

perilous, affords an outlet for freight and light wheeled transport when floods and freshets brim the river's banks. Open house to every traveller of the open spaces, unofficial post office for the convenience of ranchmen thereabouts, and a meeting place for all and sundry, Writing-on-Stone has rightfully earned an enviable niche in song, story, and pictorial embellishment.

Before the advent of the Mounted Police, creaking ox-carts and wagons loaded with trade goods passed along the canyon's rim, wending a noisy way from Fort Benton, Montana, to Fort McLeod and Whoop-up. Their deep-rutted trail crossed the river below the rock formation and passed close by a huge squarefaced block of sandstone standing in solitary grandeur upon the open plain on which the pioneers of early days imperishably engraved their names. The inscriptions of I. G. Baker, Fort Benton trader, "Baldy" Buck, of Circle ranch fame, Sergeants Sexton, Gillespie, McLeod and Rock, Constables Percy Ashe and "Spud" Murphy, mingle with the rude colorful etchings of Indians and impressions left by round-up bosses, cowpunchers, and other personages peculiar to the old west.

Whisky smugglers, fearful of carrying too much contraband into the Indian country, cached excess supplies within the caves and crevices near the trail. Sometimes, though, the vagaries of unkind fate must have prevented their return, but the passing years kept the secret well. Keg staves, spread fanwise as they fell apart when rust severed the hoops which held them in order, scatter the floors of more than one out-of-the-way cavern where they were cunningly hidden long before the fiery contents became absorbed by the all-prevailing sand.

Whatever other uses the caverns may have served it is more than mere conjecture to presume that, at a very early period in the days before history, they sheltered a race of people pre-dating the Indian of the plains. Digging below the surface of the frontal ledges, hearths of fire-burned stones, portions of broken bones, and horn implements which crumble to the touch when exposed to the air, are unearthed at a depth of a foot or more below the present level. Within the deeper recesses scratches faintly colored with ochre and almost effaced by time appear criss-cross on the soft walls. Perhaps the inhabitants were responsible for the construction of the intricate stone patterns laid circle within circle, which are discovered by uncovering the surface of the flat-topped buttes nearby? It may be their bones, too, portions of human skulls and other osseous fragments of human origin that one finds beneath the sandy floors of these primitive habitations?

The historic interest of later human remains brings us to a more recent period. It is stated upon reliable verbal authority that the Sioux Indians who were engaged with American troops about the time of the Custer massacre, camped during a temporary cessation of hostilities in the vicinity of Writing-on-Stone. This is supported by the evidence of an extensive camp-site on the prairie between the canyon and the international boundary, and by the remains of Indians who succumbed to injuries inflicted in warfare and were placed with all their paraphernalia in the rock crevices thereabouts. From among the human fragments can be found bones fractured and shattered by bullets which apparently caused death. And what is more, the bodies were once clothed in blue red-lined cloaks worn by the American cavalry of the period, robbed from the dead and dying soldiery on the field of battle.