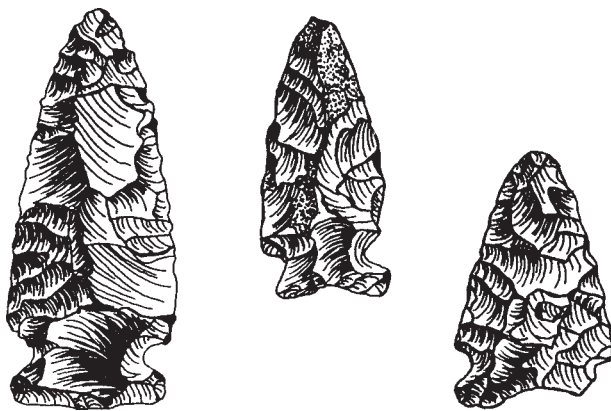


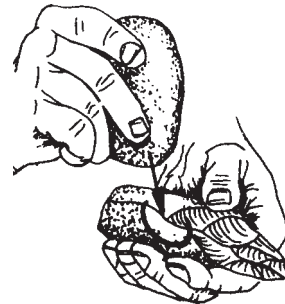
ARCHAIC PERIOD

THE ARCHAIC PERIOD in Iowa refers to prehistoric remains that occur after those of the Paleo-Indian period and between 10,000 and 3,000 years ago. Archaic materials have been found widely scattered across the state as surface discoveries and at an increasing number of excavated archaeological sites. The most characteristic artifacts of the Archaic are projectile points, especially medium-sized, triangular-shaped points, often with a concave base and notches on each side to facilitate hafting them to the shaft. Frequently both the base and notches have been ground (dulled) so that the material used to bind them would not be cut by a sharp edge. Within this category there is considerable variation in points across the state. Other typical chipped stone artifacts include several different forms of scrapers, ovoid blades, drills and notched flakes.

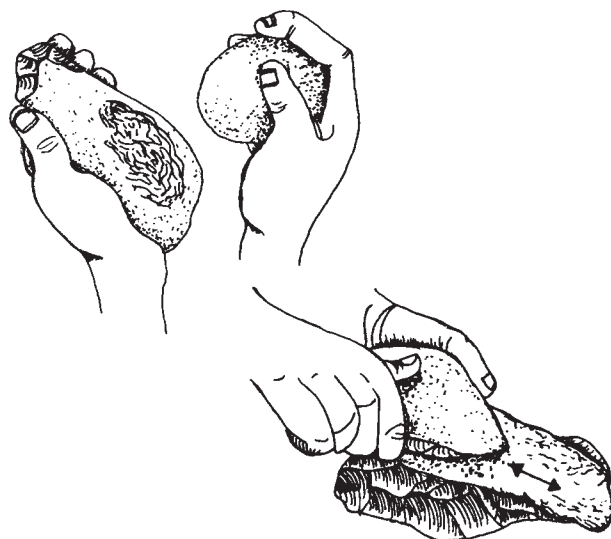


Side-notched points from Horizons I and II at the Cherokee Sewer site

A new category of stone artifact also makes its appearance in Iowa during this time. These are ground stone tools manufactured by pecking and abrading rather than by chipping. These processes allowed for the use of harder, less easily worked stone such as granite and quartzite made into tools for grinding, crushing and chopping. Typical ground stone tools from the Iowa Archaic include abraders, axes, manos and metates. Manos were stones used to grind seeds and nuts by crushing or rubbing them against a stone base called a metate.



Flint and chert were worked into a variety of tools by chipping.



Techniques of pecking and grinding were used to shape harder, less easily worked stone

One type of ground stone artifact found in Archaic sites in the eastern part of the state is important because it suggests the invention of a new hunting technique. This was the bannerstone, a heavy, polished stone artifact usually perforated and made into a variety of shapes. Some bannerstones are wing-shaped while others suggest the form of a boat, bird or animal. Many archaeologists believe that these may have been used as weights on the “atlatl” or spear thrower. The atlatl was a composite tool usually consisting of a wooden shaft about two feet long, fitted with a hook of antler at one end and a handle at the other. Perforated shell weights or bannerstone weights would also have been fitted onto the wooden shaft. By using an atlatl, Archaic hunters would have been able to throw their spears further and with greater force than before.

The “atlatl” or spear thrower allowed Archaic hunters to project their weapons further and with greater force.



The t-shaped, chipped stone drill is a new tool first found at Archaic sites.

