Archeological Parks

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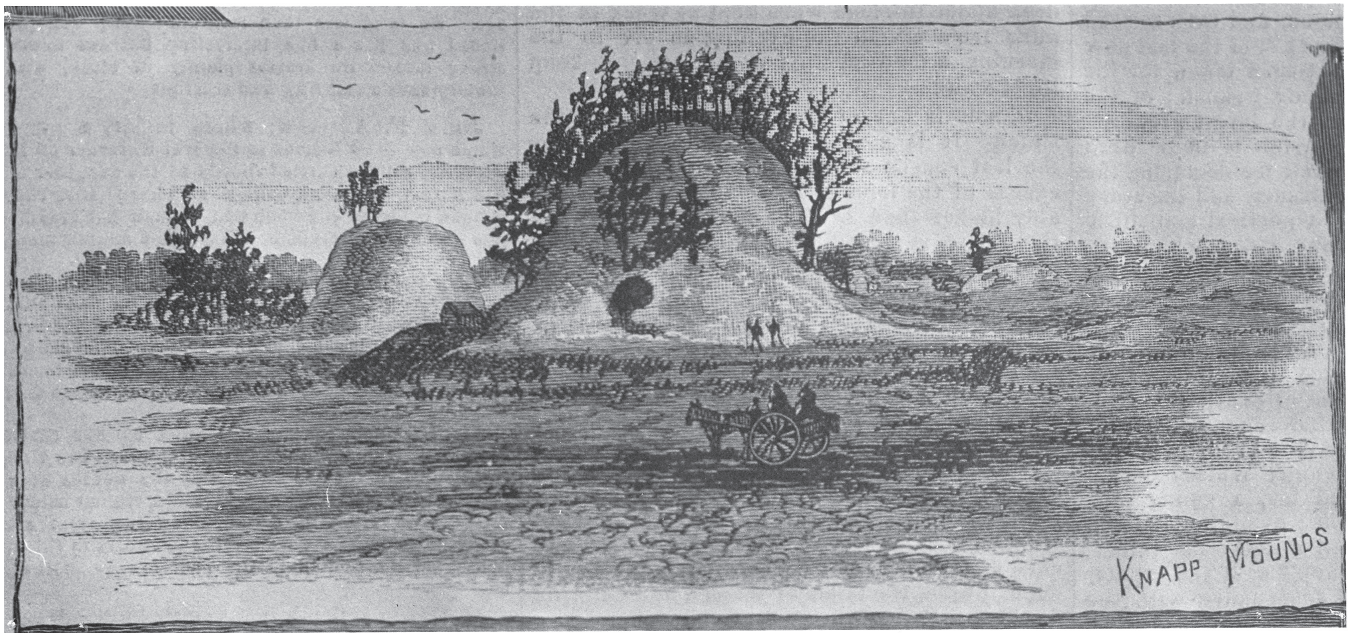


Do you want to visit an archeological site? It's easier than you might think, because some of the best archeological sites have been preserved as archeological parks that the public can visit and enjoy. Archeological parks not only help to preserve important sites, but also provide opportunities for archeological research and the sharing of information with students and the general public. See what they have to offer.

What Is an Archeological Park?

Archeological parks are archeological sites that have been preserved in a park setting and opened for public visitation. In reality, almost all large parks have archeological sites on them, but not all parks are archeological parks, which are specially devoted to the preservation and interpretation of a particular site. Most people in the eastern United States think of archeological parks as Native American mound sites because, in this region, mounds are the type of site most frequently preserved as archeological parks.

But other kinds of sites have also been preserved as archeological parks, such as the Native American pueblo ruins in the western U.S. and the geometric earthworks of the Ohio Valley, as well as historic sites such as early Euro-American or African-American town sites and Civil War battlefields.

Relatively few archeological sites are preserved as archeological parks. Those that are usually represent some of the larger, more visible, or more complex sites. Archeological parks are frequently managed by the Federal government through the National Park Service or by states through their state park systems, museum systems, and universities.

Development at archeological parks varies. Some have little more than trails and interpretive signs. Others have more extensive development, which can include museums or visitor centers with exhibits, educational programs, and special events.

What Does Archeology Contribute to an Archeological Park?

Archeological research at archeological parks provides a greater understanding of the lives of the people who built, lived at, or used the sites. In the case of prehistoric sites—such as Toltec Mounds near Little Rock—the original inhabitants or builders left no written records about the site and what it meant to them. By carefully studying the clues left in the soil, such as the remains of buildings or activity areas or cooking fires, as well as bits of broken tools and other objects, archeologists may learn many things about the original inhabitants. How many people lived at the site? What kinds of houses did they live in? What foods did they eat? Were they hunters, fishers, or farmers? Did they have special areas or structures for religious ceremonies? Did they have royal rulers?

