

A Special Thank You to Dr. Lauren Ritterbush

Feast with the People of the South Wind: An Ethnobotanical Approach to Kanza Subsistence Patterns, 1724-1873



Sketch of Kanza village from the sketchbook of Pierre-Jean de Smet. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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A presentation of the information gathered regarding the Kanza Indian tribe of northeastern Kansas. The information pertains to the tribe's dietary practices, specifically those that utilized the wild and native resources surrounding their villages. As time passed and the location of their villages changed, it is assumed that the resources they had access to would change. This study will show that this was not necessarily the case. The Kanza people were knowledgeable of their environment and chose new village locations that suited their lifestyle. The natural resources found around each village, dating from 1724-1873, are listed chronologically to show the consistencies and changes between the villages, followed by an evaluation of the uses of each resource as an attempt to show how important the resources were in the shaping of their lifestyle.

When I began this project, I was not starting with a blank slate. Previous projects had led me to sources concerning the Kanza Indians, and my own heritage had led to me to a few as well. I am currently a member of the Kanza tribe and I grew up hearing stories about their way of life and often eating traditional foods at holiday gatherings. This project was one very close to me, but I wanted to focus on an aspect of the tribe that I wasn't as familiar with; their use of the land.

My first step was to find someone who would be able to provide me with more information on the topic, so I decided to sit down with one of my professors, who pointed me to Robert Blasing. An expert on Indian hunting trails, specifically in the Great Plains region, Blasing was able to help me establish a new outlook on my project. After meeting with him and discussing the various types of plants and trails associated with tribes in Kansas, I realized that focusing on how the Kanza utilized the natural resources around them was much too broad of a project. I decided to narrow down my project based on what uses of natural resources were most consistently recorded. Based on sources that I had already read through for previous projects, I knew that natural resource use for dietary purposes was the most consistently recorded use. The final description of my project was the Kanza use of natural resources for dietary purposes.

I began skimming through the resources that I had previously used and had immediate access to. This included Ron Parks's *The Darkest Period*, William Unrau's *The Kansa Indians*, Lauren Ritterbush's *Visit to the Blue Earth Village*, and Louise Barry's *The Beginning of the West*. After perusing through these sources, I realized that finding early sources would be my most difficult task, so that was what I focused on next. I was eventually able to find an online copy of the *1724 Journal of de Bourgmont*, which provided me with most of my information concerning that time period.

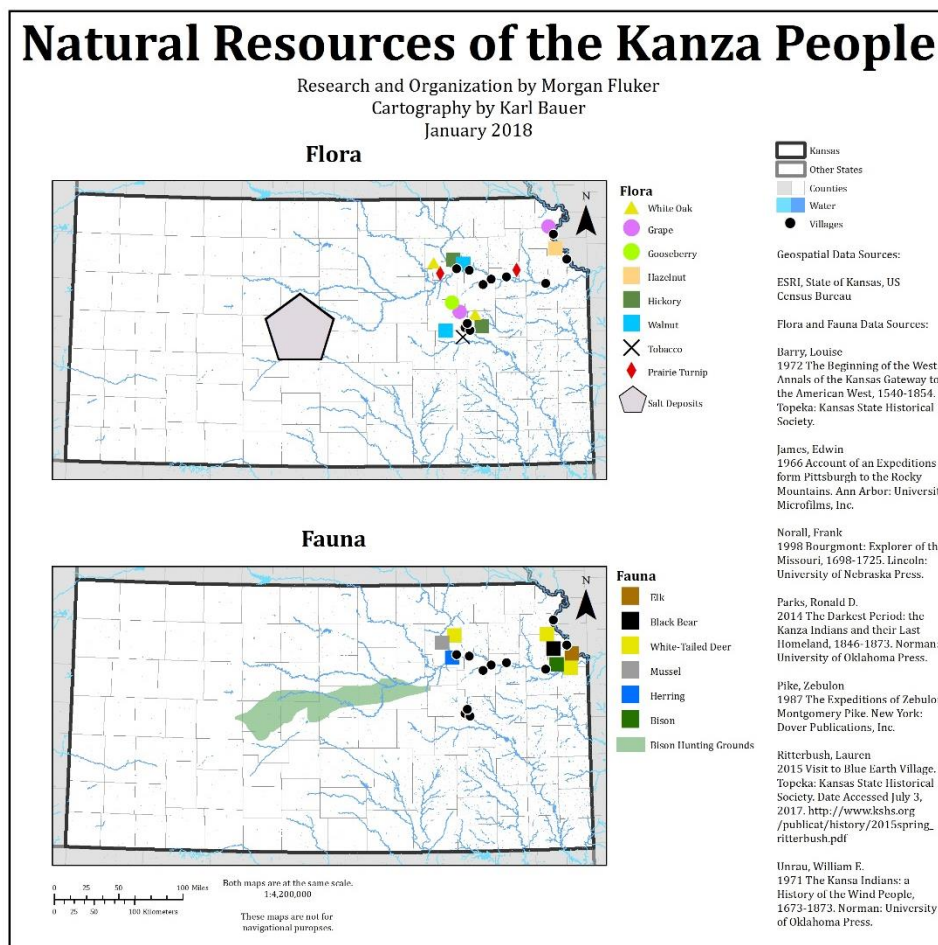
Checking what was available to me through the university's library was my next step. I ended up primarily discovering accounts from expeditions, along with journals and miscellaneous documents. I

