

Pentagon Site, Pentagon 2
Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
West of Barry's Landing off Highway 37
Fort Smith vicinity
Big Horn County
Montana

HABS No. MT-105-B

HABS
MONT
2-FOSMI.V
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPY OF MEASURED DRAWING

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PENTAGON SITE, PENTAGON 2

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Location: West of Barry's Landing off Highway 37, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Fort Smith vicinity, Big Horn County, Montana.

Present Owner: United States Department of Interior, National Park Service

Present Occupant: Vacant (archeological site)

Significance: Hundreds of crib-style timber structures were once found in the Northern Plains. Today only about 50 or 60 structures remain in upright positions. The structures were made as a temporary house by all the northern Plains tribes. They housed Indian war parties and were most common during the historic period when northern Plains Indians increased their expeditions to steal horses. They were likely built between A.D. 1825 and 1875.

Pentagon 2 is an archeological feature constructed with five walls, roughly rectangular on three sides with two angled walls on the north side. Several stone were laid on the ground to level the structure which had seven or eight tiers of deadfall. A small opening was located in the northeast wall. The structure had no roof.

History/Description: Pentagon 2 is located in a shallow catch basin about 150 yards north of Pentagon 1. Runoff from the adjacent mountain has drained and eroded into the limestone substrate reducing the overall height of the basin in relationship to the surrounding terrain. Rocks are plentiful with some large limestone boulders that have rolled down from exposed outcrops above the basin. Juniper, sage and grasses are the primary vegetation and a few limber pines also grow in the basin. The basin's walls restrict the immediate view range, but walking a few yards from the structure the view is excellent to the north, east, and south.

Pentagon 2 was constructed of deadfall limber pines that were laid up in crib-style construction. Several flat limestone rocks were apparently placed beneath the bottom tier of the structure. These rocks are not uniform around the base and probably represent rocks that were jammed under the first tier in low spots to stabilize and level it before adding the next layer of deadfall. Seven to eight additional tiers of deadfall were added to the walls. Chunks of limestone were used to chink holes between the tiers of the deadfall. The structure has a maximum height of slightly more than five feet today and may have stood another foot higher when it was originally constructed.

Pentagon 2 was built with five walls but they are not of equal length. The southern wall is about 17 feet in length, the east and west walls are about 10 feet in length. These were constructed with relatively square corners as though the structure was intended to be rectangular. The north wall, however, was built of two shorter segments about 9 feet in length that attach to the east and west walls at angles of about 125 degrees and meet in a northward projection. This gives the structure five walls with the two outward projecting northern ones as the shortest, the

southern one the longest, and the east and west ones of about equal length. The interior floor area is about 475 square feet.

There are no windows in the walls but there is an opening in the northeastern wall that may have been used for entrance and egress. Deadfall with large knobby protrusions or their roots still attached, 3 to 4 feet in length, were laid into the short northeastern wall on top of the base tier. The smaller ends of these pieces were fitted into the cribbed corners while the knobby ends were stacked, with no additional support, into the wall. These shorter segments were placed in the middle tiers as both the base tier and the top tier spans the length of the wall. This left an opening in the wall about 30 inches wide and 36 inches high that was apparently used as a door. The structure did not have a roof.

An archeological test excavation was placed immediately outside the entryway. The upper few inches of the soil deposits were unconsolidated and contained more dark organic materials than expected. A single heat cracked and fire darkened stone was recovered as well as several pieces of chipped stone flaking debris. A second test excavation was placed inside the structure in the entryway adjacent to the wall. A small stone drill and abundant fragments of charcoal were recovered in this excavation. The charcoal inside the entryway and the fire-cracked rock outside suggest cleaning of an interior hearth and/or tracking of charcoal by individuals passing through the door. The location of the hearth was not determined but it is likely near the center of the floor area.

The stone drill or awl is made of a red-colored chert that is found locally in the Pryor Mountains. The tool is broken with its tip and shank portions missing. It has little evidence of use-wear but it would have served the purpose of putting holes in soft material like buckskin or could have been used to drill a hole in material like bone. The artifacts do not help much in determining the age of the structure. Similar drill bits are found in nearby sites where they are thought to represent the historic Crow Indian use of the region. While that might be the case with this one, similar tools were used by other Indian tribes and in different time periods.

A large limber pine started growing inside the structure after it was abandoned. The tree is estimated to be about 80 to 100 years of age, which means the structure is at least turn of the century in age. Of course the tree may not have started to grow in the structure until it had been abandoned for some time and because we do not know that length of time, it is a poor indicator of the construction age. Perhaps the best way to establish the age of the structure is to compare it with Pentagon 1. The two features are close to one another and built in the same manner. The condition of the wood in both is the same and quite likely they were built and used at the same time. It is not unusual to find more than one of these deadfall timber structures on a site.