A large, grass-covered, prehistoric mound may look impressive sitting in a field. We can marvel at what it must have taken to build it when people were limited to stone tools and baskets. But how much more meaningful it is to have a fuller picture of the lives of those people—to learn about not just their architectural abilities, but also their struggles and successes. In doing so, we can reach a fuller appreciation for the richness of their lives and our shared humanity.

What if written records do exist, as is the case with historic sites, such as the park at Washington, Arkansas? Archeology can still contribute much to the understanding of historic sites, because many of the common details of life are not recorded in public documents or journals or histories. Things that everyone in the community accepted as part of ordinary life may not have seemed worthy to record, but these same things may have changed drastically after 100 years or more. Consider that at one time, kitchens were separate buildings and horses were used for everyday transportation.

Further, some aspects of society may have been considered irrelevant or unimportant to those writing about their own times. Slaves' interactions with each other and struggles for survival, and women's management of households and children, were on the periphery of what men knew and thought important to write about. Today, archeological research can broaden our knowledge of the stories of these people "without history."

At archeological parks, the information that archeology contributes to the understanding of a site is shared with visitors, educators, and students through tours, exhibits, films, trail signs, festivals, and publications.

What Interests Do Archeological Park Serve?

Archeological sites that become parks receive a special level of protection to ensure that they will be preserved forever. That doesn't mean, however, that the sites are locked away, never to be seen. One of the great advantages of archeological parks is that everyone can visit them, sharing in the beauty, mystery, and knowledge of the special places they preserve. At the same time, different people have different interests in how an archeological park is used. Balancing those different interests requires thoughtful management on the part of park staff.

Preservation

The primary concern at an archeological park is preservation of the site. To many people, especially descendants, these sites may have a personal connection, representing sacred places that are symbols of their heritage. In addition, the community's recognition of the historical importance of a place allows everyone to share in the site's heritage.

Preservation of an archeological park may limit the activities that can be undertaken there. For example, sometimes the location of playground areas or picnic shelters might disturb the feeling of a site or its religious aspects, and so wouldn't be appropriate. Popularity of an area might erode or damage a site. Illegal collecting of artifacts and vandalism destroys the site and what can be learned about it.

Visitors can help preserve the special qualities of archeological parks by observing guidelines of behavior and respecting restrictions on activities and access to certain areas.

Research

Archeologists are interested in archeological parks because of what they can contribute to our knowledge about the past. Contrary to popular opinion, archeologists don't dig up sites to search for imagined treasures. Rather, they study the remains in the earth to uncover clues that reveal how people in the past lived.

Research at archeological parks always should be conducted with much care and forethought. Excavation destroys what it studies, so research plans must be specific and limited, preserving as much of the site as possible, restoring excavated areas when finished, and reporting on what was learned. The growing use of remote sensing equipment allows archeologists to focus their excavations on specific features, without disturbing other areas of the site.

Education

Knowledge gained through archeological research is shared with the public through a park's public education—or interpretive—program. Educators or interpreters at archeological parks develop programs for teachers and students, families, seniors, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, and visitors of all sorts. Programs may include slide shows and videos, guided tours, crafts classes, interpretive trail signs, and festivals, as well as exhibits and popular publications. A good education program can make a visit to an archeological park much more meaningful and fun.

Tourism

An increased interest in tourism to archeological parks—called Heritage Tourism—has been growing over the past few years, as people seek vacations that are not just recreational, but also provide authentic experiences and opportunities to broaden their knowledge. For example, guided tours of an area's archeological parks or participation in a professionally directed excavation at a park can provide new opportunities for tourists to a region.

As outlined above, people have differing interests in the use of archeological parks. Careful management of archeological parks is very important in order to balance these many interests with the preservation of the site for generations to come.

Where Can I Find Archeological Parks?

Archeological parks are located all over the United States. If we include in our definition historic parks that make use of archeology, then archeological parks can be found in every state. One doesn't have to go far afield, however, to find archeological parks. Not only are there important ones near Arkansas, but our state park system also has a number of very fine archeological parks.

We will begin with a brief description of several nearby archeological parks and conclude with a more detailed description of Arkansas's archeological parks. Keep in mind that the Native American builders of these prehistoric sites did not have the state boundaries we have today, so many ancient Arkansans may well have visited or participated in the activities at these sites.

