

COMPLEXITY

1000–1541 CE

Mississippi Period

Towns and cities in Arkansas continued to grow during the Mississippi period and were organized into chiefdoms of thousands of people. Agriculture was practiced on a large scale; domesticated corn, beans, and squash were grown along with locally domesticated plants such as goosefoot, marsh elder, and sunflowers. People used stone, mussel shell, and bone tilling instruments to plant and care for large fields of crops. They made stone woodworking tools to clear land and obtain wood for fuel and construction.

Mississippian pottery was produced by artisans who made highly decorative vessels in a variety of forms for daily, ceremonial, and trade use. People also created art pieces on wood, stone, shell, and copper, as well as through weaving and basketmaking. Forms and designs on these items suggest distinct social identities and status differences and give us a glimpse of the religious beliefs of Native Americans in the southeastern US.



Illustration of shell gorget found in Greene County, by Rachel Tebbetts.

ENCOUNTERS

1541–1542 CE, then 1673 CE

In 1541, Hernando de Soto and his entrada crossed the Mississippi River into what is now Arkansas, encountering large Indigenous populations with complex social dynamics between the different chiefdoms. De Soto died soon after and his men left Arkansas in 1542. When French explorers Marquette and Jolliet met the Quapaw in 1673, they wrote about a population far

smaller than what the Spanish recorded in 1541. From archeological evidence, we see that people dispersed from large city centers into smaller towns during the late Mississippi period. Tree-ring data indicate long-term drought, if not broader climate change during this time, may have led to this change. However, there is no strong archeological or oral historical evidence from descendants to support those theories.

* BCE = Before Common Era, CE = Common Era

This brochure was created by the Arkansas Archeological Survey, based on *Ways of the Ancestors* by George Sabo III. Printing funded by the Arkansas Archeological Society's Bill Jordan Public Education Fund.

More information and resources, including the Gathering, Gardening, and Agriculture course, are available at archeology.uark.edu.



Modern Nations with treaty land in Arkansas

Caddo Nation: www.mycaddonation.com

Cherokee Nation: www.cherokee.org

Osage Nation: www.osagenation-nsn.gov

Quapaw Nation: www.quapawtribe.com

Tunica-Biloxi Tribe: www.tunicabiloxi.org

Modern Nations with postcolonial ties to Arkansas

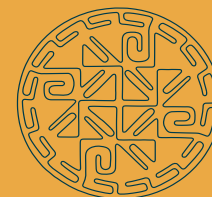
Choctaw Nation: www.chocatawnation.com

Chickasaw Nation: www.chickasaw.net

United Keetowah Band of Cherokee:
www.ukb-nsn.gov



Peoples of Arkansas Precontact to the Present



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SURVEY**

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ENTRY

11,500–8500 BCE*

Paleoindian Period

Hunter gatherers entered the region now known as Arkansas during the Ice Age. The climate was cooler and wetter than it is now and the landscape included tundra, grassland, and a mix of hardwood, deciduous, and boreal forests. These early people hunted large game, such as mammoths and mastodons, using stone spear points called Clovis points and spear throwers called atlatls. Although the archeological evidence from the few known Paleoindian sites consists mainly of



Drawing of crystal Clovis point dated to 14,000–10,500 years ago, ARAS collections; by Natalie Mulvihill.

stone tools, groups of people likely stayed in certain locations for months at a time and built shelters. Drastic climate changes around 10,000 BCE (the end of the Pleistocene) led to the modern (Holocene) climate. Ice Age animals went extinct. Deer, elk, and bison emerged as the large mammals on the landscape. Plant life in Arkansas and the surrounding region also changed in response to the warmer environment.

SETTLING IN

8500–1000 BCE

Archaic Period

In the early Holocene, people settled in small hamlets with houses for a few families. They domesticated crops and built trade and exchange networks across regions.

The Dalton culture is the earliest archeologically identified culture in this period.



Dalton artifact assemblage from the Chowning collection. Photo by Jared Pebworth.

Many of the distinctive Dalton spear points found across Arkansas were later reworked into other tools such as knives, drill bits, and awls. Regional styles of projectile points also developed, suggesting larger communities and the expression of social identities through objects. While these stone points have survived, most items made from organic materials—like clothing and food—have not.

Radiocarbon dates of plant remains from Arkansas bluff shelters link plant domestication to about 5000 BCE. The University of Arkansas Museum holds a seed bag woven from native grasses that dates to nearly 2,000 years ago and still contains stored seeds.



Woodland period woven seed bag, UA Museum collection. Photo by David Dye (University of Memphis).

People began building earthen mounds during the Archaic period. Arkansas's earliest dates to 1000 BCE. Nearby in Louisiana, the Poverty Point site dates to about 1250 BCE and is a large mound complex built by the people of the Poverty Point culture.

EXPANDING

1000 BCE–1000 CE*

Woodland Period

Over this 2,000-year period, people in Arkansas moved from small villages into larger towns. They settled new areas, gardened on a larger scale, continued domesticating native plants, and adopted maize agriculture from Central America. They still gathered wild plants such as nuts, seeds, and berries.



Painting of Early Woodland people building a house; by Rachel Tebbetts.

The first evidence of pottery in southwest Arkansas dates to about 1000 BCE. Regional decorative styles help archeologists understand how people expressed membership in various communities.



Middle Woodland ceramics from Helena and Red Hill mound sites, illustrating zone stamps; by Rachel Tebbetts.

Around 600 CE, people adopted the bow and arrow, increasing hunting efficiency. Arrow points are much smaller than spear points and vary in form across communities and regions. Based on the type, variety, and distribution of artifacts, personal adornments, and village layouts preserved in the archeological record, it appears that people in Arkansas at this time had access to the larger southeastern US through trade networks and lived in a relatively equal society.