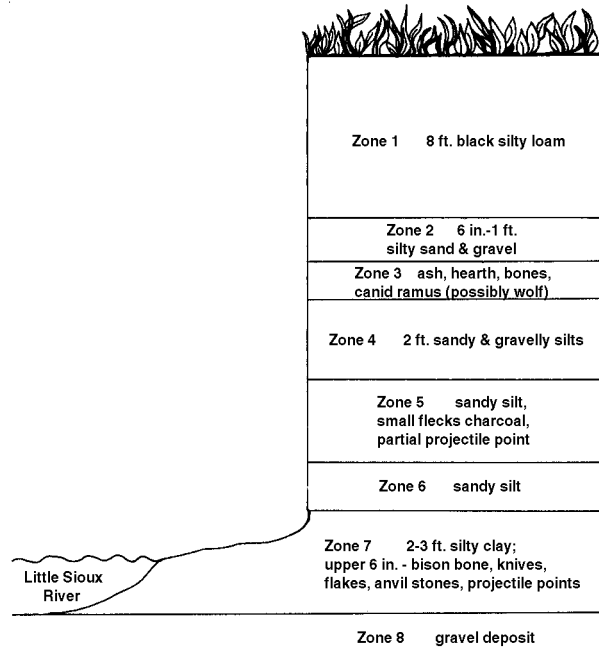
A number of bone artifacts were also made by Archaic peoples. Bone awls, probably used for a variety of tasks such as piercing skins or working basket fibers, are found. Bone scraping tools are known. And, at the

Cherokee Sewer site in Cherokee County, a whistle made from the hollow bone of a bird was discovered. It is believed to be the earliest artifact of its kind in North America. We also know that it was during the Archaic period that people in North America began to hammer chunks of raw copper into a variety of artifacts. Most of this copper was acquired from deposits in the Great Lakes region and then traded widely throughout eastern North America. Copper pins were found at the Olin site and at the Turkey River mounds in eastern Iowa, and a socketed copper point was found in Dickinson County. All of these materials may have been traded into Iowa.



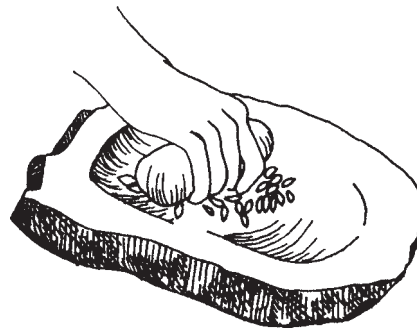
A bird bone whistle from the Cherokee Sewer site.

A number of excavated sites in Iowa, including the Cherokee Sewer site and the Simonsen site in Cherokee County, and a site near Pisgah in Harrison County, have been interpreted as places where bison were killed by Archaic hunters. In the lowest level excavated at the Simonsen site, numerous bison bones were found, suggesting that Archaic hunters killed and butchered at least 25 animals. Hunting of large game was thus an important part of the economy. Nevertheless, as is the case with Archaic sites outside Iowa, there is evidence that smaller animals were becoming increasingly important. Excavations at sites such as Sand Run Slough, Gast Spring, and 13MC15 in southeastern Iowa have produced middens, or garbage heaps, containing the remains of deer, elk, smaller mammals, fish, turtle, bird, and shellfish. There was also a growing reliance on plants, especially wild seeds and nuts. At Simonsen and the Cherokee Sewer site hackberry seeds were recovered and at the latter site, the remains of goosefoot and hickory nuts were also present. At Sand Run Slough, identified plants include walnuts, hickory nuts, acorns, ragweed, sunflower, goosefoot, marshelder and wild rice.



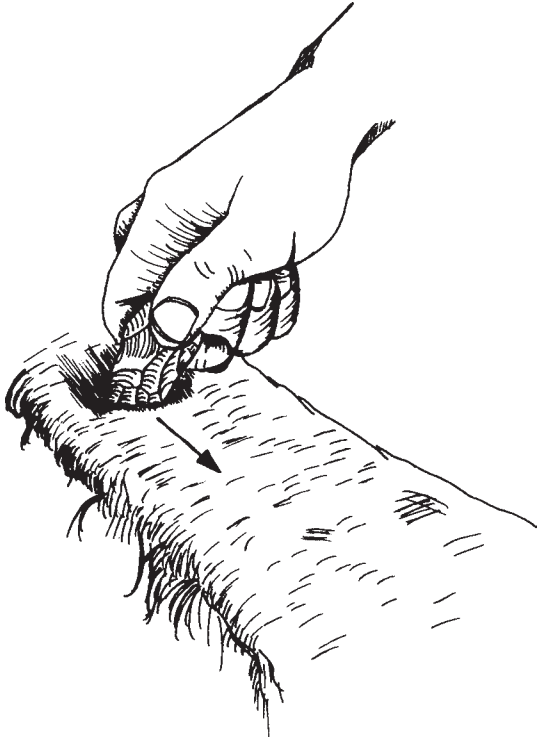
A profile of the Simonsen site shows how the cultural layers were found stratified, one over the other. The oldest layers are at the bottom, the youngest (most recent) occur above.