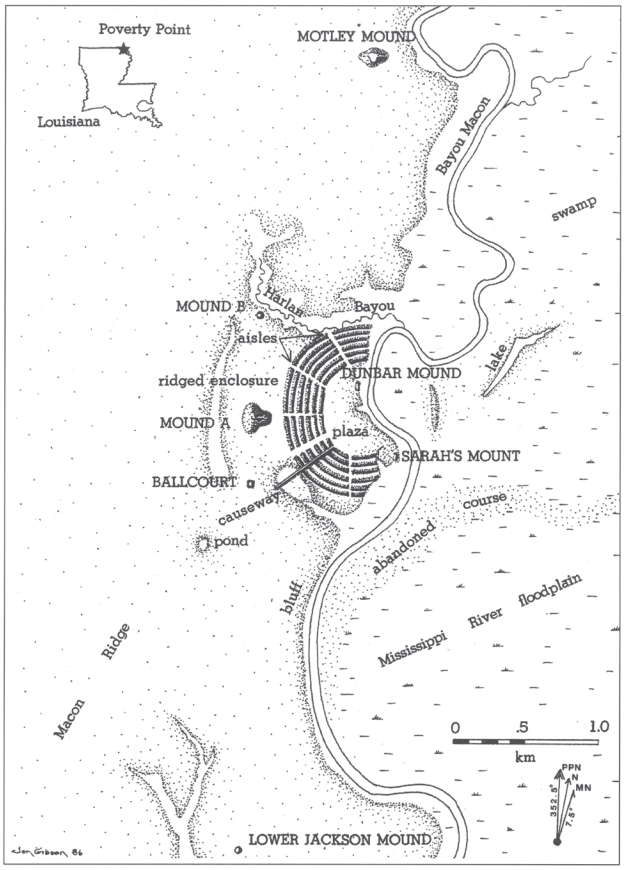
Cahokia, Illinois

Cahokia, located in Illinois, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, was the largest prehistoric city in North America north of Mexico. People lived at Cahokia from about A.D. 800–1300 during the period archeologists call the Mississippian. The city included mounds, plazas, temples, and a stockade, as well as neighborhoods and suburbs that covered some five square miles. It has been estimated that by A.D. 1100, as many as 15,000 people may have lived there.

Over 120 mounds were built at Cahokia, but the site is best known for Monks Mound (you can see it from Interstate 55/70), which covers 14 acres and rises to a height of 100 feet—the largest prehistoric earthen structure in the United States. Cahokia was an amazing capital of politics, religion, commerce and art in the heart of North America.

Poverty Point, Louisiana

This unique Archaic period mound site is located at Epps, Louisiana, about 30 miles south of Arkan-



Map of the Poverty Point site.

sas's southeast corner. The site consists of six concentric earth ridges that form a C-shape facing the wall of the Mississippi River floodplain and stretching nearly three-quarters of a mile at the widest arc. Several mounds are located in the area, the largest of which—Mound A—sits just outside the ridges and is thought by some to represent a bird. It stands more than 70 feet high, with a 640-foot wingspan.

The people who lived at Poverty Point, from about 1750–1350 B.C., conducted a lively trade in imported minerals and stones, including soapstone, galena, copper, and various cherts, and are known for the beautiful, polished tools and ornaments they made from these materials. Until recently, Poverty Point was the only Archaic period site known to have mounds, which had long been associated with the later Woodland and Mississippian periods. More Archaic mound sites have come to light in recent years (including one in southeastern Arkansas that is associated with the Poverty Point culture), but the Poverty Point site remains the largest and grandest of them all.

Spiro Mounds, Oklahoma

Nestled in a bend of the Arkansas River, the Spiro Mounds site is located only about 10 miles west of Fort Smith. From A.D. 900–1400, Spiro Mounds was a seat of political, religious, economic, and artistic life that may have served as a gateway for trade between the peoples of the Plains and the Southeast. The site covered over 100 acres and included a town and mound areas on both the river bottomlands and the upland ridges. The leaders of Spiro society displayed their wealth through burial rituals. Decorated ornaments, cups, and batons made of imported conch shell, copper, quartz and other exotic materials were included in the graves.