read through the journal of Pierre Jean de Smet and Edmund Flagg, the account of Zebulon Montgomery Pike's expedition and Stephen H. Long's, and a few secondary sources about various time periods. The secondary sources included *Standard History of Kansas and Kansans* by William E. Connelley, *Before Lewis and Clark* by Shirley Christian, and *The Kaw or Kansa Indians* by Frank Hauke. The online library also provided me with valuable resources, including *The Reputation of the Kansa Indians* by Michael S. Amend. All of these sources either provided me with new information or worked as cross references with other sources I had already read through.

Before venturing to the Kansas State Historical Society, I decided to see what was available to me online. Through various archives and online databases, I was able to find a few helpful resources. I discovered a letter from the Secretary of the Interior regarding the Kanza in 1872, *The Kaws on the Missouri in 1724* by George J. Remsberg, and the *Reminiscences of Frederick Chouteau* by Franklin G. Adams, all of which provided helpful cross-referencing information. While searching through the sources at the Kansas State Historical Society, I discovered books that provided helpful information and even a primary source. The sources were *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811*, *Villages of the Algonquian, Siouian, and Caddoan tribes west of the Mississippi* by David I. Bushnell, and the *Present Status of the Archaeology of the Kansa* by Roscoe Wilmeth.

After locating all the above sources, I narrowed them down based on the amount of information they provide, how credible the author was which was discovered through online background research, and how well the information lined up with the information provided in other sources. When I was done selecting, I decided on the time range for my project. After reading through the sources, I realized that there was very little to no credible evidence of the Kanza prior to 1724 that pertained to the subject of my project, so I made this the start of the time range. In 1873 the Kanza were moved to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, so their time of relying primarily on the resources of Kansas ended, as did the time range I would be focusing on.

Once my time range was set, I began rereading through all of the sources I selected to be used in the final product. While reading through them, I recorded different dates, village locations, plants being gathered and eaten, animals being hunted and eaten, and the location of the Kanza when they were observed hunting. I used the information of their plant use and dates they were observed to map out what plants were being used at each village location. I collected the information of the location of the hunting grounds from each village location and overlapped them to find a common hunting ground for the tribe. When all of these locations were pinpointed, I created icons for each natural resource, and placed them on two maps: one displaying the using of natural faunal resources, and one displaying the use of natural floral resources. A graduate student in geography, Karl Bauer, helped to finalize the maps, shown below.



