

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about 8 to 10 feet of essentially sterile water-laid sand intercalated with enormous slabs of sandstone, and it consisted of "unelaborated hearths...[with]... numerous animal bones representing food debris, and many artifacts of Pictograph Cave I.<sup>7</sup> Lithic artifacts were comprised of a mixture of a small number of lanceolate spearpoints, points with a constricted stem, and cornernotched points, as well as other items such as spokeshaves, gravers, drills, choppers, metates, large disks, manos, pestles, and a shaft smoother. Worked bone included awls, knapping tools, game counters, tubes, disc beads, and a serrated flesher. Shell artifacts were represented by two circular unio disk beads.

The Pictograph Cave II cultural deposit, averaging about 2 feet in thickness and consisting of hearths, small pieces of charcoal, broken animal bones, and stone chips,<sup>8</sup> was separated from Pictograph Cave I by about five feet of limited artifact-bearing sand and disintegrated sandstone. Lithic artifacts were comprised mostly of barbed, Woodland-like, corner-notched spearpoints, and included other items such as blades, scrapers, choppers, retouched flakes, disk beads and one item of polished stone. Worked bone was represented by awls, knapping tools, tubes, a game counter, arrowshaft wrench, and an antler tine pendant. Shell was absent in the finds. Considerable duplication exists between artifacts of Pictograph Cave I and those of Pictograph Cave II.

The Pictograph Cave III cultural deposit, 4 to 5 feet in thickness and occurring in the lower portion of about 4 feet of almost sterile water-laid sand, consisted of many large hearths broken animal bones, and many artifacts.<sup>9</sup> Lithic artifacts consisted of side-notched triangular arrowpoints as well as blades, scrapers, choppers, retouched flakes, gravers, drills, blanks, mauls, manos, hammerstones, pestles, abrading stones, and shaft smoothers. Worked bone was represented by knapping tools, awls, antler butts, tubes, a game counter, shaft wrench, and a needle. Worked wood included numerous finished and partly finished arrowshafts and foreshafts (some with arrowpoints still affixed), skewers, fire-making equipment, gaming sticks, paint applicators, a pitch applicator, and other miscellaneous items. The recovery of the arrowshafts provides valuable information on method of manufacture and level of weapons sophistication in Late Prehistoric times. Other cultural material from this level consisted of several pieces of tanned leather (one with a sewn seam), sinew, tufts of buffalo hair, dried prairie potatoes, and hematite pigment. In addition, according to W. T. Vanaman, a surveyor employed during the

<sup>7</sup>Mulloy, p. 29, 1958.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 30.

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initial excavation, "Indian" beds were found, the evidence for which consisted of **superposed layers** of vines, twigs, and leaves; sand; and then charcoal. The stratigraphic provenience of the beds is unknown, however, they probably belong to either the Pictograph Cave III or Pictograph Cave IV deposit.

The Pictograph Cave IV cultural deposit was confined to the top one foot of Pictograph Cave III and the top eight inches of the talus slope deposits in front of the caves in Empty Gulch.<sup>10</sup> Artifacts from the cave consisted of 13 potsherds from a single vessel and one tri-notched triangular arrowpoint as well as gaming sticks, metal tools, and wood skewers, many of which show evidence of being cut with metal tools.

Trenches dug on the talus slope, which in places extended to as deep as 24 feet, produced a large number of potsherds along with triangular arrowpoints, iron arrowpoints, and evidence for a possible Crow house, which consisted of an oval arrangement of large postholes, a central firepit, and a baked floor. Trenches in the ravine area southeast of Pictograph Cave produced concentrations of scattered bison and human bones occurring just beneath the surface. Vanaman reported that broken and burnt human bone was found in one of the trenches along the talus slope and suggested that this represented evidence of cannibalism.<sup>11</sup> Pottery was represented by over 1,000 potsherds, approximately 90% of which were of Mandan-Hidatsa-Crow tradition and 10% of which were of Intermountain tradition (possibly Shoshonean).