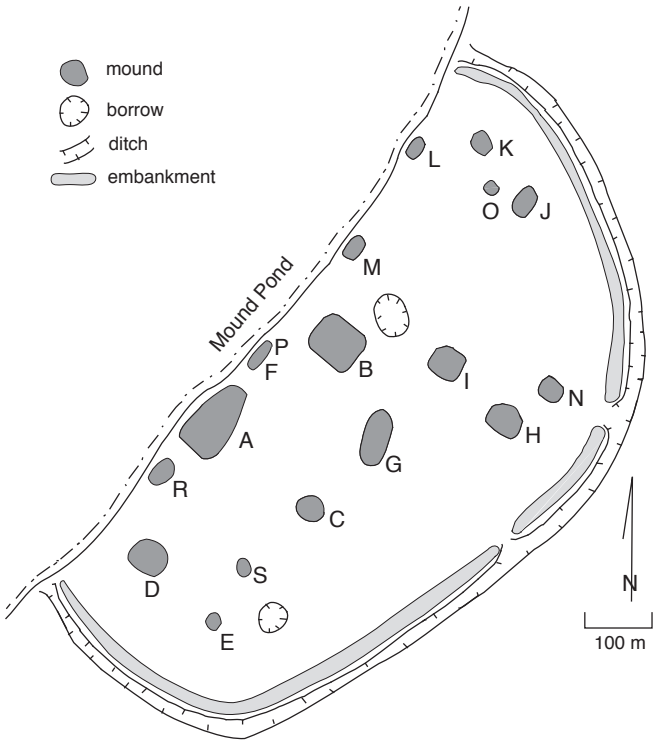
Sadly, in 1933, a group of treasure hunters leased the privately owned site and mined the largest mound for grave goods, removing hundreds of artifacts made of wood, cloth, copper, shell, pottery, basketry, and stone. No effort was made to observe or record the context in which the artifacts were found, and much information about the Spiro people was destroyed for all time. In order to prevent further destruction of Spiro and other Oklahoma sites, the state legislature passed an antiquities preservation law in 1936. Since then, scientific research has been conducted at the site by the Historical Society and state universities, and the largest mound has been reconstructed.

Chucalissa and Pinson Mounds, Tennessee

Just across the Mississippi River from West Memphis is Chucalissa, a Mississippian period village that was occupied from about A.D. 1000–1500. The site consists of a plaza around which were placed a large flat-topped temple mound and a series of smaller house mounds. The temple mound held a large building nearly 50 feet square that was supported by cypress posts 12–18 inches in diameter. The large

building on the temple mound and several smaller thatched-roof houses have been reconstructed by museum staff, providing a suggestion of what a Mississippian period village might have looked like.

About 90 miles northeast of Chucalissa, near the town of Jackson, is the unique, 400-acre Middle Woodland ceremonial center of Pinson Mounds. Dating about A.D. 1–500, this large and complex Middle Woodland site is without parallel. The site consists of at least 12 mounds, including the 72-foot tall Sauls Mound—the second-tallest mound in the country—several flat-topped mounds, which are more usually associated with Mississippian sites, and joined twin burial mounds. In addition, the site has a 16.5-acre circular earthwork, which is similar to the geometric earthworks of Ohio but unusual in the Southeast. Pottery found at Pinson Mounds shows that people from as far away as the Gulf Coast and the Tennessee River valley visited the site. Special items placed with the dead included freshwater pearls, a sheet of mica, a ground-stone pendant, and a pair of engraved bone dance rattles.



Map of the Toltec Mounds site.

Where Are Arkansas's Archeological Parks?

Virtually every state park in Arkansas includes archeological sites, even if they weren't the sole purpose for which the park was developed. These sites include ancient Native American mounds and rock art locations, early settler homesteads or towns, lumber or grist mills, and Civil War battlefields. Archeological research contributes much to the understanding of these sites and provides park staff with information to protect and interpret them.

In addition, Arkansas has archeological parks that were established specifically to preserve certain prehistoric and historic sites. Four of them are highlighted below.

Toltec Mounds State Park

Toltec Mounds, located southeast of Little Rock near the town of Scott, is a unique site of the Transitional Late Woodland/Mississippian period, which was built and used from about A.D. 700–1050 by a Native American cultural group now called the Plum Bayou people. The site originally consisted of a cluster of 18 mounds covering 100 acres; the two largest mounds measure 49 feet and 39 feet in height. Many of the smaller mounds have been worn down by agricultural practices, but markers assist visitors in finding their locations.

Located beside a lake, the site is enclosed on three sides by a ditch and earthen embankment. The builders used a standardized unit of measurement, in modern terms equal to 47.5 meters, to lay out the site. A number of the mounds, which were arranged around two rectangular plazas, appear to be placed to mark the sunrise and sunset on the solstices and equinoxes.

