

The Archaeological Guide to Iowa

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Book Reviews and Notices

The Archaeological Guide to Iowa, by William E. Whittaker, Lynn M. Alex, and Mary C. de la Garza. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015. xv, 271 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliographical suggestions, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Colin Betts is professor of anthropology at Luther College. His work focuses on the topics of archaeology, ceramics, and ethnoarchaeology.

The Archaeological Guide to Iowa is fundamentally intended to provide an overview of Iowa's archaeological heritage "for those that want to experience archaeological places firsthand" (1). Underlying this goal is the premise that Iowa's archaeological heritage is best appreciated firsthand. In pursuit of that general goal, the authors have selected a sample of 68 archaeological sites located throughout the state that provide readers with the opportunity to visit locales associated with the various periods in Iowa's prehistoric and historic past. These sites include "must-see" examples of Iowa's rich cultural legacy as well as others whose value lies less in their aesthetic appeal than in their ability to elucidate broader trends in Iowa's past.

The introductory chapter outlines the structure and purpose of the book and provides a basic summary of the fundamental temporal periods of Iowa's cultural legacy. The remainder of the book consists of individual summaries that specify the sites' cultural and temporal contexts and situate them within the larger issues associated with the history and practice of archaeology in Iowa. The sites are organized according to the major river systems along which they are located, proceeding west to east and following the general flow of rivers from north to south. Within each drainage system the sites are presented chronologically. Each section concludes with details on how to visit the site or related locales as well as a short bibliography for further reading. It is not possible to visit all of the sites in the book because some have been destroyed or are located on private property or their locations have been kept confidential to prevent damage or looting. In those cases directions are provided to geographically comparable locations or to facilities where it is possible to view the materials recovered from those sites.

The Archaeological Guide to Iowa provides a concise overview of Iowa's past and facilitates visits to the places where the vestiges of that past can be experienced directly. The authors effectively achieve their stated goal of emphasizing the importance of archaeology as a study of landscapes and locations of human activity as much as it is of objects and artifacts. By encouraging firsthand appreciation for these locales, they provide a rich sense of the complex palimpsest of the human experience in the state. As such, the book serves admirably as a stand-alone introduction to the archaeology of Iowa or as a companion to Lynn Alex's comprehensive *Iowa's Archeological Past* (2000).

The structure of the book works well for the sites associated with Native American occupations. As the authors note, river valleys represented primary modes of transportation for indigenous groups. This structure also facilitates the exploration of developmental trends within culturally similar regions. The organization is a little less effective with respect to the historic Euro-American sites included in the book, however. Nonetheless, the book's extensive cross-referencing provides ample opportunities to draw connections among the sites and to highlight the larger issues that cross-cut Iowa's prehistoric and historic past—both in terms of what happened and of our efforts to understand and preserve that heritage.

The sites that the book covers were selected as much for their value for providing a representative cross-section of Iowa's archaeological heritage as for their ability to illuminate broader issues associated with the presentation, preservation, and conduct of archaeology. These issues span the gamut from the rise and fall of the Moundbuilder myth to the development of cultural resource management and the changing relationships between archaeologists and descendant communities. Some readers may be disappointed that it is not possible to visit many of the sites included in the book and may question their inclusion in the guide. However, their inclusion is invaluable: the reasons behind their inaccessibility serve to highlight the challenges involved in the stewardship of historical and archaeological heritage. Those challenges are not specific to the state and touch on elements common to historic preservation in general. In this vein, the final site presented in the book, Fort Madison, represents a fitting epilogue for highlighting the value of archaeology for understanding the prehistoric and historic past as well as the ongoing threats to the physical locales associated with Iowa's cultural heritage and the challenges associated with their preservation.