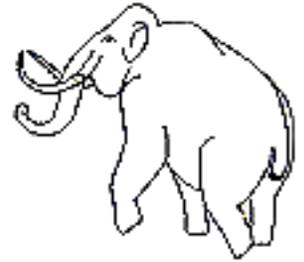


Native American History in the Mississippi Headwaters Region

The Paleo-Indian Tradition (10,000 - 8,000 B.C.)

People first moved into the Headwaters Region about 12,000 years ago. These people, known to archaeologists as Paleo-Indians, followed the mammoths, mastodons, and giant bison that migrated into the area after the retreat of the glaciers. Also known as "Big Game Hunters" these people used long, thin, "fluted" spear points that were ideally suited for piercing the tough, thick hides of the animals they hunted.



The Paleo-Indians were nomadic hunters, constantly moving in search of food. These nomadic hunting parties were undoubtedly small, probably consisting of only several family groups. Consequently, Paleo-Indian sites are generally small and scattered throughout the region, making it difficult for archaeologists to locate them.

Later in the Paleo-Indian Period, extinction of the Mega-fauna forced people to hunt small animal species such as bison, elk and moose. While not well understood, it is likely that over-hunting by Paleo-Indians contributed to the extinction.

The new prey the Paleo-Indians hunted was faster and required them to make changes on their hunting strategies. A change in the type of points people make for hunting is one change archaeologists see in these sites. Hunters replaced the fluted points, better suited to poking and jabbing, with long, narrow unfluted or lanceolate points that would break off in the animal and mortally wound it.

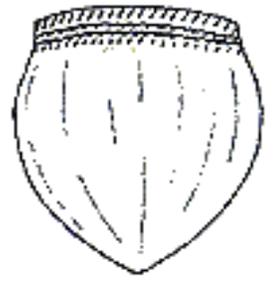
The Changing Landscape

The rugged landscape and many lakes of the Headwaters Region are a direct result of the last ice age in Minnesota. About 13,000 years ago, a warming trend in the earth's atmosphere began to melt the glaciers. Vast amounts of glacial meltwater flowed across the land, forming a network of streams and rivers. Basins, carved by the glaciers, filled with water from melting ice to form lakes. By 12,000 years ago, the glaciers retreated from Minnesota. The warming climate allowed Mega-fauna such as woolly mammoths, mastodon and giant ground sloths to move into the Northern Minnesota.

The Altithermal, a warmer drier period, began about 3,000 years later. By 8,000 years ago, hardwood forests of elm and oak replaced the spruce forests of the north. This warming trend pushed the hardwoods further north, allowing prairies to expand almost as far north as Duluth. After 7,000 years ago, the climate reversed its pattern becoming cooler and moister. This climatic shift pushed the prairie and forests back to the south and eventually led to our present-day climate.

The Woodland Tradition (800 B.C. - A.D. 1700)

Archaeologists identify the beginning of the Woodland Tradition by the presence of ceramic vessels and burial mounds. Pottery first appeared in the Headwaters region approximately 2,100 years ago. The building of large burial mounds illustrates the increasing level of complexity developed by native populations. People hunted and fished just like they had during the Archaic Period, but plant foods became more important in their diet. At this time, reliance on wild rice as a primary food source becomes recognizable in the archaeological record.



With the introduction of the bow and arrow into the region, hunting and warfare also began to change during this period. Archaeologists observe this change as a shift toward the use of smaller, triangular points. Ground stone tools like axes and mallets become more common as well.

Regional cultural tradition became distinct during the Woodland period. This variation is due in part to a group's adaptation to a specific ecological zone. The cultures in the Prairie Region to the west and the Mixed Forest Region to the south are very different from the ones in the Headwaters Area. The lakes and rivers in this portion of the state nurtured a reliance on aquatic resources, particularly fishing. Pottery is an especially good indicator of this regional variation, displaying different designs and patterns in each region. While regional variation did occur, it is important to remember that cultural groups from these regions were constantly interacting with one another. These interactions allowed them to exchange ideas and culture.

The Late Prehistoric Period (A.D. 900 - 1700)

While this is a continuation of the Woodland period, there is a change from a riverine to a lakeshore adaptation. In part, this shift in village locations comes from increased use of wild rice found growing in the lakes. Pottery styles change as well, becoming much more decorative. Potters frequently used a cord wrapped stick to make decorative impressions in the wet clay. People were still building burial mounds during this time, but they were not nearly as large as those found in the preceding Woodland Period. This may be due to the increasing population that forced people to focus their attention and energy on other, more pressing cultural functions.

Sandy Lake pottery, made from clay mixed with crushed shell, is found throughout the area. The use of a shell and clay mix for pottery is characteristic of Mississippian pottery that is primarily found south of the Headwaters region. These similarities in pottery construction suggest to archaeologists that people in the Headwaters region were now exchanging ideas with people further to the south.

