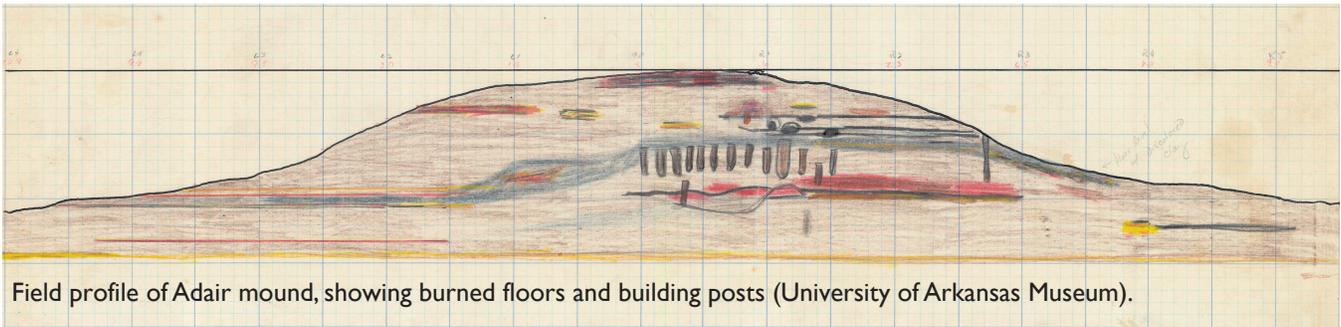


Indian History in the Lake Ouachita Region

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Lake Ouachita was created with the construction of Blakely Mountain Dam by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1953. The lake, designed for flood control, hydroelectric power, recreation, and wildlife management, covers about 40,000 acres in Garland and Montgomery counties. Before the lake, rural communities such as Buckville, Avant, and Cedar Glades developed in the Ouachita River valley between the 1880s and 1950. There are traces of still older communities beneath the waters of Lake Ouachita, places where Indians lived during the past 13,500 years. We can learn about this Indian history from oral traditions, from written accounts left by explorers, and from archeology.



Caddo Indians in the Ouachita Mountains

In the late 1600s and early 1700s, Spanish missionaries and French traders met Caddo Indians living in the Red River valley in what is now Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. When settlers reached the Ouachita River in the early 1800s, there were no Indians living in the valley.

Caddos were farmers. According to oral tradition, the first Caddo woman emerged onto the surface of the earth carrying corn and pumpkin seeds. Archeologists find evidence of Caddo farming villages along the Ouachita River, with charred fragments of domesticated crops such as maize or corn, squash, beans, and chenopodium or goosefoot (a relative of quinoa) on sites dating from the 1300s to 1600s.

The Adair site, a Caddo mound center excavated in 1939 by Works Projects Administration crews, now lies under Lake Ouachita. The archeologists mapped several mounds at this site, including one that stood 14' high. Their trench through the mound showed a series of burned and rebuilt structures. Elsewhere at Adair, wall posts from large circular houses and a cemetery area were uncovered.

Fourche Maline Ancestors

Indians lived in the Lake Ouachita region during the Woodland period, between about 1000 BC and AD 1000, and are known as the Fourche Maline culture (named after

a creek in eastern Oklahoma). These people were probably ancestral to the Caddo Indians that lived in the Ouachita Mountains in later centuries. As seen from the Poole site, excavated by WPA crews prior to the construction of Lake Ouachita, Fourche Maline communities made and used pottery, and chipped dart points and other tools from locally available stone. A pattern of wall posts uncovered at Poole was interpreted by archeologists as a long rectangular house. By this time, farming a suite of native crops such as goosefoot, squash, and sunflower would have supplemented hunting, fishing, and plant gathering, although little direct evidence has been documented in the Lake Ouachita region. Squash from recent excavations in Montgomery



County has been radiocarbon dated to AD 715–940, providing a clue to early native farming in the Ouachita River valley.

Novaculite Quarrying in the Archaic Period

Novaculite is a hard, fine-grained siliceous rock similar to chert or flint. Used in recent centuries for Arkansas whetstones, it was the raw material of choice for Native Americans living in the Ouachita Mountains region. Novaculite was quarried from outcrops on mountain ridges, leaving pits, trenches, and debris piles that form some of the largest archeological sites in the state. Many of these quarry sites are protected on land within the Ouachita National Forest and Hot Springs National Park. Chipped stone tools made from novaculite have been found on archeological sites as far away as Louisiana and Mississippi. Trade in stone connected Indian communities across great distances, especially during the Middle and Late Archaic period, from about 6000 to 1000 BC.



Notched pebble netweights show the importance of net fishing during the Middle Archaic period (Arkansas Archeological Survey).

Rich resources for food from game, fish, and plants drew people to the Ouachita River valley. During the Middle Archaic period, settlements along the river may have been year-round communities. Indians fishing with nets could harvest large quantities of fish, especially during the spring and early summer when catfish, gar, buffalo, and largemouth bass congregated for spawning in Arkansas rivers. Hickory nuts were a good source of protein and fats. Archeologists uncover anvil stones for processing nuts and quantities of nutshell preserved by charring on Archaic period sites in the Lake Ouachita region.

Early Settlers: Clovis and Dalton Culture

Based on finds of distinctive chipped stone spear points of the Clovis and Dalton styles, archeologists have documented the presence of small groups of people living in the Lake Ouachita region near the end of the Ice Age. Hunters using Dalton style points relied on deer as they adapted to a changing climate. The earliest artifacts from this area date to the Paleoindian period, about 11,500–10,500 BC. At this time, people across North America used spears tipped with Clovis points to hunt mammoth, mastodon, and bison.



Quartz Clovis point discovered during Blakely Mountain Dam construction (Arkansas Archeological Survey, Sargent Collection).

Archeological sites at Lake Ouachita are protected under federal historic preservation laws. Please do not dig into sites or remove artifacts.

For Further Reading

- Arkansas Archeological Survey
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