

Canyon Camp is a special place with a rich assortment of natural history and cultural heritage. The sense of place within this canyon is very strong, and you all have likely felt the unique energy here from your own experiences with us on the banks of Coon Creek. This feeling is what we call 'The Spirit of Canyon Camp,' which we share with all Scouts, volunteers, and friends who come through our front gate to enjoy outdoor adventure with us.

The natural history of Canyon Camp begins with the canyon's geological formation from the Apple River's watershed through an ancient seabed formed when dinosaurs roamed North America¹. Because of the camp's unique location within the Driftless Region, the continental glaciers that flattened most of the Midwest during the last major ice age of the Pleistocene Era spared the local geography of this beautiful area². This is characterized by the limestone bluffs, deep ravines, and rolling hills that surround us. We are grateful for the pastoral scenery and diverse terrain that surround us, even when the steep elevation in camp may leave us breathless and our calves aching. This is what makes Canyon Camp unique and beautiful.

We also recognize the rich cultural heritage of the landscape through three groups of people; the Scouts and volunteers who have recreated here for camping and practicing Scouts skills for nearly a century, the former settlers who used this property for raising crops, livestock grazing, and historic stagecoach wagon routes, and the Indigenous peoples who stewarded this land for thousands of years³.

Evidence of Indigenous settlement and use of this land is extensive across the landscape, particularly in the set of eleven linear and conical mounds that can be found along the crest of camp's hill within and nearby Mound Point campsite⁴. It has been theorized that this was a special location to Indigenous peoples, given the high vantage point above the Apple River and proximity to key travel routes. Many artifacts such as arrowheads, pottery shards, and other hand tools have been found across the property over the years, many of which can be found in the Camp Museum in the Rawleigh Cabin.

In the pre-Columbian era, the middle Woodland peoples lived in this area and far-along the Mississippi River valley⁵. According to archaeologists from the University of Chicago, the mounds found here in camp were formed and used by these people, dating back over 2,500 years⁶. In the post-Columbian era, it is likely that the Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, Peoria, Sauk and Fox, and many other tribes have benefitted this land⁷. We also acknowledge the painful removal of these Indigenous peoples from this landscape in the process of American Westward expansion⁸. We are honored to provide educational opportunities for Scouts to learn about the Indigenous heritage of the landscape, particularly with the offering of "Indian Lore Merit Badge" through the Scouts BSA program we host each summer⁹.

To celebrate this history, Canyon Camp traditionally hosted a Wednesday evening visitor's night that included Native American story dancing, singing, and drumming performed by members of the Canyon Camp Staff. Although this practice has been discontinued for the present day as we embrace the future at Canyon Camp, we are deeply appreciative of our Staff alumni and friends who participated in these activities with ethical intent over the previous six decades. We also recognize the sincere desire to respectfully celebrate and continue on the traditions and memory of the Indigenous groups that appreciated this landscape long before us.

As our camp moves forward, we will continue to teach the human history of this special place to our Scouts and appreciate the unique physical and cultural geography manifested into the landscape around us. In the process, we hope you feel the 'Spirit of Canyon Camp' and consider sharing this special place with others as the Staff continue to provide experiences and memories that will last a lifetime.

References:

¹Knox, James C. 2019. "Geology of the Driftless Area." In *The Physical Geography and Geology of the Driftless Area: The Career and Contributions of James C. Knox*, 543:0. Geological Society of America. [https://doi.org/10.1130/2019.2543\(01\)](https://doi.org/10.1130/2019.2543(01)).

²Frankie, Wayne T., and Robert S. Nelson. 2002. *Guide to the Geology of the Apple River Canyon State Park and Surrounding Area of Northeastern Jo Daviess County, Illinois*. Illinois State Geological Survey.

³Gale, Neil. 2023. "The First Nine Stagecoach Routes out of Chicago." *The Digital Research Library of Illinois History Journal*. July 31, 2023. <https://drloihjournal.blogspot.com/2023/07/stagecoach-routes-out-of-chicago-first-nine.html>.

⁴Determan, Bill. 2021. "Indian Mounds at Canyon Camp." *Canyon Camp*. May 26, 2021. <https://www.canyoncampbsa.org/post/indian-mounds-at-canyon-camp>.

⁵Henry, Edward R., and G. Logan Miller. n.d. "Toward a Situational Approach to Understanding Middle Woodland Societies in the North American Midcontinent." Accessed April 23, 2025. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/26989076>.

⁶Cole, Fay-Cooper, and Thorne Deuel. 1937. *Rediscovering Illinois Archaeological Explorations In And Around Fulton County*. University of Chicago Press.

⁷Native Land Digital. 2025. "Our Home on Native Land Map." 2025. <https://native-land.ca/>.

⁸Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

⁹Scouting America. 2025. "Indian Lore Merit Badge." <https://www.scouting.org/merit-badges/indian-lore/>.