

The ATLATL

“Too long have I hunted mammoth alone!” Rich McWhorter

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Survival By Hunting: Prehistoric Human Predators and Animal Prey.

By George C. Frison. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004. Hardcover, 266 pp., index, references, and illustrations. ISBN 0-520-23190-2, \$34.95.

Reviewed by John C. Whittaker

George Frison, a major figure in Plains archaeology since the 1960s, has produced a new book that many atlatlists will enjoy. *Survival by Hunting* is a well-written and readable combination of summaries of information from some of the important sites Frison has worked on with his personal hunting and ranching experience. Frison's main theme is that the archaeological record of prehistoric hunting strategies can best be understood "by those familiar with animals and their behavior in response to modern hunting strategies."

Frison starts with some environmental and historical background on the Plains, and a chapter on his own development as a rancher, hunter and guide, and eventually archaeologist. A series of chapters then covers all the major game animals of the Plains, starting with the extinct fauna hunted by the Paleoindian populations. In each case, Frison discusses archaeological sites and the evidence for prehistoric (and in sometimes historic) hunting strategies, relevant technologies and changes through time, and insights gained from modern studies of animal behavior. The chapter on bison for instance includes amusing and revealing stories from bison breeders about the behavior of a contrary beast, sometimes docile but capable of running right through strong fences, bulky but fast on its feet, strong but surprisingly susceptible to injuries. Bison are the most glamorous Plains animal, but Frison also deals with mammoth, pronghorn, mountain sheep, elk, deer, and other game.

Throughout *Survival by Hunting* there are discussions of butchering, problems with carnivores and scavengers, animal populations and environmental change, and weapons technology, often from Frison's own personal experience or experiments. Frison dwells on trap, drive, and impoundment strategies, which are less well-known, and where he has an unusual amount of experience recognizing and interpreting the vanishing remnants of corrals, bison jumps, hunting stands, and drive lines from the past. He deals with atlatl and bow in several places. In his earlier work on Paleoindian hunting, he seemed to emphasize the use of thrusting spears, but he now seems to regard most of the early projectile points as likely to have been used on atlatl darts. This may be partly fall-out from his famous experiments using atlatls and Clovis points on culled African elephants, which he describes again here.

All in all, *Survival by Hunting* is a highly recommended distilling of the career of one of America's most interesting archaeologists. To those of us who hope to see atlatl hunting revived, there is a lot of practical advice here, and for the archaeologist dealing with atlatls or primitive hunting, some sound principles for interpreting the past, in an enjoyable package.