After the maps were complete, I reread through the sources once more to look more specifically for the way in which the tribe was using the resources. After reading through the books, I realized I was still missing some key information. I reached out to a Kanza elder for an interview to discover how else the tribe might have been using these resources. While the information she provided me was invaluable, the most interesting thing I learned from her was information regarding the Kanza use of grapes (described below). I also sought out other materials for information on how the Kanza might have been using the resources, and found information in an ethnobotanical guide by Kelly Kindscher on their use of prairie turnips.

Overall, the process of mapping out the Kanza tribe's use of natural resources and recording how they used them required an extensive amount of time searching for sources that provided the kind of information I needed. The hardest part was locating resources that discussed the Kanza tribe solely, as many resources focus on the Osage or on Plains Indians as a whole. Once the sources were found, it was all matter of reading, rereading, and recording. The final product is the result of four months of research and writing, and I am very pleased to be able to provide this information, not only for the public, but hopefully as a small reflection of the relationship between the Kanza people and their homeland.

Reconstructive Ethnobotany

It is often the case when studying people of the past, that the primary focus is on that group's relationship with other people. The focus is on domestic relationships, including kinship and social hierarchy, and their external relationships, including allies, enemies, and trade networks. When looking back at Native American tribes, while their relationships within their tribe and with others were important to their way of life, their relationship with their land was arguably more important. Native American tribes had close relationships with the land surrounding them and the resources they provided. In return, the resources available to them had great impact on how they lived. They had dietary, spiritual, medicinal, ornamental, and utilitarian purposes for the people of the tribe. The natural resources surrounding each tribe shaped every aspect of their life and was the cause of many differences between tribes.

Reconstructive ethnobotany is an effective way to evaluate how nearby resources impacted a group of people. Ethnobotany is an evaluation of the cultural use of natural resources by a group of people. Reconstructive ethnobotany is a method of research that compiles information gathered from journals and primary historical accounts, maps, interviews, archaeological reports, historical and recent botanical analyses of the land, and any other credible sources that provide information about the people and/or the land, to more directly show the relationship between people and land. Helen Rountree, an ethnohistorian who has used this method to assemble a list of plants used by the women of the Powhatan tribe for dietary, utilitarian, and medicinal purposes, says that this information helps to highlight "nutritional matters" and "people's seasonal movements within their territory".¹

¹ Helen Rountree, *Powhatan Indian Women: The People Captain John Smith Barely Saw* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 2

Reconstructive ethnobotany can help to determine why people chose the homes they did, how they utilized the resources around them, and how those resources impacted their lives.

The Kanza tribe of the upper Kansas River lived off the resources provided by the prairies of Northeastern Kansas. They thrived in their early years on the prairie, taking advantage of the abundance of trees, bison, turnips, berries, and much more. They inhabited this region of Kansas for many years and developed what Ronald Parks describes as “earth awareness that was time-tested, practical, nuanced, and cyclical”.² This essay attempts to evaluate that awareness as it reconstructs the environment surrounding the Kanza tribe that fed them throughout the years. The types of sources used to compile a list of resources and their uses among the tribe will be analyzed, and the information they provided presented chronologically by village location starting in 1724 when the Kanza had their first known contact with a European explorer, to 1873 when they were removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This essay will focus solely on the resources used for dietary purposes, and how those resources changed through time as their villages moved and as they had more European and American influence. After the source types are laid out and explained, the information gathered will be presented, first by listing out the resources used at each village location in chronological order, then by explaining how the Kanza used these resources

² Ronald D. Parks, *The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and their Last Homeland, 1846-1873* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 122

What to Use to Reconstruct

Journals, especially when evaluating cultures that have any type of written history, are possibly one of the most valuable sources of information. They provide first-hand accounts of the lives of the people from either inside or outside sources, and in some cases, both. One does have to be careful of possible biases and human error when attempting to extract information from journals, or any primary source. The journals used for this particular study consist of the journal of Etienne Veniard la Sieur de Bourgmont, Zebulon Pike, Stephen H. Long, George C. Sibley, and John D. Hunter. Each of these people were explorers who encountered the Kanza tribe at different times during their respective expeditions. Each journal provides information that focuses on their expedition's primary goal, but each journal also provides additional information about the surrounding environment, feasts, and observed traits of the tribes they encountered. Because it is not the case for some of these journals that the primary goal was to observe natural resources and tribal habits, the information given regarding this may not be recorded carefully or accurately in the journals. Given the time period that these men were traveling, and the explorers' relationships with and views of Native Americans, biases might also be present in the journals. Some information may have been altered intentionally or unintentionally based on the authors' personal perceptions of the Native Americans.

