

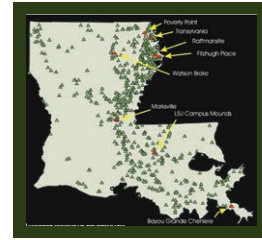
Native Americans have lived in what is now Louisiana for at least 12,000 years. They adapted to major climatic and social changes with modifications to tools and ornaments made of wood and other plant materials, as well as stone, bone, shell, and clay. Aspects of social life and religion were also captured in the form and decoration of both utilitarian and ceremonial artifacts. The organic artifacts have long since disappeared, but the more durable materials remain to reflect the lifestyles—and the artistry—of Louisiana's first settlers.

Another durable reflection of prehistoric Native American societies is the public architecture that remains—the earthen mounds that provided the focus for social, political, and religious life. Like artifacts, mound shape and size changed through time; mound function and the meanings the mounds had in the social landscape of these peoples changed as well. Archaeologists study the shape, size, and construction history of mounds in an attempt to read the meaning in these monuments.

This exhibit is designed to provide a glimpse of lifeways in the prehistoric past in Louisiana. It is composed of examples of the durable objects used in everyday life, along with some information on the organic items—everything from houses to baskets—that have disappeared. The discussion of mounds highlights the sacred landscapes that gave living its breadth in the past.

### LOUISIANA ANCIENT MOUNDS TRAIL

There are over 700 known mound sites in Louisiana, a testimony to the vigor and industry of the societies that lived in Louisiana in the past. In order to enhance public appreciation of the mounds, the Louisiana Ancient Mounds Heritage Area and Trails Commission has created the Louisiana Ancient Mounds Driving Trail. The Trail consists of 39 mound sites in northeast Louisiana that can be seen from roadways. Each mound site is marked by a historic marker that provides information about the site. More information can be found in the Trail Guide, available from the Louisiana Division of Archaeology or on the internet at <http://www.crt.state.la.us/archaeology/homepage/>.



Location of mounds in Louisiana, those highlighted are discussed in the text of this display. Image courtesy of Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

# ANCIENT MOUNDS AND ARTIFACTS

## Durable Reflections of Transitory Societies

### Radiocarbon Dating

Anything organic—anything that breathes in the naturally occurring radioactive carbon in the air or water—can be radiocarbon dated. Dates are reported as (for example) 6570 +/- 80 B.P. The B.P. stands for "Before Present," the +/- term is the range of error on either side of the date, and the "6570" is the number of years "before present," which by the standards set when the technique was developed, is 1950. Over the years, scientists have learned that a number of corrections and calibrations are necessary to translate these "raw" counts of remaining radioactive carbon to B.C. and A.D. dates. One of the most important calibrations is with tree rings, which, it turns out, are more accurate than radiocarbon dating! Dates throughout this exhibit are corrected and calibrated.

### LOUISIANA'S PREHISTORIC CULTURES

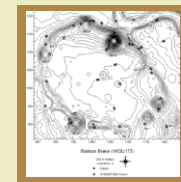
The actual names of prehistoric societies in Louisiana are not known. Therefore, we can only refer to prehistoric "cultures" by somewhat arbitrary names that archaeologists apply. These are Paleoindian, Archaic, Poverty Point, Tchefuncte, Markville, Troyville, Coles Creek, and Plaquemine/Mississippian. The Plaquemine/Mississippian cultures are the immediate predecessors of historically known tribes.

**Paleoindian.** Little is known of Louisiana's Paleoindian (10,000-8,000 B.C.) cultures. Stone tools are generally all that remains. No known mounds are known for Paleoindian cultures.

### LOUISIANA MOUNDS 6000 B.C. - A.D. 500

**Archaic.** The earliest dated mounds in the U.S. are in Louisiana. These were constructed by Archaic cultures sometime around 6000 B.C. The LSU Mounds, though younger (4000 B.C.), closely resemble those earliest mounds.

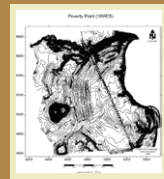
Archaic mound sites became more elaborate through time. The Watson Brake Site (5400 B.C.) is a set of 11 mounds tied together by an embankment. These encircle a 200-yard plaza, possibly used for ritual performances and social dancing. As at other Archaic mound sites, no burials have been found. Artifacts include beads, and the drills to make them, as well as dart points and square-based-clay objects.



The Watson Brake site. Image courtesy of Dr. Joe Saunders, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Geoscience, University of Louisiana at Monroe.

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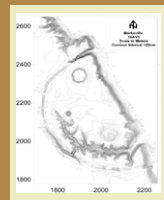
**Poverty Point.** The Poverty Point site represents the climax of Archaic mound building. Constructed between 1600 and 1500 B.C., the site contains six concentric earthen rings, a 600-yard central plaza, and the third largest mound in the United States. A staggering quantity of flint points, drills, paper beads, and other objects have been recovered from the site. Many were made of exotic materials. Copper was traded in from as far away as the Great Lakes; stone was imported from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Georgia. Archaeologists still debate what kind of society had so much surplus labor and wealth so early in prehistory.



