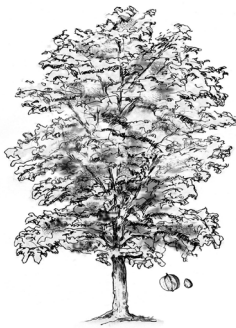


Rockhouse Cave, 8000-1200 BC: A Case Study

What is the Archaic Period?

American Indians' cultures differ based on the environment, the type of foods they ate, the tools they used, the sites they lived in, and what their communities looked like. By studying American Indians' cultures and ways of life and how they changed over time, archeologists identify cultural periods. A cultural period is a length of time when people share similar ways of life. In Arkansas, these cultural periods include the Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippi periods. The Archaic Period is a time between 8500 – 600 BC, when people ate similar foods, used similar tools, and lived in similar sites and communities.

What kind of food did Archaic people eat? How did they get their food?



A hickory tree and nut.

During the Ice Age, people hunted really big animals, like mastodon or mammoth. When the Ice Age ended and the Archaic Period began, the weather warmed up. All the big animals that once lived in Arkansas went extinct. So people changed the way they got food. Archaic Indians hunted deer, small mammals, and turkey, and they fished. The first Archaic Indians did not plant foods or have gardens. They gathered wild plant foods such as fruit, seeds, and nuts. It seems like it would be hard to be an Archaic Indian, but there were many plants and animals they could eat. They traveled to places where fruits were ripe, where nuts were ready to pick, or where it was best to fish. This allowed Archaic Indians to have diets of many different types of foods.

What kind of tools did Archaic Indians use?

Archaic Indians used spears and spear throwers (atlatls) to hunt deer and small mammals. Archeologists don't find ancient things made of materials like wood, because they rot easily. So they don't find the wood shafts of the spear. Instead, archeologists find large stone spear points that Archaic Indians attached to the end of wooden spears. They used stone to make many of their tools. Archaic Indians made and used stone knives. Once they killed an animal, they used the stone knives to butcher the animal and cut the meat.

They used deer skins to make some clothes, like shoes and robes. They used stone scrapers to soften the animal skins and stone knives to cut the leather. They made bone needles to sew the animal skin. They also made stone drills to make holes in wood and bone to make necklaces.



A fishing hook made from bone.

Archaic Indians ate a lot of nuts. They used hammerstones to break open nut shells. They used grinding stones to grind nuts and seeds into meal, similar to cornmeal, that could be made into dough. They made stone axes to cut down trees and adzes for other woodworking, such as canoe-making. They carved fish hooks out of bone and made fishing nets by tying stones to one edge of a net woven from plant fibers. The weights made one end of the net sink to the bottom of the river. The other end floated catching the fish that tried to swim through the net.



An atlatl (spear thrower) and spear used for hunting.



An adze for woodworking.

What did Archaic Indians' communities look like?

Archaic Indians lived in bands, or small groups of people related to each other. Most bands had 30 to 50 people living together. Young adults found husbands

and wives from neighboring bands. The leader of a band was the person with the most knowledge and skill. In this kind of community, everyone did the same work and was treated equally. This is called an egalitarian society.

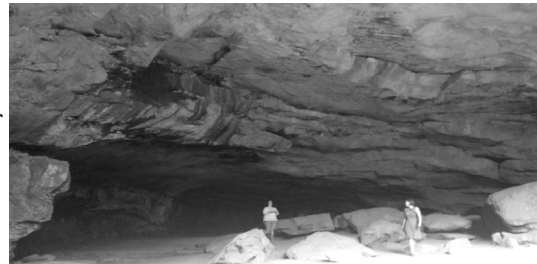
What types of sites did Archaic Indians create?

During the Archaic Period, people lived in base camps for a year or so, before moving to another place. There were no stores to buy food, tools, and clothes. Archaic Indians traveled around to find animals to hunt, plants to gather, and stones to make into tools. When they traveled, Archaic Indians stayed in special purpose sites near their base camp. Archaic people also had special places where they buried family and community members who died, much like the cemeteries we use today.

☐ **Base Camp:** The main place where people lived. A base camp is where people built their homes and did their day to day activities. Archaic Indians moved their base camps to new locations each year, but they usually built them along rivers and streams.

◆ **Special Purpose Site:** Special purpose sites are places where people stayed for a few days or a few weeks, while they hunted, butchered animals, gathered plant foods, or collected rocks to make tools. These sites are located near base camps in the uplands, forest edges, or river bottoms.

△ **Cemetery:** A cemetery is place where people who died were buried. Cemeteries were located in the river bottoms near the base camp. Archaic Indians buried their loved ones with some of the tools and objects they used during their lives, like spear points, hammer-stones, or drills.

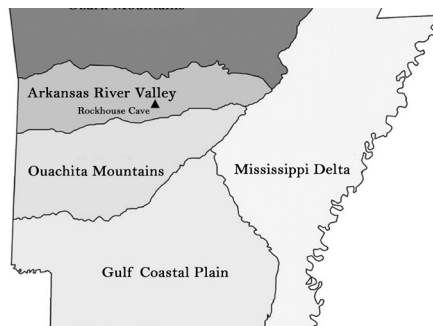


The inside of Rockhouse Cave. Photo by Jodi Barnes

What is Rockhouse Cave?

Rockhouse Cave is a special purpose site located in the uplands on top of Petit Jean Mountain. Petit Jean Mountain is part of the Ozark Mountain chain. The site is located south of the Arkansas River. Rockhouse Cave is a very large bluff shelter. Bluff shelters are shallow, cave-like openings formed in the rock of a mountain. Rockhouse Cave's floor is bigger than two basketball courts put together! Archaic Indians used Rockhouse Cave between 8000 and 1200 BC.

Archaic Indians camped in the bluff shelter while they hunted and gathered nuts, because it was dry. They cooked meals over a campfire. They also repaired and sharpened some of their tools. Archaic Indians also used Rock house Cave to store their nuts and seeds for the winter, since its dryness created an ideal environment for food storage. Because of this dryness, archeologists found artifacts that usually decay more quickly in damp soils, like seeds, baskets, and clothing. Indians who camped at Rockhouse Cave thousands of years later painted most of the images that you can still see on the walls, but Archaic Indians may have painted some of them.



Location of Rockhouse Cave in Arkansas.





On the walls and ceiling of Rockhouse Cave, Arkansas Indians drew a large number of rock art images, or pictographs, in red iron oxide pigment between 900 - 1600 AD. Images on Petit Jean Mountain include nested diamonds, concentric circles, rayed circles, and animal figures, such as snakes and fish. It also includes edible plants like corn, goosefoot, and young fiddlehead ferns that show the importance of these plants in the foodways of Arkansas Indians.

You can visit Rockhouse Cave in Petit Jean State Park

Learn more at: <https://archeology.uark.edu/ozarkbluffshelters/learn-more/visit-a-shelter/>



Left, a young fiddlehead fern; right, a goosefoot plant. Both pictographs on Petit Jean Mountain. Photo by George Sabo.

Nut Butter: A Gathering Recipe



Ingredients:

1 cup of pecans, walnuts, or hickory nuts

Instructions:

Using a mortar and pestle or a food processor, grind the nuts into a paste.

If it isn't sweet enough, add a little honey.

Use nut butter like you would use margarine, butter, or peanut butter.

Do not use acorns.