More compiled works of historical non-fiction may also be used to evaluate ethnobotanical features of a group of people. These sources tend to be a compilation of primary and secondary sources written in a cohesive format. The historical non-fiction, secondary sources used for this study consist of *The Darkest Period* by Ronald D. Parks, *The Kansa Indians* by William E. Unrau, *A Visit to the Blue Earth Village* by Lauren Ritterbush, and *The Beginning of the West* by Louise Barry. For the sake of reconstructing the ethnobotany of a group of people, these sources work well because they use the cultural aspects of the group to help make the presentation more human focused. The facts are often

accompanied with stories that back them, and in the case of the ethnobotany, show the cultural use of the resources that have been presented. However, because of this, it is important to look out for stories that have been embellished. Since there are many sources that go into the creation of these works, it is also important to ensure that these sources are credible and are not out of date or unreliable. The sources used for the above-mentioned books and article are recent, relative to the publication date, and reliable primary and secondary sources.

Another source that assists in compiling an ethnobotanical analysis is interviews. If there are still people alive who either lived during the time being studied and had direct contact with the group of people, or who are currently part of a descendent community of that group, then they are rich sources of information. They can provide first-hand accounts of information from the time that they observed with their own eyes, or information regarding traditional practices of the group of people that have been carried to modern times. For this project, an elder of the Kanza tribe, Treva Brack, was interviewed. She is a retired Tribal Storyteller and Indian Student Counselor, who spent most of her life studying traditions of the Kanza tribe and teaching them to young students. When interviewing for information, it's important to take into account that the memory might be altered from the original observation, or in the case of a living member of a descendent community such as the Kanza elder, modern traditions may be different from historically practiced traditions.

Each resource that could be was cross checked for accuracy. The Bourgmont journal, being the only one pertaining to that time period, could not be corroborated with any other sources. The information provided in Barry's book pertaining to the time between 1830-1846, also had very little to no resources to be corroborated with. The journals that recorded information from 1800-30, however, were corroborated with each other, with information from Unrau's book, and Ritterbush's article. Park's book provides references to many sources that were used to provide the information about the tribe in 1846-73, but the book, being the most complete and detailed source of information about this

time period, is the only source used for information from this time. The information provided by the Kanza elder wasn't given in the context of a specific time period, so this information was primarily used to corroborate already known information, and to give presently perceived historical uses of certain resources.

Village Locations and Resources

In 1724, Etienne Veniard la Sieur de Bourgmont, a French explorer, encountered the Kanza tribe along the Missouri. Bourgmont approached from the east, crossing the Missouri to reach the village.³ The notes from the Stephen Long expedition of 1819 mentions that the party sighted remains of this abandoned village along the Missouri River, just below its confluence with Independence Creek.⁴ This location is corroborated on the map of Kanza villages from 1724-1873 depicted in William Unrau's book.⁵ This is the first known European encounter with the Kanza tribe. Most previous encounters are still in question as to whether it was the Kanza tribe or archaeologically similar groups.

Bourgmont visited the tribe during his mission to establish a fort for the French King and to negotiate peace between the surrounding tribes. While there, he makes multiple mentions of his hunting party returning "loaded down" with deer, and even observes that deer can be seen "in herds" as his traveling party approached the village.⁶ Based on later accounts of the Kanza diet that include deer, we can assume that the tribe was hunting and eating the deer during this time as well. Bison meat was also a staple food in the Kanza diet, but was not hunted around the village. The tribe had a special bison hunting ground that will be discussed later on.