Only the upper seven feet of the 35 feet of deposits at Ghost Cave were culture bearing. This deposit consisted entirely of Pictograph Cave III remains and added hafted knives, bone scrapers, stone tablets, fragments of coiled basketry, and a bracelet to the inventory. Although it falls within the landmark boundary, the finds will not be summarized here as Pictograph Cave is the principal focus and the landmark in concern.

Over 100 red, black, and white pictographs, many of which had large shield designs, heart-arrow motifs, animals, and costumed individuals depicted, were observed on the wall of Pictograph Cave prior to excavations. Evidence suggested, however, that they are no older than the Pictograph Cave III and IV deposits. These pictographs were recorded by Robert Howard and are on file at the University of Montana in Missoula. From World War II on, after excavations had been completed, most of the fragile pictographs were destroyed by vandalism and to a lesser degree by the

<sup>10</sup>ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Vanaman, p. 4, 1938.

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elements. Of the ones remaining today, many are partially or completely obscured by spray paint or carvings rendered while the cave was being used for local parties and picnics. In addition, activities of relic hunters have destroyed much of the remaining Pictograph Cave I and II cultural deposits as well as a large stratified control block left on the southeast side of the cave.

Discussion

Comparison of the artifacts from the Pictograph Cave I cultural deposit with those of Pictograph Cave II revealed many similarities.<sup>12</sup> This coupled with the fact that the zone of sand and disintegrated sandstone between these two cultural deposits was not completely sterile suggested to Mulloy that little cultural change had taken place between the time of the two deposits and that the partially sterile zone reflected "intermittent and attenuated occupation."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, a sharp difference in the nature and abundance of artifacts from Pictograph Cave II and III--the latter manifesting a much richer material culture--coupled with an almost complete lack of artifactual material in the intervening zone suggested to Mulloy a larger time gap between occupations.<sup>14</sup> Mulloy feels that the Late Prehistoric, as represented by Pictograph Cave III and the Historic, as represented by Pictograph Cave IV are "highly similar and probably differ most greatly in presence of European trade items..." and points out further that "...a similar horizon style complex seems to carry through both, though it is much less strongly represented in the Historic Period."<sup>15</sup>

Period Classification

Mulloy based much of his historical outline for the Northwestern Plains on the stratified cultural remains from Pictograph Cave and considered this site as fully representing four periods--the Early Middle Prehistoric, placed between 2600 B.C. and 1350 B.C.; Late Middle Prehistoric, placed between 1350 B.C. and 500 A.D.; Late Prehistoric, placed between 500 A.D. and 1800 A.D.; and Historic dating after 1800 A.D.<sup>16</sup> The Early Middle Prehistoric period, to which he assigned Pictograph Cave I, is characterized by lanceolate spearpoints with broad lateral notches as well as a smaller number of corner-notched points and by a "a much increased vegetable gathering orientation and lack of larger animals, particularly the buffalo..." except in the Eastern Plains where buffalo hunting continued. The Late Middle Prehistoric period, to which he assigned Pictograph Cave II, is characterized by corner-notched spearpoints, an intensified vegetable gathering orientation, the first appearance

<sup>12</sup>Mulloy, p. 209, 1958.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., p. 29.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p. 213.

<sup>16</sup>ibid., p. 208-214.

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of bison traps, and possibly tipi rings. The Late Prehistoric period, to which he assigned all but the top one foot of Pictograph Cave III, is characterized by side-notched triangular arrowpoints, shaft smoothers, ceramics (although missing in Pictograph Cave III), increases in number and size of sites, the first evidence of constructed dwellings, and a return to hunting of larger game. The Historic period, to which he assigned the top one foot of Pictograph Cave III as well as the ceramics and house from the eight inch cultural layer at the top of the talus slope deposits, is characterized by the appearance of European trade goods, movements of people from the Eastern to Western Plains, and a concomitant shift in emphasis toward hunting.