

# Vore Buffalo Jump Archaeology and the La Verendrye Expedition Report

By Gene Gade

Archaeology at the Vore site indicates that many different tribes lived in the vicinity of the Black Hills and used the buffalo jump in the 1550 to 1800 A.D. time period. Written records of the region and period are very sparse. However, in the winter of 1742 and 1743, Louis-Joseph La Verendrye, his brother Francois and at least two other French Canadians traversed the Black Hills region in their attempt to find a pathway to the Pacific Ocean from Canada. En route they met and were aided by many different Indian groups.

Louis-Joseph's report of the expedition is maddeningly short on geographical detail and the names he applied to both landscape features and Indian groups are not the same as those used today. However, careful reading of Verendrye's narrative coupled with knowledge of the tribes and geography from other sources, allows informed guesses as to Verendrye's route and the people he encountered. At the very least, the report provides additional credence to the archaeological evidence of many regional tribes and vice versa.

The Verendrye brothers made their exploration at the behest of their father, Pierre La Verendrye, who was the greatest explorer that New France produced. The elder Verendrye pioneered the route from Lake Superior, through what are now known as the Boundary Waters to the huge lakes of Manitoba and into Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Rivers. He established trading posts at key points to exchange European manufactured goods for Indian-trapped furs. Verendrye's efforts added more than a thousand miles of river/lake

highways to the French operations and accessed hundreds of thousands of square miles of wilderness.

The routes that Pierre Verendrye and his four sons opened were adopted by the British Northwest Company after France lost Canada to England in the Seven Years (a.k.a. French and Indian) War. The British Canadians then expanded them all the way across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific and north to the Arctic Ocean.

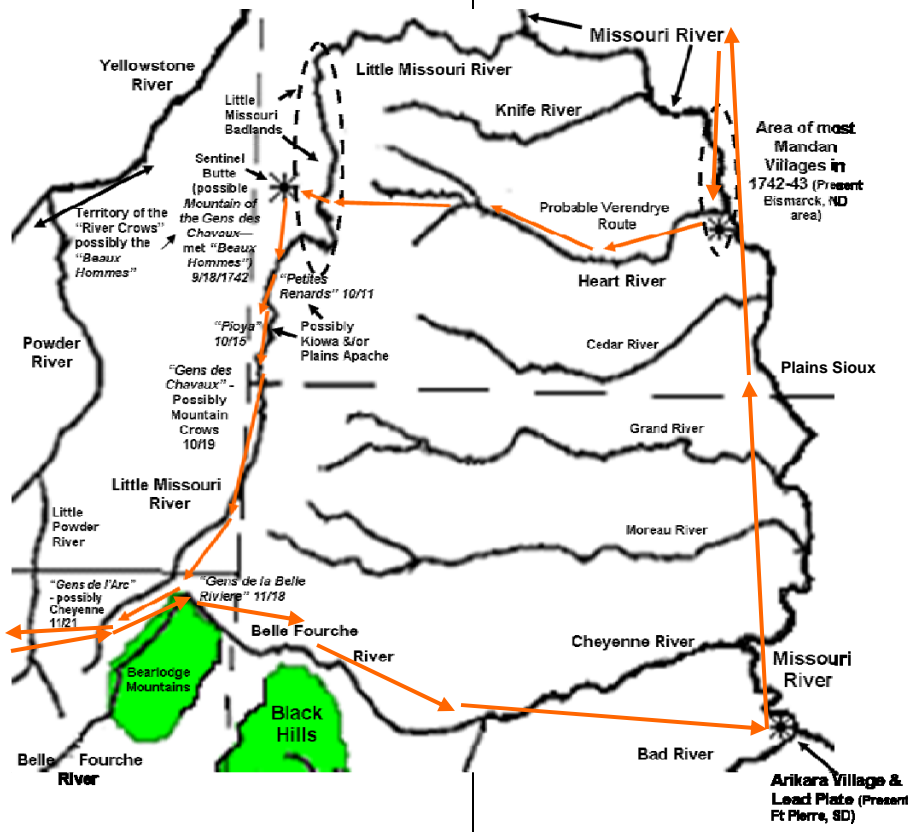
Fur trade was the immediate economic enterprise for the Verendryes but their second goal was to find a route across North America to the "Western Sea" which would provide France a trade route to Asia. It was pursuit of this second goal that motivated the two Verendrye sons' attempt to find a route across the Rockies in 1743.

Part of the Verendrye's course is known. They departed Ft La Reine (present Portage la Prairie, Manitoba) April 29, 1742 and traveled south to the Mandan villages (near present Bismarck, North Dakota). From there they journeyed west to the Little Missouri Badlands arriving in mid-August.

From then until March 19 of the following year, the

Verendrye's route and the tribes they contacted are much less certain. The first Indian group he encountered came from the west. He called them the "Beaux Hommes" or Handsome Men. These people may have been the so-called River Crows who lived along the Yellowstone River, not far west of where they joined the Verendryes.

The Verendryes continued south southwest with the "Beaux Hommes" until t



**Verendrye continued:** they found a group he referred to as "*Petites Renards*"...Little Foxes. It's uncertain who the Little Foxes were, but they may have been Plains Apache or Kiowa Apache. A few more days of walking took them to a small group called the "*Pioya*" (possibly Kiowa).

Continued trudging final brought them contact with the long-sought "*Gens des Chaveux*" or Horse People. It was the Horse People that Verendrye had been hoping would lead him across the mountains. Unfortunately, the Horse People "*were in a state of great desolation*", because of a recent attack made on them by the "*Gens du Serpent*", Snake People.

The Shoshone were usually called The Snakes by other tribes in that era. They lived near the Bighorn Mountains and were probably in the height of their relative power in the 1740's because they acquired horses before the other area tribes.

Continuing their search for Indian guides and allies, the Verendryes sought and found a tribe they called "*Gens du l'Arc*"...Bow People, and another group referred to as *Gens de la Belle Riviere*, People of the Belle River. These groups were probably Cheyenne. Reference to the Belle River, presumably the stream now called the Belle Fourche, places Verendrye near the northwest corner of the Bearlodge section of the Black Hills, maybe less than 50 linear miles from the Vore Buffalo Jump.

The Bow People formed a large war party against the Shoshone and agreed to guide the Verendryes across the

mountains. Verendrye's report states that on New Years Day 1743, "*We came in view of the mountains.*" Nine more days brought them to the base of the Bighorn Mountains and the observation that "*They are, for the most part, thickly wooded with all kinds of wood and appear very high.*"

Just at that tantalizing point, Verendrye's Indian allies decided they needed to return and protect their own villages from attack, and beat a fast retreat from the land of the Shoshone. Verendrye had to abandon his "Quest for the Western Sea". He never found out that, instead of the Pacific on the other side of the mountains, he would have found many more mountains, wide deserts and additional Indian tribes.

March 1743 found the Verendryes east of the Black Hills where they met the "*Gens de la Petite Cerise*"...Little Cherry People...who can be positively identified as Arrikara. At their "fort" village across the Missouri from present Pierre, South Dakota, Verendrye buried a small lead plate on a hill to document his presence there. The plaque was found by school children in 1931, 170 years later!

On his return north to Ft La Reine, the Verendryes made two contacts with groups of Sioux, a tribe that was then in the process of migrating toward the Black Hills.

Louis-Joseph Verendrye's report substantiates what archaeology at the Vore Site has established, that many different tribes were living and hunting in the Black Hills region in the 1700's.