The meat in their diets was accompanied by nearby plants. While they were cultivating some crops at this time, they had not yet started to form large plots of crops, and preferred to gather wild plants. Bourgmont notes that, as he neared the village from the east, his path through the prairie showed him an abundance of hazelnut trees.⁷ In an account by George C. Sibley during his later

³ Frank Norall, ed., *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri 1689-1725* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998)

⁴ Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains; volume 1* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc, 1966), 113

⁵ William E. Unrau, *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673-1873* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 22

⁶ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*, 4

⁷ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*, 2

encounter with the tribe, the Kanza collect nuts from nearby trees in the forests.⁸ It can be assumed that, if there were forests near their village, that the tribe was collecting nuts from the trees. They were also utilizing grapes for food and trade with visitors. They offered baskets of grapes to Bourgmont and his men as gifts while they were visiting, which they then turned into wine; an unfamiliar process to the Kanza.⁹ Tobacco was also often offered to visitors, but it wasn't eaten. Tobacco was collected from around the village and smoked by the tribe and their visitors. Bourgmont makes many mentions of watching the Kanza offer the calumet, or tobacco pipe, to his party and members of other visiting tribes.¹⁰

The tribe eventually moved down the Missouri River. Unrau, and Lauren Ritterbush in her article, place the tribe near modern-day Fort Leavenworth by 1744. Not much information is provided about the tribe at this location. The tribe had established trade with the French by this time, and were providing them with large amounts of pelts.¹¹ It is not specified what animals' furs the Kanza were trading, nor is it clear if they were using any of these animals' remains for food. Bison bones and robes, however, were found during the archeological excavation of this site, so it can be assumed that the tribe still utilized bison as a main source of food.¹²

The Kanza remained at this village until 1800 when they moved south to the Kansas River, and upstream toward its confluence with the Blue River.¹³ The notes from the Long expedition place the village approximately two miles downstream from the junction of the Kansas and Blue Rivers.¹⁴ The village stood on a terrace just north of the Kansas River, and near the edge of a curve in the Blue River.¹⁵

⁸ George R. Brooks, ed., *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811* (Missouri Historical Society Bulletin 21, no.3, 1965), 175

⁹ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*, 4

¹⁰ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*, 2-5

¹¹ Lauren Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village* (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Historical Society, 2015), 17; Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 66-68

¹² Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 17-18

¹³ Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 22; Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 3

¹⁴ James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains*, 131

¹⁵ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 6

It was during their time at this village, known today as Blue Earth, that the Kanza began to have consistent visits from both European and American travelers and traders.

Following the traditions of their previous villages, the Blue Earth village used bison as a primary meat in their diet, but hunted them at a location away from their village. The deer, however, were still hunted near the village. While they were found and hunted near the village, the tribe did make hunting trips back to the Missouri River to take advantage of the abundance of white-tailed deer, elk, and black bear that still inhabited the lands near their old villages.¹⁶ Both Sibley and Hunter observed the use of elk, deer, and bear in the Kanza people's diet.¹⁷ Mussels and herring are also believed to have been part of the Kanza diet, but it is unclear how they were incorporated. Freshwater mussel shells found at the site indicate that the mussels were at least caught, and possibly used for food.¹⁸ Hunter observed the use of herring by the Kanza during his visit to the village.¹⁹ The use of these animals is also apparent in their faunal remains found at the village. There is evidence of the Kanza eating dog and horse while inhabiting Blue Earth, but this was not commonplace and only occurred in times of dire need. Horses and dogs were utilized for work and companionship, and the Kanza were not quick to resort to eating them.²⁰ They are also not considered part of the environment as the Kanza traveled with their dogs and horses and took them along whenever they moved villages. They did not roam wildly on the plains.

