

MONTANA ANCIENT TEACHINGS

Foreword

DEAR TEACHER:

You hold in your hands Montana's first effort to create a basic, introductory curriculum for the teaching of archaeology and Montana prehistory in elementary and middle schools. It is something you and your fellow teachers have asked for and archaeologists in Montana have talked about creating for years. And, as we in the archaeological profession are fond of saying: "It's about time!"

The *Montana Ancient Teachings* curriculum was made possible by a grant that the Montana Historical Society received in 1997 from the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), a non-profit national organization of over five thousand archaeologists. For some years, the SAA Public Education Committee has led a nationwide recognition that the future of archaeology lies in education. It's not that we need or want to create a nation of archaeologists—in fact, there are barely enough jobs for those archaeologists trained today! Rather, it is because archaeology depends upon an informed public to act as stewards of America's cultural heritage and provide support for efforts to learn from, appreciate, and preserve our irreplaceable pieces of the past. Archaeology, as you will see in this curriculum, is as much about us as it is about those who came before us.

Sara Scott (archaeologist) and Russ Ann Sisk (teacher), the co-authors of the

Montana Ancient Teachings curriculum, describe their approach and organization in the following introductory pages. I believe that they have done a superb job in this and throughout the lessons and activities that follow in bringing the past alive and putting it into perspective for young people. I think you, as educators, will be able to take what they have presented and readily apply it to your classrooms—as is or adapted to suit your own presentation methods. Feel free to explore, extend, and ad-lib what is here.

A brief word about what *Montana Ancient Teachings* is and is not.

Montana Ancient Teachings is an introduction to the world of archaeology and what archaeologists have learned about Montana prehistory through archaeology and related scientific disciplines. Archaeology is foremost a science and not a treasure-hunt. Archaeology is also one way of exploring and knowing the past—it is a scientific approach to understanding artifacts and what they can tell us about past people and behavior. In *Montana Ancient Teachings*, the emphasis is on what archaeology tells us about Montana's prehistory—although as a method, archaeology can also be applied to historic sites. In Montana prehistory, we are learning about the hunting and gathering, nomadic way of life for over ten thousand years of Montana's native

peoples, some of whom are undoubtedly the ancestors of Montana's tribes today. All Montanans can learn from and identify with this past, however, as it is the heritage of our state and is also a way of life experienced for more than 99 percent of human existence worldwide—or so archaeologists believe.

Montana Ancient Teachings is not finished, nor is it the last and only word about ancient people. Much of what is said here is based on theories supported by evidence—but archaeological theories can and have changed as new evidence is brought to light. Archaeology also is not the sole perspective we have in understanding the past. Religions and Native American beliefs and oral tradition sometimes appear to differ with archaeology—as is the case, for example, with ideas about human evolution or the migration of early people to the New World across the Bering Land Bridge. Finally, *Montana Ancient Teachings* is not all that can and should be said about Native American people in Montana—past or present. Much exists elsewhere in curricula, resources, and living people that can provide a fuller understanding of Montana's Indian people and their history—and this information must also be pursued. A good place to start is with the Office of Public Instruction's handbook, *Montana Indians: Their History and Location* (1992), and The Council for Indian Education's annual listing of books approved by the Intertribal Indian Editorial Committee (1240 Burlington Ave., Billings, MT 59102-4224).

As educators, I trust you will accept *Montana Ancient Teachings* both for what it is and what it is not, and challenge your young people to think about Montana's past with creative ideas and open minds.

Please let us know how *Montana Ancient Teachings* works for you! The Montana Historical Society is committed to editing, adding to, and subtracting from the curriculum as we learn more from you and others. There are already several traveling kits and other enrichment materials available or in preparation that complement the curriculum and its activities. I encourage you especially to refer to the *Montana Archaeology Education Resource Catalog* for listings of resources available statewide, including other curricula, speakers, exhibits, footlockers, tours, etc. It is viewable on the Montana Historical Society's homepage (<http://mhs.mt.gov>) under "Historic Preservation" or can be requested by contacting the MHS Education Office (406-444-4794).

Most of all, I hope you enjoy your journey with your students as you go . . . forward into the past!

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