

Bison hunters: More advanced than thought

August 16 2006

A Canadian archaeologist says the First Nations of the Canadian Plains might have had complex tribal social structures 1,700 years earlier than thought.

Until now, a commonly held view outside the Canadian Plains has been that the arrival in the 1600s of Europeans and the domesticated horse were the main catalysts that caused Plains Aboriginal people to abandon small bands in favor of large tribes.

But University of Calgary archaeologist Dale Walde says the archaeological record tells a different story.

"It's important that we recognize the achievements of Aboriginal people, prior to the advent of Europeans," Walde said. "There has been a tendency by some to regard them as simple hunter-gatherers with very basic levels of social organization, living hand to mouth in small bands -- but that really isn't accurate.

"My theory is that tribal groups from the south and east would have come in and taken the buffalo themselves, had the Plains Indians not developed the means to hunt more bison and trade bison products with them," he said. "This is the first time anyone has suggested this sort of mechanism for that evolution."

Walde explains his theory in the journal *World Archaeology*.

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Citation: Bison hunters: More advanced than thought (2006, August 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-08-bison-hunters-advanced-thought.html>

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