Because of the larger number of excavated sites, we know a good deal more about the Archaic way of life than we did about that of the Paleo-Indian period. A number of sites such as Lungren and Hill in Mills County, the Ochevedan site in Osceola County and the Soldow site in Humboldt County, appear to represent the remains of small campsites. Here, artifacts, broken animals bones and flint chips were found intermingled and surrounding hearths where small groups of Archaic peoples camped. The presence of flint chips (chipping waste from the manufacture of stone tools) suggests that stone artifacts were made and repaired at the camp. Many of the artifacts from the Cherokee Sewer site were manufactured of stone that comes from some distance away. This suggests that chunks of stone were brought from the source



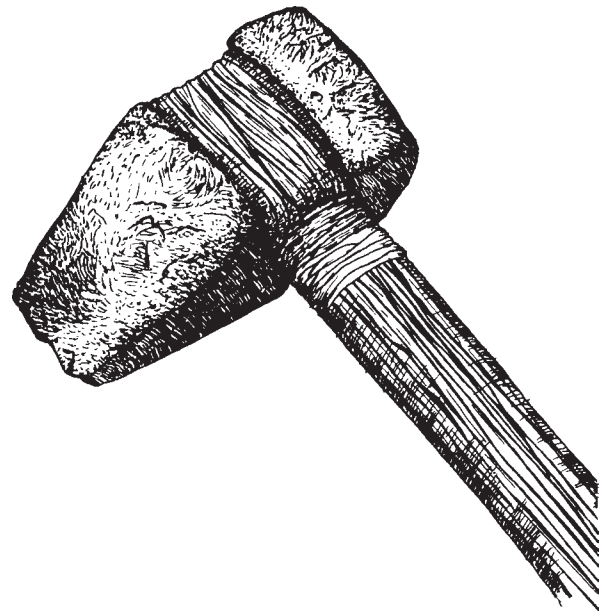
Nuts and seeds were ground by Archaic peoples using a mano and metate.

to the camp and then manufactured into tools. The majority of the artifacts from these camps are stone and bone tools for butchering meat and dressing hides, two important activities to Archaic peoples. Since pottery is unknown in Archaic sites, it is probable that some cooking was carried out by heating stones in the hearth and dropping them into skin bags, tightly woven baskets, or hide-lined pits filled with water. Meat or perhaps roots or tubers were then added to the containers and cooked in the hot water. Large quantities of fire-cracked rocks, roasting pits, hearths, and earth ovens indicate a variety of heating and cooking practices among Archaic peoples.



Animal hides were scraped in the preparation of clothing

At 13MC15, several oval-shaped structures and sixty, large earth ovens were revealed. Structures were defined by the concentration of artifacts and other debris. Elsewhere we have more limited evidence of the type of houses that were built. The Archaic pattern of residence would most likely have been migratory with small groups of families moving about as the seasons changed and as different food resources became available. This would have necessitated some type of temporary structure. Perhaps a dwelling consisting of a wooden or bone frame covered with skins or mats would have been adequate. We certainly know that hide and wood-working tools were available to Archaic people. Clothing was probably made of sewn hides or woven plant fabrics. Bone or copper matting needles may have been used. As with Paleo-Indian peoples, social groups would probably have remained small, perhaps consisting of a few families who cooperated with one another particularly in food-getting activities. We suspect that the overall population level in Iowa towards the end of the Archaic had increased over Paleo-Indian times.



Stone axes, grooved for hafting a wooden handle, first appear at Archaic sites.

We know something about the burial customs of Archaic people as a result of excavations at a number of sites. At Turin in Monona County, four burials were discovered consisting of an adult male, an adolescent, a child and an infant. All were found in a flexed position, their knees raised to their chest, and lying on their side. The adolescent had been placed in a shallow grave and red ochre (a powdered form of iron oxide) had been sprinkled over the body. Placed with this individual was a necklace of shell beads (perhaps a symbol of status) and a side-notched projectile point similar to those from the Simonsen site 40 miles away. In the prehistoric world the dead were often covered with red ochre, for what reasons we can only guess. The burial of the young person at Turin was not unlike the burial of people in Europe or the Near East who lived during the same time period. At later Archaic sites including the Lewis Central School site in Pottawattamie County and the Turkey River mounds communal burials continued. At Sand Run Slough West one pit appeared to contain the remains of a deliberately buried dog. All of these sites indicate that Archaic people took care in the disposal of their dead, placing with them personal and, perhaps to them, valuable items.