The Poverty Point site. Image courtesy of Dr. Erik Riddick, Department of Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis.

**Tchefuncte.** For unknown reasons, the Poverty Point site was abandoned sometime after 1000 B.C. The complex trade network associated with the site collapsed. The Tchefuncte culture that followed did not build mounds until the very end of the culture, when it was influenced by a loosely integrated politico-religious system called "Hopewell," which connected Southeastern societies by 100 B.C.

**Markville.** This influence resulted in the Markville culture, the hallmark of which is the burial mound. These conical burial mounds are often surrounded by embankments. The burial mounds contain evidence of the resurgence of long-distance trade. They contain beautifully crafted platform pipes, musical pan pipes, and ear spoons (earrings), often made of exotic materials. Burnished pottery often incised with bird iconography is also found. The scroll design used throughout this exhibit is another Markville design, though the meaning of this motif is unclear.

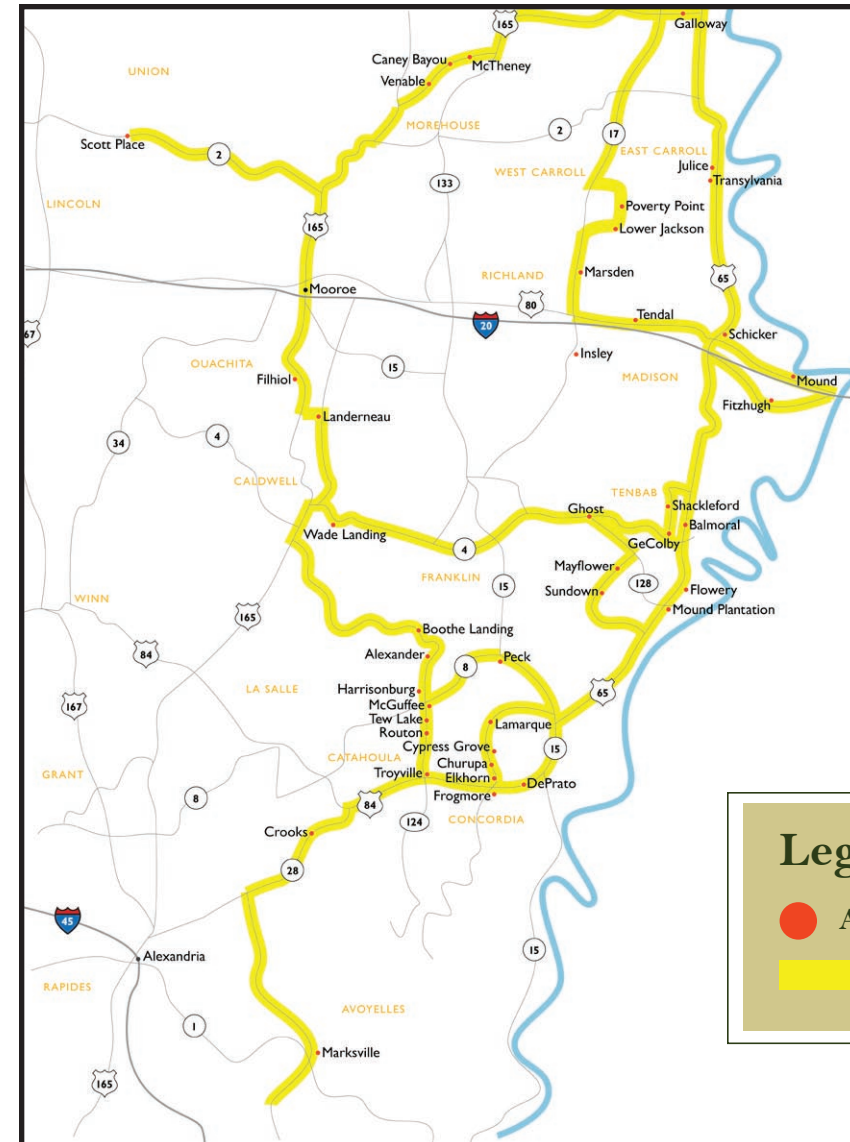


The Markville site. Image courtesy of Dr. Chip McGrew, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Geology and Anthropology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**Troyville.** The Markville culture gradually disappeared, and by A.D. 500, a new culture called Troyville is defined. Changes in pottery and other artifacts indicate influences from eastern cultures, especially from panhandle Florida. Instead of burial mounds, public life was dominated by low flat-topped mounds, which are believed to have functioned as stages for public rituals. These mounds also became more elaborate as sociopolitical roles developed and political positions became inherited.



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**Legend**

- Ancient Mound Markers
- Ancient Mounds Trail

Blowup of Map on Introduction Panel