

PREHISTORIC INDIANS OF INDIANA

Paleoindians:

Paleoindians are the first known people who lived in the Americas, including Indiana. They lived here during the last stages of the last glacial advance, or ice age, and the early part of a changing environment and climate that began to look like the one we now have in modern times. These people occupied the area now known as Indiana some 12,000 years ago, and lasted until about 10,000 years ago.

These early peoples probably lived in small groups of related individuals who moved around a lot, hunting large game animals, including some now extinct, such as the Mastodon, a large elephant-like creature. They also relied upon the gathering of wild plants to eat for their survival. Their population was very low.

The Paleoindians had very well-made stone tools, made out of a type of stone archaeologists call chert, which is a fine-grained rock that breaks a little like glass when hit by hard materials like another rock or a piece of deer antler. The tools they made by chipping, flintknapping, and flaking included long spearpoints, cutting and scraping implements, and engraving items. Some of their spear and piercing tools are called Clovis, Cumberland, Quad, Plainview, Hi-Lo, and Agate Basin points.

Evidence of these peoples is often found in Indiana on land near water sources like major rivers and springs, and where chert is found. Little is known about the Paleoindians since they moved around a lot and did not occupy any one place for a very long time. Therefore, they did not leave behind much evidence of their lives in any one place.

Archaic Indians:

American Indians known as the Archaic peoples lived here for a long time: some 6-7,000 years. Although these people did change over time, increasing in population and using new tool types and food preparation techniques, they did share certain general characteristics. These included new types of spear points and knives, with various types of notches and stems for hafting to wooden handles and shafts. Some of the projectile point types of the Archaic Period are called Kirk, Thebes, MacCorkle, LeCroy, Faulkner, Godar, Karnak, Matanzas, Brewerton, Riverton, and Terminal Archaic Barbed points.

They also used ground stone tools such as stone axes, woodworking tools, and grinding stones. The grinding stones were used to pound, crush, and grind wild nuts, berries, seeds, and other plant foods. They were hunters and gatherers of wild plants and animals, and moved around in their natural environments by season, often scheduling their movements to coincide with the appearance of foods like nuts, fish, deer, and wild seeds. Over time, they became very selective in what kind of resource they were pursuing.

During the Archaic Period, the spearthrower was used. This consisted of a shaft with a handle, weighted for balance with a ground and smoothed stone, and a hook on the end. A spear was fitted onto the hook, and was thrown with the spearthrower shaft.

Towards the end of the Archaic, more evidence of mortuary activities is found, including human

burials with a red pigment coloring remains or grave goods. Burial mounds appear. During the Archaic, the cultures became more different from one another, and more types of artifacts were used. Their settlements became more permanent. One type of settlement was along large rivers, where they discarded large amounts of mussel shells. These sites are called shell middens or "mounds," although they are not really constructed, burial mounds. The general Archaic period ended at about 1,500 B.C., although some Terminal Archaic peoples lived until 700 B.C.

Woodland Peoples:

During the Woodland Period, a number of new cultural characteristics appear. A notable event was the appearance and use of ceramics and pottery vessels. Another significant occurrence was the use and increase of horticulture. A remarkable feature of some Woodland sites is earthen mounds and earthworks, such as embankments. The Woodland peoples persisted for over 1,500 years in Indiana.

During the early portion of the Woodland Period, the pottery was thick and heavy. One early Woodland culture called the Adena people had elaborate mortuary rituals, including log tombs beneath earthen mounds. Projectile points during this time included Adena, Kramer, Dickson, and Gary Contracting Stemmed types.

A little later in time, in the Middle Woodland, there were also elaborate burial rituals, but also long-range trade of exotic goods like mica, marine shells, copper, obsidian, copper axes, drilled wolf and bear teeth, and other goods from region to region throughout the Eastern Woodlands area of North America. Some of these groups were called Hopewell peoples. Their ceramics had all kinds of incised and stamped decorations. During this time, the Woodland Indians were likely organized into groups we might recognize as what we today call tribes. Projectile points from the Middle Woodland include Snyders, Lowe Flared Base, Steuben, Chesser, and Baker's Creek.

The latter part of the Woodland Period is called Late Woodland. In Late Woodland, two important events occur. One is the first appearance of agriculture; that is, intensive cultivation and modification of crops such as corn and squash. Another important occurrence is the appearance of the bow and arrow. Prior to this time, most of the chipped stone tools were either spearheads, knives, engraving tools, or scrapers. In Late Woodland, however, small, triangular points occur which are true arrowheads. One type of these arrowheads is called Madison. Other point types are termed Jack's Reef Pentagonal and Racoon Corner Notched. Settlement during the Late Woodland time changed from the earlier more permanent and nucleated villages to a pattern of smaller sites dispersed more over the landscape. In some regions of the state, Woodland groups may have persisted almost until historic times, although in general, the Woodland Period ends at 1,000 A.D.

Mississippian Period:

The Mississippian peoples in Indiana lived in some cases almost until contact with Early European explorers, missionaries, soldiers, and traders. They lived from about 1,000 A.D. until possibly as late as 1650 A.D. A noticeable change during this period is the nucleation of some peoples into large settlements akin to "towns," such as at the Angel Mounds site near Evansville, Indiana. These towns had large public areas such as plazas and platform mounds--like truncated or flat-topped pyramids--where influential or important public individuals lived or conducted rituals. Thus, there was social stratification and ranking of individuals in Mississippian societies. There were probably chiefs and religious leaders. The towns were supported by the harvesting of large agricultural fields

growing corn, beans, and squash. People living in sites such as these are termed Middle Mississippian.

Notable artifacts indicating Mississippian settlements include large, chipped stone hoes, and pottery bowls and jars tempered with crushed shell. Straps, loops, and handles for these containers characterize this time period as well. Stone tools include point types known as Madison, Nodena, and Cahokia, and other implements such as mortars, pestles, pendants, beads, anvils, abraders, and other items.

Another less elaborate type of Mississippian society called Upper Mississippian was present in the state, with people living in hamlets and villages. Many of these people lived in northern and southeastern Indiana. They also grew and harvested maize, beans, and squash. One group to the southeast was called Fort Ancient, and lots of shell-tempered vessels with straps are found at these sites. In northern Indiana, incised shell-tempered pottery fragments are found on Upper Mississippian sites that are often located near the beds or former beds of lakes.

For further information, contact:

Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology
402 W. Washington Street, Room W274
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2739
Phone: 317/232-1646
Fax: 317/232-0693
www.IN.gov/dnr/historic ; dhpa@dnr.IN.gov

This product has been financed with federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior and administered by the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indiana Department of Natural Resources. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program activity or facility operated by a recipient of federal assistance should write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.



3/10/04