The Archaic of Iowa suggests a general affinity with sites on a similar time level elsewhere in North America. Several of the western Iowa sites with Archaic materials, particularly the Hill, Simonsen and Cherokee Sewer sites, have been compared to other Plains Archaic sites like the Logan Creek site in eastern Nebraska. Marshall McKusick, in *Men of Ancient Iowa*, suggested grouping all of these into the "Logan Creek Complex" (a complex being a group of sites which have the same range of tool types). This complex consists of both kill sites and small campsites. Triangular, side-notched projectile points, ovoid blades, and a variety of scrapers including notched end scrapers are characteristic finds. A number of



A copper awl, one of a number of copper objects known from Iowa sites, may be a link to the Old Copper Complex

ground stone tools also occur at Logan Creek, Hill and the Cherokee Sewer site. Other excavated sites with similar types would include the Lungren site, Turin, Ochevedan and the site near Pisgah. Similar materials have been found as surface discoveries at a site on the Keg Creek floodplain in Humboldt County. In addition to a small number of Paleo-Indian type projectile points, this site produced Archaic-type, side-notched points and side-notched end scrapers. Similar artifacts have been reported from surface collections in the central Des Moines valley.

Several Late Archaic complexes in eastern Iowa have also been suggested based on specific types of projectile points and associated chipped stone artifacts. These are believed similar to artifact complexes defined in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Discoveries in Iowa of side-notched projectile points like the Osceola type and copper artifacts compare favorably with material from the Old Copper Complex of Wis-

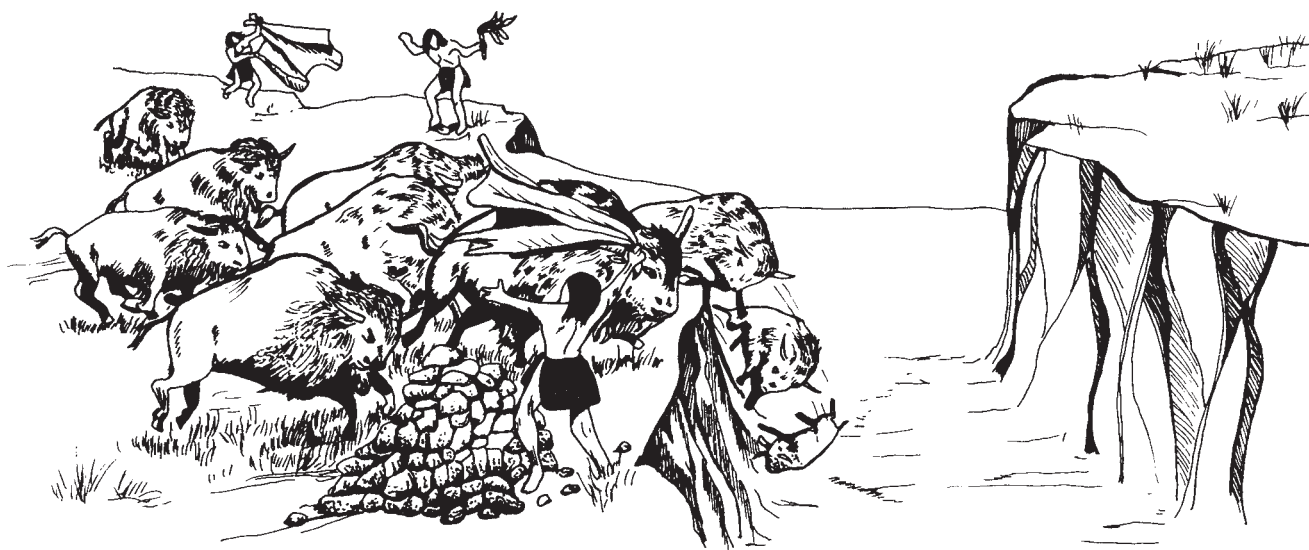
consin. An intriguing example is the Olin site on the Wapsipinicon River in Jones County. Here, dredging operations many years ago recovered faunal remains of bison, beaver and caribou together with a copper pin and two chipped stone, side-notched points from a depth of 35 feet.

A thousand years ago, people in parts of Iowa were adopting a number of innovations that mark changes in the fabric of native culture. Among these was the deliberate cultivation of certain plants, a stepping stone on the way to farming. At the Gast Spring site cultivated squash, little barley, and goose-foot were discovered in deposits dated to 1000–800 BC. So far, this is the oldest known occurrence of cultivated little barley in the Midwest.

Lynn Marie Alex, Revised 2002

Illustrations by Mary Slattery

Layout by Valerie Johnson



A bison jump—Archaic people killed large numbers of bison by stampeding them over cliffs. Men and women lined up to form a V-shaped trap into which the bison were driven. Shouting and waving blankets and firebrands, the hunters sent the terrified animals over the cliff edge to their deaths at the foot of the jump.