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August 21, 1956

Seven hearths, probably used by Indians about 4,000 years ago, have been discovered between one and two miles south of Sinclair, Wyo., Carling I. Malouf, assistant professor of anthropology at Montana State University, reports. The find extends the known range of the Indians that used such hearths, he says.

Malouf found the "very good specimens" this summer while he was working by special arrangement with the Colorado Interstate Gas Company and the National Park Service. After the construction company staked out the route for a Colorado Interstate pipeline, Malouf followed with his investigation of the surrounding area for evidence of pre-historic man. Five of the hearths were uncovered in the trench dug during ditching machine operations, Malouf said. He found two others nearby.

The "ovens" are basin-shaped holes, measuring about two feet across and one foot deep, filled with charred rocks, sand, and charcoal. The rocks in the basins were blackened to a depth of about a quarter of an inch when they were uncovered, but the black soon bleached out upon exposure to sunlight and air, Malouf said.

The Indians probably used the ovens for cooking vegetables, according to Malouf. The absence of bones near the ovens indicates that grasses, roots, herbs, and small animals and birds were cooked by a slow baking process. Wood was used for fuel to heat rocks that would retain heat for several hours, he explained.

The people that used these hearths could be classified as foragers because there is evidence that they relied upon "scrounging" for food, Malouf said. The earliest inhabitants of the region were big game hunters, popularly known as the Yuma and Folsom hunters, who roamed the plains about 6,000 years ago, he said. As changes in climate and other factors made it harder for the Indians to find food, they had to depend more on plants, herbs, roots, and small game to be found in the vicinity, he

(more)

continued. It was during this stage, about 4,000 years ago, that the hearths he discovered were made, Malouf surmises. The Shoshone and Cheyenne tribes, who were hunters and buffalo eaters, lived in the area at a later period, after the beginning of historic times, he pointed out. "These hearths are definitely pre-Shoshone," he said.

The dating of prehistoric finds is done by radio-active testing of carbon, Malouf said. Although carbon tests have not yet been applied to the hearths found near Sinclair, tests made on similar hearths that were apparently used during the same period place the time of use at about 4,000 years ago, according to the MSU anthropologist.

The hearths he discovered give a much better idea of form than specimens previously found in other spots, Malouf said. One of them is an especially good one, he added.

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