Probably no more than 50 people lived at the site at any one time. These were most likely the religious and social leaders of the community and their families. The rest of the community lived in small villages or farms in the surrounding countryside. The Plum

Bayou people hunted, fished, and gathered nuts and wild plants. They grew native seed plants and some corn. Their tools included axes, knives, drills, awls, and scrapers. They fashioned clay bowls and jars with flaring rims, decorating the vessels with incised lines or notches.

Research conducted at Toltec Mounds has provided modern Arkansans with a better understanding of the lives of the Plum Bayou people and brought to light their architectural accomplishments and knowledge of astronomy.

Parkin Archeological State Park

The Parkin site, located in Cross County in northeast Arkansas just west of Memphis, is representative of a period in Arkansas's past that bridges the time from prehistory to history. This large Native American town, spanning the years from A.D. 1100–1550, is especially important because many scholars believe it to be the town of Casqui visited by the expedition of Hernando de Soto in the summer of 1541.

The four written accounts of the de Soto expedition are important sources of information about the Native Americans living in the Southeast when the first Europeans arrived. When information from the de Soto chronicles is combined with that from scientific excavations, it is possible to tell a more detailed story of life in this Mississippian period community than either source would offer alone.

The strongest evidence for Parkin being the town of Casqui comes from that combination of clues. According to the de Soto accounts, at Casqui, the Spaniards erected a cross on the summit of the large mound; at Parkin, archeologists have uncovered the base of a large bald cypress post on the largest mound. Radiocarbon dating of the wood falls between 1515 and 1663, within the time of de Soto's visit and providing concrete support to the historical account. Other historic period finds include a brass bell and a sixteenth-century glass bead, which are the kinds of objects the Spaniards brought on their journey.

The town covers about 17 acres, and was once surrounded by a defensive ditch and palisade wall. Physical remains visible today include a large two-level mound and portions of the ditch. Agricultural fields, in which the townspeople grew corn, beans, squash, and other seed plants, were located outside the wall. Deer, fish, and other animals provided meat. During the Mississippian period, populations were large and there was competition for land and resources, so people protected themselves from raiders by enclosing their towns. Inside the palisade were the houses and granaries that supported life.

The visit by Hernando de Soto and the Spaniards changed life forever for the peoples of the New World and the Old World. Today, research at Parkin seeks to uncover the story of this ancient town thrust into history by unexpected visitors.

Arkansas Post National Memorial

Established as a trading post and later serving as a military outpost, frontier settlement, and territorial capital, Arkansas Post played an important role in the state's earliest history. For nearly 200 years, it served as an outpost for three nations—France, Spain, and the United States. Arkansas Post was moved several times during its history, but the park is located where it existed the longest, on the Arkansas River in Arkansas County, in the southeast part of the state near the town of Gillett.

The first Post was established in 1686 by Henri de Tonti as an Indian trading post near the Quapaw town of Osotouy. In the colonial period, the population of the small town was mostly Frenchmen with their Quapaw wives. But people of other nationalities and races were also residents, including a number of enslaved blacks among whom were skilled artisans and clerks.

The United States acquired Arkansas Post as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. By 1819 it became the territorial capital of Arkansas, which made it the seat of political life in the state and the first home of Arkansas's oldest newspaper, the *Arkansas Gazette*. In 1821, the capital was moved to Little Rock and the Post began a slow decline.

Today there are architectural footprints marking the locations of several buildings. Signs and a visitor center at the park headquarters provide information. Archeologists continue to study Arkansas Post and its environs. Work done in 1997 and 1998, during the Arkansas Archeological Society's summer Training Program, explored the part of the site thought to be the Quapaw town of Osotouy.

Historic Washington State Park

The nineteenth-century town of Washington has been preserved as a state park with many of its original buildings and landscape features intact. It is located in southwest Arkansas, just nine miles northwest of Hope, off Interstate 30.

Washington was established in 1824 as a county seat and served as a convenient stop for travelers on the Southwest Trail leading to Texas. It became a center for political and economic life in Hempstead County and served as the state's Confederate Capital during the Civil War. When the railroad bypassed the town in 1874, its importance declined and it remained largely unchanged. In the middle twentieth century, local residents, realizing its unique historic character, organized to preserve the town. The resulting state park was called Old Washington, but the name was later changed to Historic Washington State Park.

