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The Caddo Indian Village

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The Caddo Indian Village

by
Jacques Bagur

The Kadohadacho, or Great Chiefs, of the Caddo Nation left their home in the Great Bend of the Red River in Arkansas in 1790 because of disease and Osage depredations and moved south, joining a related tribe, the Petit Caddo, on the floodplain of the Red River above present-day Shreveport. In 1800, when the Great Raft began to affect the area, the Caddos moved to higher ground on Sodo Lake (a complex of five lakes that later came to be called Caddo, Clear, Cross, Shifttail, and Soda [Figure 1]). They lived there until the early 1840s, when they sold their land to the United States and moved to a reservation in Oklahoma.

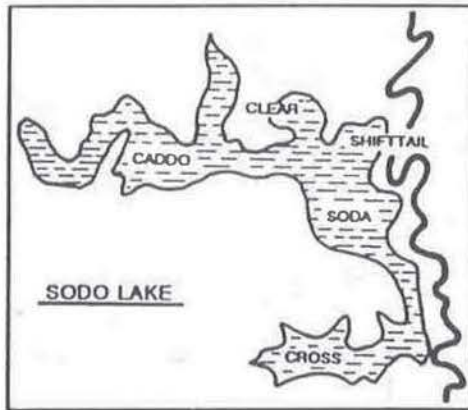


Figure 1. Great Raft Lakes on the Red River, ca. 1800

In 1805, the Caddo Village was composed of 100 warriors, 100 old men and strangers, and 250 women. Adding children, the village would have been sizeable. In spite of its importance, there are few records of a white man ever having visited it, and no contemporary accounts give its exact location. As a consequence, the village site was sought for many years without success.

All of the Caddoan tribes of the 1800s were agriculturists who raised such things as corn, beans, and pumpkins, using pointed sticks, rather than hoes, to punch holes in the ground to plant seeds. They also fished and traveled and hunted by horseback. They lived in thatched wattle and daub huts supported by wooden poles. These huts were widely dispersed over many miles, sometimes forming small clusters, which was compatible with agricultural practices. They also traded heavily with distant white settlers, exchanging furs and hides for guns, riding equipment, and a wide variety of household items. Earlier traditions of pottery making and arrowhead manufacture were abandoned.

Beginning in 1991, Claude McCrocklin, a Shreveport archeologist, conducted a preliminary survey of an area north of Caddo Lake on James Bayou and found a number of house sites spread out over four miles from Monterey Lake west (and therefore mostly in Texas). These sites contained the right types of artifacts from the 1800-1840 period to indicate that they could be components of the Caddo Indian Village (see McCrocklin, this issue), and there are no records of white settlers having been in that area during that period. McCrocklin found chipped tools made from European ceramics and bottle glass that were obviously of Indian making. In addition, he found colorful polished pebbles that were unique to other Caddo Indian villages that have been investigated.

These preliminary findings suggest that the Caddo Indian Village has been located. However, since there were many Indian tribes in the Sodo Lake area, the James Bayou site may not be Caddoan, and if Caddoan, not Kadohadacho. For a clearer indication that this is

the correct site, it is necessary to turn to seven pieces of evidence presented in accounts that were written in the early 1800s:

1. All contemporary accounts agree that the village was on Sodo Lake.
2. Most speak of it as being distant from the Red River, and two say that it is on the western portion of Sodo Lake, which suggests a location on Caddo Lake.
3. Two say that it is located on a small creek, with one of these saying that the creek is pirogue-navigable in the rainy season. James Bayou is the only stream entering Caddo Lake that fits this description.
4. William Darby's 1816 map of Louisiana shows the village in Texas on James Bayou, but on the south side (Figure 2).

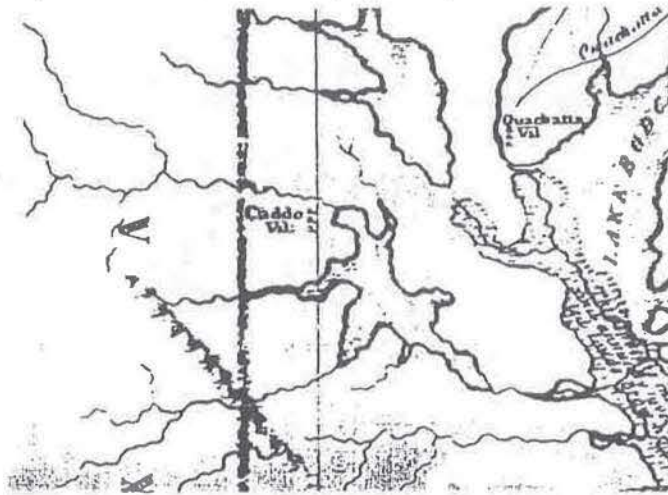


Figure 2. William Darby's 1816 map

5. The village was called Sha-childni-ni, or Timber Hill. There is a prominent timbered hill on the James Bayou site.
6. One account says that the agricultural activities took place on a flat prairie of white clay soil. The James Bayou site is the only place near Caddo Lake that has such a prairie.
7. Maps and contemporary accounts indicate that there was a trail from the Caddo Village to the Coushatta Village on the Red River. The surveyors who established the boundary between the United States and the Republic of Texas in 1841 pinpoint this trail as leading into the James Bayou site.

When the archeological and historical evidence is taken together, it is obvious that the James Bayou site is the Caddo Indian Village. Further investigations are needed to determine the extent of the site and its exact composition.

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