The Archaic Tradition (8,000 - 800 B.C.)

As the weather became warmer and drier, hardwood forests began to dominate the region. Local populations began adapting to this changing landscape. People still hunted large animals, but they increased their use of other foods such as fish and other aquatic resources, wild berries, nuts and seeds. To obtain these foods, Archaic peoples needed to move throughout the year to exploit each food resource as it became available.



Important cultural changes took place among the populations of the Headwaters Region during this period. Beside the expanding food base, archaeologists can identify an increase in the social complexity of Archaic peoples. Regional differences began to appear, probably due to the notion of 'territory' caused by seasonal hunting and gathering of the same areas every year. Different burial customs and the development of a variety of smaller stemmed or notched points suggest the beginning of regional cultural variation. One important invention of this period was the 'atlatl' or spear-thrower. This wooden handle gave a hunter more force to fling a spear, resulting in longer and more accurate throws. During the Archaic, people established trade networks with other groups. Exotic stone and copper became highly prized for making tools and ornaments. Some artifacts made of copper include large curved knives, spear points, fish hooks and axes.

Ricing

The Indian people of the Headwaters Region have long been depending on wild rice as a primary food source. Rice was first harvested from the slow moving rivers and lakes by Indians of the Woodland Culture nearly 1,300 years ago. The long grains of rice were collected in the fall by canoe. One person would push the canoe through the rice beds with a pole while another person used a long stick to bend the stalks over the side of the boat and thrash the grain into the canoe with a second stick. Once the grain was ashore, it was either sun-dried, fire-dried or parched over a fire to preserve it for storage. Once dried, the rice was hulled to remove the close-fitting skin (chaff) from the kernel. This was often done by treading on the rice in a pit lined with animal skins or some other material. The last step was to remove the chaff by winnowing. On a windy day, the hulled rice was placed in a long shallow basket and then flipped into the air to allow the chaff to blow away. Since this rice could be stored longer than meat or fish, food was readily available during the winter months. This increase in available food, along with other factors, led to population growth and cultural expansion throughout the region. Wild rice continues to be an important food source for the Native American peoples today.



The Historic Period (A.D. 1600-1950)

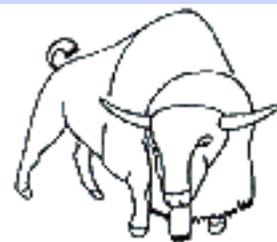
Undoubtedly, the northern regions felt the presence of eastern colonization long before the first explorer pressed into the area. In the early 1600's, Anishinabe (Ojibwe) groups, armed with firearms and actively involved with the fur trade, pushed their way into the region. They displaced the Dakota (Sioux) groups that occupied the region earlier. These groups fought for the area almost to the turn of the 20th century.



Fur trading posts became established in the area in the latter half of the 18th century. However, less than 75 years later, fur trading had all but vanished. Trappers overhunted the beaver in the area, and the demand for beaver fur declined as a fashionable item in Europe. Explorers then crossed the region, opening it up for logging by 1850. The logging boom of the late 1800's and building of railroads around this time opened the way for most homesteaders well before the turn of the century. By this time, the Native peoples of the headwaters region, plagued by sickness, were moved onto reservations and forced to live by Euro-American standards. Today, logging and tourism are important industries for Native Americans in northern Minnesota.

Itasca Bison Kill Site

Between 7,000 and 8,000 years ago, Native Americans of the Archaic Period established a camp along a small creek leading into Lake Itasca. During their time there, they killed at least 16 long horn bison as the animals crossed the lake. The hunters butchered the bison on the lakeshore and threw the bones into the water. They also threw unwanted stone butchering tools away with the bones. As the lake filled with sediment, a peat bog formed and preserved all the bones until a construction crew found them in 1937.

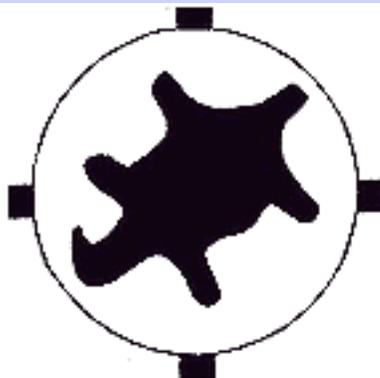


Williams Narrows Site

This site is perhaps one of the most important archaeological finds in northern Minnesota. Situated on a narrow strip of land along the northern shore of Lake Winnibogoshish, this stratified site produced some of the earliest artifacts known in Minnesota. These early artifacts, fluted points and long, slender lanceolate points, date to the Paleo-Indian Period. Copper tools from the Archaic Period and hundreds of pottery fragments and stone artifacts from the Woodland Period have also been recovered.



