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Dee C. Taylor asserts piles of rocks along the Bull River are not Indian burial mounds

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Piles of rocks along the Bull River in Montana are not Indian burial mounds, as commonly believed, according to Dr. Dee C. Taylor of Montana State University, who recently directed a crew of students in an archaeological survey of the area.

Dr. Taylor and his students spent three days surveying the area along the Kootenai River between Troy and Libby. Half the crew worked along the river searching for ancient habitation sites while the other half excavated a series of rock mounds along the Bull River, just south of Bull Lake.

The excavation crew found nothing in the mounds, indicating that they were not burials but, more likely, were monuments or memorials built up by the addition of stones over many generations, Dr. Taylor reports. He suggests that an Indian passing the heap of stones would place another stone on the mound as an offering to his guardian spirits, or simply for good luck. This practice probably continued until quite recent times though the mounds themselves may possibly date back to prehistoric times.

On a promontory below Kootenai Falls - atop a rock cliff that drops off to the river about 20 feet below - the party found indentations hollowed out of the rock surface of the top of the cliff. These hollows must have been formed by the grinding of meal, seeds, and such substances, Dr. Taylor says. The party also found projectile points, grinding stones, and fire-cracked rocks in the area, which point to the existence of old hearths.

Commenting on the Buffalo Jump near Ulm, which has been proposed as a state monument, Dr. Taylor said recent tests he participated in were disappointing. At least 10 test pits were dug along a half-mile stretch at the base of the cliff, but the amount of bone deposit found was much less than expected, he said.