Being on the banks of two rivers, there were plenty of wild plant resources available to the tribe at the Blue Earth village. Nearby tobacco plants were still used for smoking when outsiders visited²¹. Surrounding forests were made up of hickory, walnut, and white oak trees. The hickory and walnut

¹⁶ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 15-16

¹⁷ Brooks, *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811*, 176; John D. Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J. Maxwell, 1823), 172, 287

¹⁸ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

¹⁹ Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of the Mississippi*, 291

²⁰ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 15-16; Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of the Mississippi*, 293

²¹ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

trees provided nuts for the tribe to gather, while the oak was home to beehives that provided honey.²² Sibley noted an abundance of these trees along the tributaries of the Kansas River, and lists honey as one of the tribe's indulgences.²³ Prairie turnips were also found in large sums near the village.²⁴ Prairie turnips are a type of potato that are common in the prairies and were one of the primary wild foods gathered by plains tribes.²⁵ While salt was also part of the Kanza diet at Blue Earth, it was not gathered around the village.²⁶

After spending just under thirty years at the Blue Earth village, the Kanza tribe split into four groups and moved into three new villages further down the Kansas River named after the chiefs who led the groups. Some of the tribe remained at Blue Earth, but by 1830 it had been abandoned. Two villages settled just downriver, one at the confluence of the Kansas River and Mission Creek led by Hard Chief and the other just south of the first led by American Chief. Hard Chief moved his village upriver in 1834 to the junction of the Kansas River and Red Vermillion Creek. The third group, led by Fool Chief, moved further downriver and settled north of the Kansas River, just below Big Soldier Creek.²⁷ In a letter from Reverend Thomas Johnson from 1835, found in the book by Louise Barry, he reports that he found three Kanza villages during his travels. There were two villages found on either side of the Kansas River, presumably Fool Chief's and American Chief's villages, and one village, Hard Chief's, that had moved upstream for better hunting.²⁸

During his travels, Reverend Johnson noted that the deer had almost entirely disappeared from the prairies.²⁹ With so few accounts of the Kanza from this time, it is not clear whether deer were still

²² Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 106

²³ Brooks, *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811*, 170

²⁴ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

²⁵ Kelly Kindscher, *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 185

²⁶ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 15

²⁷ Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 22

²⁸ Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 289

²⁹ Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 289

used in their diet. It is possible that the tribe still traveled east to the Missouri to hunt deer, but there is no mention of this by Reverend Johnson. Johnson, along with two other reverends and the Kanza Agent Cummins, reported in 1837 that the tribe had resorted to begging white settlers for food. Those who weren't out begging were back home digging up prairie turnips to help accommodate the tribe.³⁰ Reports of the tribe begging could account for the lack of records of the tribe harvesting wild resources, as they may be scarce during this time while white settlement increased.

As white settlement continued to increase, and the Kanza's distressing situation grew, the government decided to remove the tribe from the area to a new location with more resources. In 1846, they signed a treaty to establish their new reservation, but it wasn't until 1847 that the location in Council Grove along the Neosho River was decided upon. The Kanza, little by little, moved to the new Council Grove location in late 1847 and into early 1848.³¹ Between hunts and travels to other towns to get resources, the whole tribe was rarely at the new location at one time.

The Kanza chiefs were initially very fond of the new land, observing large amounts of oak, hickory, and walnut trees surrounding the area.³² While the abundance of these trees would provide a great source of nuts to eat for the tribe, the increase in white settlers building wooden houses and the traffic of the Santa Fe trail led to a quick diminishment of the tree supply. Tobacco was still found and used at the Neosho village, but significantly less frequently than at previous locations.³³ The women of the tribe often went out to gather grapes and gooseberries that were found on the trail to the hunting grounds. Many settlers in Council Grove report seeing the women harvesting the berries, and either trading with the women, or holding onto the berries for them while they went on hunts.³⁴ Bison meat

³⁰ Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 322

³¹ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 14-16, 23

³² Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 20

³³ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 215-217

³⁴ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 143

was still a key part of the diet, but traveling was still required for hunting, and the supply of bison quickly dwindled as settlement increased.