Because the town changed so little, evidence of its nineteenth-century history still lies in the yards and around the houses. Archeological research has been conducted at the park since 1980, exploring 12 of the properties, including the Sanders house kitchen, the Confederate Capitol, and the Block-Catts house, once owned by the town's most prosperous Jewish merchant. Studies have examined the townspeople's use of space, such as where outbuildings, detached kitchens, and walkways were placed 150 years ago. Thousands of artifacts from the 1800s have been recovered, including fragments of glass, dinnerware, buttons, and nails. Much of the dinnerware is decorated with transfer-print patterns, indicating the styles and scenes favored by the community. Some pieces are even marked with the name of the New Orleans importer from whom they were purchased.

Archeological research at Historic Washington State Park contributes much to the interpretation and reconstruction of the town and its buildings. In addition, it supplements what can be known about the town from written documents, providing a fuller picture of life in this early Arkansas community.

Educational Opportunities

Park interpreters at Arkansas's archeological parks invite teachers and students to visit them and learn first-hand about Arkansas's past. Guided tours, educational programs, festivals, and hands-on activities are offered by park interpreters throughout the year. Museums and visitor centers with exhibits are available at the parks.

Consider taking your class for a field trip to a nearby archeological park to enhance the students'

knowledge and appreciation of Arkansas history. *Always be sure to call the park in advance to make reservations for class visits so the park staff can best serve your students.*

Ideas for Classroom Activities

Research Prehistoric Archeological Parks: Have each student or team of students select a different archeological park to research and then prepare an exhibit or report. Illustrate mounds or other aboveground remains, as well as artifacts recovered from the sites. Describe what life was like for the people who lived at or used the site. Was the site used for people's homes or religious purposes? Summarize the archeological research and what was learned. Students can find information on the Internet and in magazine articles or encyclopedias.

Research Historic Archeological Parks: Students may prefer to study historic archeological parks, such as historic townsites or Civil War battlefields. Report on what archeology has added to the understanding of these sites. Compare the kinds of information that can be learned from historic sources (courthouse records, archives) with the kinds of information provided by archeological research. Compare Arkansas sites with similar ones in other states.

Compare and Contrast: Look for information on archeological sites in other areas of the world where people built mounds or earthworks, or constructed stone monuments (such as passage tombs in Ireland, standing stones in Italy, or megaliths in France).

Learn about the cultures who built them. How are they similar to or different from Native American examples?

Make a Collage: Gather pictures of different archeological parks from throughout the U.S. Make a collage of the pictures, or paste them in their proper regions on a map.

Build a Model: Study the layout of a mound site or historic town at an archeological park. Make a model of the site out of clay, cardboard, or other materials. Identify the different areas and how they were used.

Write a Story or Journal: Choose a historic or prehistoric archeological park and learn about it. Let students pretend they are living at the site during its most active period, and write a story about a day in their lives. Students should describe what they see as well as what they are doing. Or for a longer project, let students keep a daily journal about their lives at the site over one or more weeks.

Make a Craft: Study the kind of pottery or ceramics (plates and dishes) once used at a particular prehistoric or historic archeological park.

Try to make similar styles using clay. Decorate the prehistoric styles by copying the patterns in the clay with a pointed stick or paints. Decorate the historic styles by painting similar patterns or cutting patterns out of magazines and pasting to the pottery.

Take a Tour: Plan a visit to a nearby archeological park. Call the park office in advance to make reservations for a guided tour and to request any background materials and student activity sheets. Have the students research the site before their visit, and assign different topics to study while at the park. Have students write reports of their topics after the visit. Write thank-you notes to the park staff.

Think Like an Archeologist: Pretend your classroom is an archeological site. Which items do you think would survive hundreds or thousands of years; which items would not? Can you tell from what remains which items belonged to girls and which to boys? If only part of an object survived, would you be able to determine what it was used for? Discuss what an archeologist would learn about the class from the items that would survive. Would that tell the whole story?

Credits

The historic drawing used on the first page is from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, May 26, 1883. This illustration of the Knapp Mounds, now called Toltec Mounds, took considerable artistic licence. The watercolor depicting Hernando de Soto's men raising a cross on the mound at Casqui (Parkin) on page 6 is by Dan Kerlin.

Further Reading on Archeological Parks

In compiling the following list, we have tried to list publications intended for the general public rather than reports written for professional historians or archeologists. In some cases, however, technical research reports are the only publications available about the sites. Everything on this list can be acquired through Arkansas libraries, and many of the books can be purchased at the related archeological parks. Works published by the Arkansas Archeological Survey can also be purchased directly from the Survey by calling 479-575-3556.

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