

PLAINS EXPERIENCE WORKSHOP

by Ann Sines

"Pack light," Fee Jacobsen said. We loaded our bags into two vans and set off for Wingsprings the morning of Thursday, August 8. There were five of us: Carol Schneiderhan, Phyllis Petersen, Jan Meyer, Fee Jacobsen and Ann Sines.

The focus of the 60-hour sojourn was Lakota history including core concepts embedded in the ceremonial, artistic, geographical, political and historical aspects of Lakota culture. The destination was Wingsprings, located on land in the LaCreek District of the Pine Ridge Indian



Plains Experience Workshop attendees from left: Carol Schneiderhan, Fee Jacobsen, Ann Sines, Jan Meyer, and Phyllis Petersen. Craig Howe is the guy in the hat.

Reservation, approximately 8 miles east and 4 miles north of Martin, South Dakota.

On the way we cut down into the LaCreek Wildlife Refuge. We stopped at the Visitors Center then doubled back to Pelican Lake. American white pelican, great blue heron, double-crested cormorant, black-crowned night heron and egrets all nested on the Pelican islands this year.



Lois Howe, Craig's mother, played a huge part in our enjoyment and comfort; the meals she served were delicious. Her official position in the printed literature is Mom.

We returned to picnic under the shade trees adjacent to the Visitors Center. We drove slowly past the prairie dog town where the only one who didn't see the burrowing owl was Jan, the most knowledgeable bird-watcher among us.

We enjoyed the beach at the Little White River Recreation Area, where Carol collected stones. We loitered photographing the snake sunning on the road and

lost track of Jan and Phyllis who'd gone ahead. With three cell phones serviced by three different carriers, we couldn't pick up a signal.

We caught up with them, but another time it would have been handy to communicate was after we sailed right through Tuthill, missing the turn that would have taken us back to Hwy. 18.

Phyllis and Jan commented they were following us through landscape they hadn't seen before. If we were retracing our route, this was not the way. We made a lot of three-point turns on gravel roads that afternoon.

To reach Wingsprings, we turned north off Hwy. 18, drove on gravel for a couple of miles, then entered a track through pasture for the last mile to reach the buildings.

Three cabins and four modern bathrooms are connected to the main lodge, completing about one-third of what will eventually be a circular encampment. A quarter mile from the cabins, four tipis and a wall tent surround a fire pit. We were given our choice of accommodations.

"Wingsprings refers to the architectural facilities we are building, the land surrounding them, and also to the ideas and hopes of the whole enterprise," Craig Howe states on the web-site.

Craig is the former Director of the Center of American Indian History at the Newberry Library in Chicago. He developed the inaugural exhibits of the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. For the past several years he's been a professor at the Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation. He holds a PhD in Architecture and Anthropology.

He is a published author, speaker, workshop leader, consultant, and Director of the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies (CAIRNS) at Wingsprings.

CAIRNS was founded in 2004 as an Indian-controlled non-profit research and education center. Educational workshops have been the focus of Craig's teaching at Wingsprings from the beginning. In July he held three teacher workshops on Teaching Lakota Culture to educators, sponsored in part by the South Dakota Humanities Council.

Recently he developed the Plains Experience Workshop. Ours was the first group to take advantage of the offering. Prior to arriving we each received a Course Packet of information and an assignment to complete.

Each morning we greeted one another with a handshake and "hahnnie wash-tay" (he-hahnnie wash-tay). Translated: "Good morning."

Each evening we again shook hands and said, "Toksa ake wacinyankinke ye" (doke-shaw ah-kay watchin' yong-keen-katay ye). Translated: "I will see you again later."

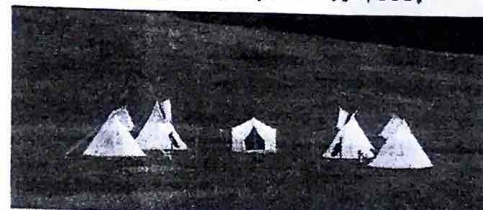
We learned how the tipis are constructed and how to physically adjust the poles depending on the weather.

We learned the four great virtues of the Lakota people; the 16 Gods and Gods-like, their domain, powers, and relationships; how the Lakota came onto the world; the establishment of the Seven Council Fires; and how both spatial and temporal order are important to the Lakota.

We learned about White Buffalo Calf Woman who presented the Itazipco people with the pipe as a gift from the Pte (Buffalo) people. The 19th generation now holds the pipe. She also told the people that they would eventually have seven sacred ceremonies and we learned those.

In a study of winter counts we learned that only one event is chosen to represent each year and that it ties into the belief and values of the community. The images, called glyths, are recorded right to left, the opposite of our way of reading.

We learned the decisions and laws that have affected



A quarter mile from the main building, a circle of four tipis and a wall tent surround the fire pit. We were offered the option of tipi, tent, or cabin as sleeping accommodations.

American Indians. We learned the nine reservations within the borders of South Dakota, including when established, size, population, age, unemployment, and household size, school enrollment, educational attainment, income, and poverty level.

We learned about the allotments and how to read a legal description of land. We were given a comprehensive reading list. Craig Howe narrowed our focus and widened our view of the world we live in.

Re-entry on Saturday following our time at Wingsprings took some doing. It helped that the road across the pasture was long, winding and rough. There was time to look back more than once. Craig and his mom stood waving.

From Wingsprings we headed west, stopping at Wounded Knee and again at the Red Cloud Indian School. At Wounded Knee young tribal members welcomed us and answered questions.

At Red Cloud Indian School, Fee arranged for a tour guide to give us a brief history of the school and take us through the church. We enjoyed the 43rd Annual Art Show at the Red Cloud Heritage Center.

Our final three-point turn was in Vetal. Fee thought she recognized Jan's van at the R Bar where Craig had taken us on Friday evening. Same color, year and model as Jan's, but the license plates were not 58-county. So we didn't stop, but continued on Hwy. 18 until we came to Hwy. 83 west of Mission and turned toward home.

For more information on Plains Experience Workshops, contact Dr. Craig Howe, CAIRNS, PO Box 448, Martin, SD 57551, 605-685-6484, or email craig@nativecairns.org.

Wingsprings

By Carol Schneiderhan

We came – all five – to get away
To learn Lakota ways.
Though directionally challenged, we persevered,
Arriving – laughing – at Wingsprings' gate.

Wingsprings, circling far below
Drew us into its curved embrace.
With Craig's gentle spirit, we opened up
And filled our hearts with Indian truths.

Tipi sleep is a pure kind of sleep.
Walls sighing and breathing with life.
The sky above, the open door
My billion-star hotel.

I clutch the sage, stone, solitude
And long to keep them close.
Believing life is circular,
I will remember this.