Long Travels and Good Eats

Flora

Salt, although it was not a fan favorite, was utilized by the Kanza in their cooking. Initially used as a seasoning, being incorporated in the preparation of meats and stews, salt started being used more as a preservative.³⁵ It grew more and more crucial to preserve foods as the supply of available food to the Kanza began to diminish. The Kanza people did have to travel to obtain their salt. The most commonly used salt deposit used by the Kanza was located on what Pike referred to as the Strong Saline Creek just below the Arkansas River. The salt deposit was at the fork where the Kanza tribe would cross the Arkansas River along their trail. It was located at the northern most point of the river in Kansas.³⁶

The prairie turnip, also known as the prairie potato, was found in abundance across most of the prairie.³⁷ After being dug up and removing the stem, leaving only the tuber, the turnip could be consumed in many different ways. The turnip could be eaten fresh out of the ground, boiled to be added to a stew, dried, or pounded into a mash to either be eaten by itself or to mix with meat.³⁸ Being very starchy in nature, the turnip could be utilized to make the tribe feel full when food sources were running low.³⁹ Prairie turnips thrived in specific meadows, that of which Parks commended the Kanza's ability to identify. He stated that they often knew primary locations for the turnips that others could only guess at.⁴⁰

Tobacco was a key resource for most Native American tribes as the process of passing the calumet, or smoking the pipe, was considered a welcoming and peaceful gesture among tribe. For the

³⁵ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 15-16;
Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 39
³⁶ Zebulon Pike, *The Expeditions of Zebulon
Montgomery Pike; volume 2* (New York City, New
York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1987); James, *Account*

*of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky
Mountains*, 122

³⁷ Kindscher, *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie*, 185

³⁸ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

³⁹ Kindscher, *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie*, 187

⁴⁰ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 123

Kanza, when members of an outside tribe would visit them in peace, they would share the calumet with them. When European or American travelers would visit or pass through the villages, they would share the calumet.⁴¹ Other resources sometimes acted as modifiers to the tobacco. Leaves of plants, bark, berries, etc. would be pounded or cut to be incorporated into the tobacco. This improved the taste of the tobacco, but also expanded how long the tobacco lasted.⁴²

The trees that could be found in the forests around the villages most often consisted of hickory, hazelnut, and walnut trees. Each of these trees provided nuts that the Kanza would collect either from the branches, or from the forest floor.⁴³ The bark and leaves from the trees could then be used as modifiers for tobacco as mentioned above. The leaves would be smoked and crushed into the tobacco mixture and bark would be cut to add flavors of that specific tree.⁴⁴ The white oak, called the bee tree by some, was also found in the forests. While it was used often for trade, the honey the Kanza people procured from the beehives on the trees was also incorporated into their diet. The Kanza would heat the honey, either in a bowl or a rawhide bag, and pass it around in a circle. A spoon would be dipped into the bag to withdraw the hot honey, licked clean, and passed on.⁴⁵

The berries collected by the Kanza all had similar uses. They are most known for collecting grapes and gooseberries, especially at their Neosho village. The berries could be eaten fresh, but they were often dried to make them last longer. Settlers in Council Grove recalled many Kanza women gathering berries and attempting to trade them to the settlers for other provisions while the Kanza men were out on their hunts.⁴⁶ The berries might have also been incorporated into other dishes. For instance, Mrs. Brack, the Kaw elder, recovered an old tribal recipe for grape dumplings that

⁴¹ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*, 2-5

⁴² Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

⁴³ Brooks, *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811*, 175

⁴⁴ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 16

⁴⁵ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 17

⁴⁶ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 143

incorporated the juice from the grapes.⁴⁷ It is likely, then, that the Kanza people had other ways of incorporating the berries into their diets.

