

# Kiowa - Possible Users of the VBJ

By Gene Gade

The stories that ancient peoples use to explain their origins and place in the world often provide important clues to their history, whether or not they are literally true. The origin story of the Kiowa tribe, for example, says that, with the help of a superhero named Saynday, the Kiowas emerged from a “sunless world” through a hollow cottonwood log into a nearly treeless land of brilliant sunshine. The Kiowas were always a relatively small tribe, in population, and their narrative explains that fact by saying that, as they were emerging,, a pregnant woman got stuck in the hollow such that no additional Kiowas could get out to their new environment.

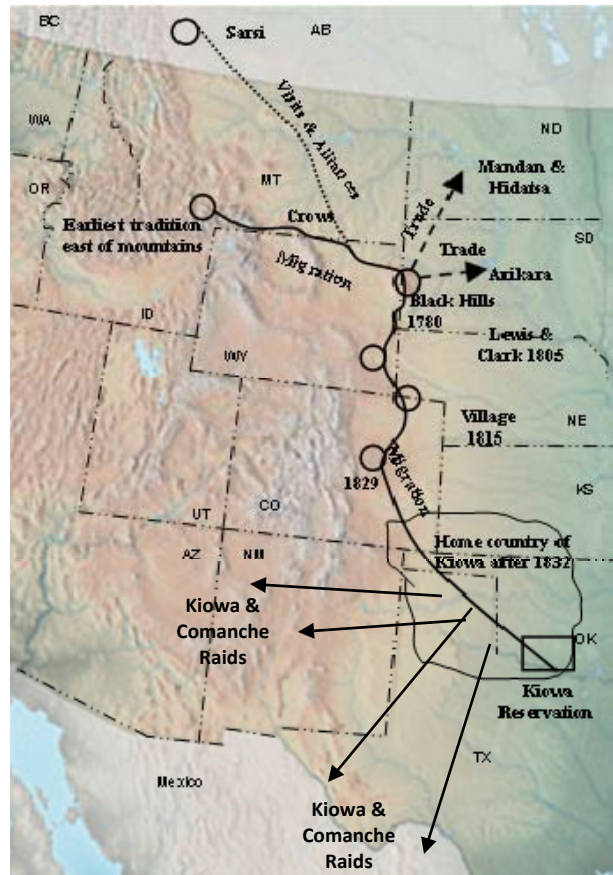
Several lines of evidence suggest that the journey of the Kiowas may indeed have begun in densely forested areas in the Northwest United States or Canada, which are markedly less sunny than the plains of western Montana where their story says they emerged from the log. It is generally agreed that the Kiowas lived for a time near the headwaters of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers . Perhaps because they were not numerous and were essentially strangers in a strange land, the Kiowas learned to get along with most of the regional tribes. It is known, for example, that they developed generally friendly relations with the Crow, Hidatsa, Mandan, Plains Apache and Arikara tribes.

As they moved into the northern Great Plains, some Kiowas met and intermarried with the Sarci Indians who spoke a variant of the Athabaskan (a.k.a. Apachean) language who then lived east of the Rockies in what is now Alberta Canada. They lived near and interacted with both the original Kiowas and the Plains Apaches. Over time, these people became a distinct group known as the Kiowa-Apaches.

By 1700, all three of these groups—the Kiowa, Plains Apache and Kiowa-Apache— had migrated southeastward and were living in the vicinity of the Black Hills. There are written records from Caucasian traders placing the Kiowas between the Black Hills and Missouri River and

documenting trade between the Kiowas and Arikaras. Distinctive arrow points excavated from the Vore Site and other archaeological evidence from the region indicate that the Kiowa, along with their Apachean allies, probably used the Vore Buffalo Jump. They may have lingered in the region as late as 1780 and, sometime in the 1700’s, acquired horses (probably from the Crows). Lewis and Clark did not actually meet the Kiowas, but they heard from other tribes that they were living in the region. Lewis specifically mentioned them in his journal.

As the Cheyenne and Lakota moved in and gained dominance in the Black Hills, the Kiowas and Apaches were displaced and moved toward

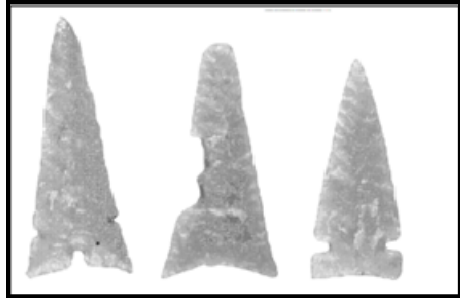


**Map of Kiowa Migration**

Adapted from a map by anthropologist James Mooney in *Calendar history of the Kiowa Indians*. US Bureau of American Ethnology, 1895-6 Annual Report, 1900.

**Kiowas continued:** the Southern Plains. As they had done earlier in their history, rather than fighting the southern tribes, the Kiowas formed an alliance with the most powerful group in the region, the Comanches. In the early 1800's, acting alone or in conjunction with the Comanches, the Kiowas conducted raids for horses, livestock, captives and other treasure throughout the Southwest U.S. and northern Mexico. By the time the so-called Indian Wars occurred, the Kiowas were firmly established as horse-riding, buffalo-hunting, warriors in a territory that included parts of Oklahoma, northern Texas, western Kansas, and southeast Colorado.

The mid-1800's were a tumultuous time for the Kiowas that included disease epidemics, depletion of the great buffalo herds, numerous treaties, and intermittent conflict with other tribes and the U.S. Army. By 1875, the remnants of the defeated Kiowa/Plains Apaches were confined to a reservation around Fort Sill in the former "Indian Territory" of Oklahoma.



Projectile Points from the Vore Site dated from the 1700's and believed to be of Kiowa-Apache origin