Turtle Mound

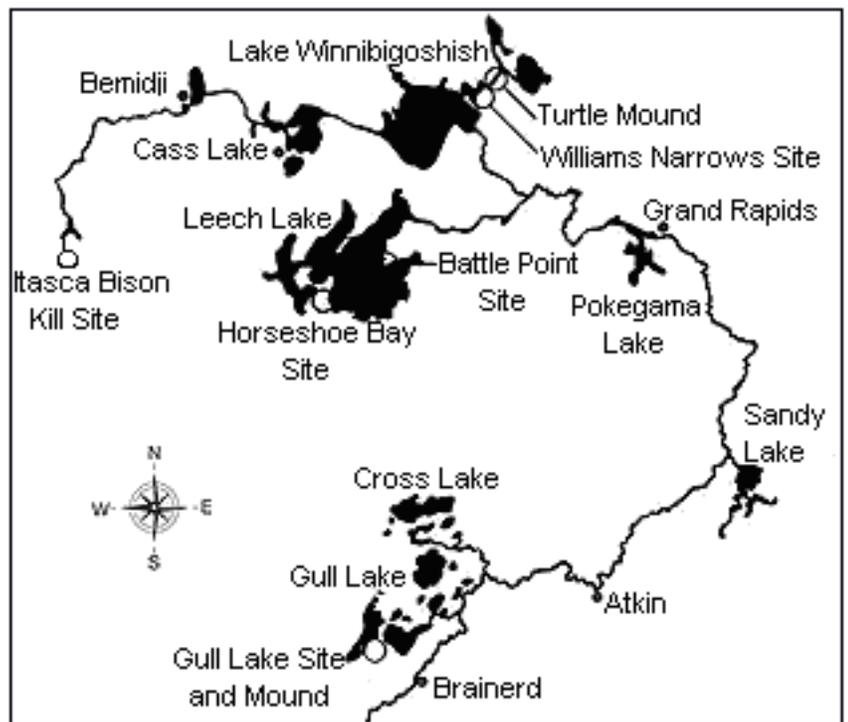


One of the most culturally important sites to the Anishinabe (Ojibwe) people of Northern Minnesota is the sacred turtle mound. This turtle effigy is actually an intaglio, a rare form of "mound" building where the image is sunk in the ground rather than raised above it. The Dakota (Sioux) people probably constructed the effigy before the arrival of Europeans to the area. When the Anishinabe people drove the Dakota to the southwest, they surrounded the turtle, which was facing northeast, with painted poles and made offerings to the spirits. Then, as Anishinabe oral history tells us, the head and tail reversed positions so that the head pointed in the direction of their fleeing enemy, southwest. Historical records indicate that the Anishinabe would often

gather about the turtle to smoke, dance and pray to the spirits.

Battle Point Site

This is the site of the last battle between Native Americans and the United States Army. Fought on October 5-7, 1898, the battle began when local authorities detained an Indian chief, Pungona Geshig of the Pillager Band, against his will. The ensuing fight between the local Native Americans and the local authorities allowed Pungona Geshig to escape. However, the United States Army was then called in to recapture him. Hundreds of soldiers, who had just returned from fighting in the Spanish-American War, were sent to the dock in Walker for Indians warfare duty. Steamboats ferried the soldiers to Sugar Point where Pungona Geshig lived. While no Native Americans died, three days of fighting in the woods and fields of Sugar Point resulted in the death of five U.S. soldiers. Seeing the futility of the situation, the soldiers withdrew without capturing Pungona Geshig.

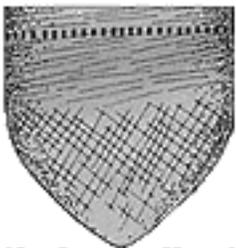


Horseshoe Bay Site

Excavated in 1990, this site proved to be much richer in archaeological material than originally thought. The site contained materials from the Paleo-Indian Period to the Historic Period. Excavations revealed a fur trading post dating to the 1800's. Historic documents suggest the post probably belonged to George Bonga, one of the earliest black settlers in the region. The post itself consisted of two buildings and several grave sites. One of the two excavated historic burials contained a middle-aged man who was believed to have been killed by an arrow as the arrowhead was found among his bones.



Gull Lake Site and Mounds



Net Impress Vessel

Less than a century ago, more than 30 mounds were grouped together near the shore of Gull Lake. Today, our modern culture has destroyed all but 12 of these earthworks. The site itself is stratified, meaning several different cultures occupied this same spot over hundreds, or possibly thousands of years. Archaeologists first identified the Brainerd Culture and its distinctive new impressed pottery at this site.

Further Information

This brochure is printed and distributed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District, in cooperation with The Leech Lake Reservation Heritage sites Archaeological Program.

Remains of past cultures throughout the Headwaters region represent important aspects of our National heritage. Therefore, archaeological sites and artifacts are protected by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and other laws. If you discover artifacts on public lands, it is essential that you bring these to the attention of one of the contacts listed below. This information will not only assist in learning about the past but in protecting these resources for future generations.

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