Fauna

Bison meat was one of the main sources of food for the Kanza during both their times of need and their times of plenty. Their lives were organized around their seasonal hunting trips. Two hunting trips took place each year; one in early spring and one in the fall.⁴⁸ The men would travel, sometimes taking the women with them, to their designated hunting grounds. There were no formal boundaries for where each tribe hunted, but it was known where each tribe hunted and those informal boundaries were typically respected. The Kanza hunting ground is reported to be located in multiple different locations, so it can be assumed that either a different hunting location was described each time, or a different area of the same, larger hunting location. Bourgmont's journal's only description of the whereabouts of the hunting grounds is that the grounds were west of the village. The Kanza men traveled with the party for a few days as they moved toward their hunting site and eventually left the party to travel the rest of the way. Bourgmont does mention seeing and hunting bison when they reached the Kansas River traveling down the Missouri, and while this was not part of their hunting grounds, it can be assumed that the Kanza did kill some bison in this area as well.⁴⁹ Pike's map places the Kanza hunting grounds near the Arkansas River and the Kanza crossing around 1806, near the point where they collected salt.⁵⁰ Barry notes in her book that the Kanza hunting party was sighted just west of the Pawnee Fork in 1839.⁵¹ This is the western most point of the Kanza hunting grounds identified by any accounts. Unrau corroborates this location in his book, stating that the Kanza hunting grounds stretched as far west as the Pawnee Fork.⁵² Between 1846-73, Parks mentions that the Kanza hunting

⁴⁷ Treva Brack, personal interview, November 21, 2017, Wichita, Kansas.

⁴⁸ Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 39

⁴⁹ Norall, *Bourgmont: Explorer of the Missouri*

⁵⁰ Pike, *Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*

⁵¹ Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 370

⁵² Unrau, *The Kansa Indians*, 39

grounds were located just west of the Cottonwood River along the Santa Fe trail. The site reached as far as the Saline and Solomon River.⁵³ Once collected and brought back to the village, the bison was used in its entirety. The meat was either boiled or jerked. It could be eaten by itself, or placed in a stew or mash. In some cases, the fat from the bison would be used to make the meat into a type of sausage.⁵⁴ There were very few dishes that didn't incorporate a part of the bison.

Elk, black bear, and white-tailed deer were found in abundance when the tribe lived near the Missouri River. When they moved, they had to make trips back east to the river to hunt them. Elk and deer served similar purposes in the Kanza diet as the bison. The meat from the animals was jerked or dried and incorporated into many dishes. Sibley even lists venison as one of the main indulgences of the Kanza. The use of black bear was different. While it can be assumed that the Kanza would eat the meat of the bears they hunted, the primary use of the bear that is recorded is the use of oil from the fat. For food, the oil was used as a type of seasoning to add to many dishes.⁵⁵

⁵³ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 15-16

⁵⁴ Ritterbush, *Visit to Blue Earth Village*, 15

⁵⁵ Brooks, *George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811*, 170

Why Reconstruct?

So why put the time and effort into reconstructing the ethnobotanical aspects of a culture? The purpose is to understand the who, what, when, where, and why of the people. In the case of the Kanza, reconstructing their ethnobotany, even just for their diets, requires a deep understanding of who they are. Understanding that as a Native American tribe that has been living off the land for centuries, the land has been their most reliable ally, and their most consistent foe. They understand the land they live on better than anyone else could and have developed the “earth awareness” that Parks refers to.⁵⁶ To know what they use is to see what they know. Choosing one plant over another, or utilizing it in a special way shows knowledge that could only come from experience and tradition. To know when they act on the environment around them is to know their cycles. Their attention to and awareness of animals’ migration patterns, plants’ growing patterns, etc., shaped the cycles of their own lives. Knowing where they obtain these resources and where they choose to live because of them gives one a hint of their dedication to their culture. In almost 150 years, the Kanza barely changed the types of resources they sought out. During those 150 years, they traveled for days to hunt twice a year. They traded the same types of furs and pelts. They lived on river banks near forests that were made up of the same trees. They didn’t change the type of location they lived in or where they traveled to hunt because it was such an ingrained aspect of their lives.

So, what is the why? The why is everything else. The question of why is answered by discovering who they are, what they know, when they act, and where they go. When all of these are answered, then so is the why. Why do they live the way they do? With a little effort, after reconstructing their full ethnobotany, one will understand why. With a little more effort, one will appreciate why. That is why

⁵⁶ Parks, *The Darkest Period*, 122

the effort is put forth to reconstruct the ethnobotanical aspects of a culture. That they may be understood and appreciated by those who may only see the unconstructed bits.

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