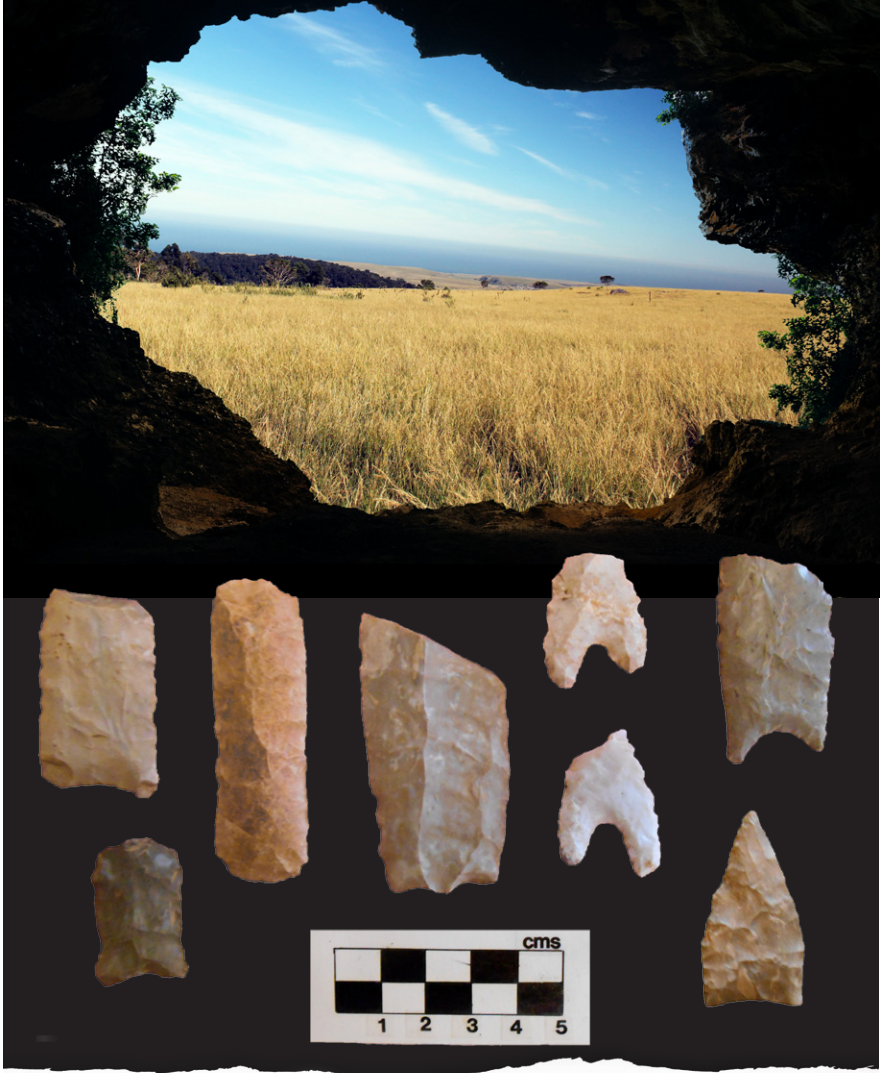


KENTUCKY ARCHAEOLOGY MONTH 2019

# THE PALEOINDIAN PERIOD

CA. 9500-8000 B.C.



# The Paleoindian Period

The earliest known people to live in what we now call Kentucky were hunters and gatherers. These people lived at the end of the last Ice Age, over 10,000 years ago. Archaeologists call this the Paleoindian period. Over 350 archaeological places dating to this time have been found in Kentucky. Studying these sites allows us to learn more about the people who lived here in the past.

During the Paleoindian period, people lived in small groups and traveled from place to place to access different resources, like stone for toolmaking. The climate was much colder and wetter than it is today. Living in the area of Kentucky at this time would have been similar to living today in parts of Canada. We know it was wet because many big game, or megafauna, became stuck in marshy swamps. Their fossils can still be seen at sites like Big Bone Lick and elsewhere along the Ohio River.

Archaeologists know about people that lived in the Paleoindian period from their stone tool technology. Stone tools give clues about people because they were used for many tasks. Their stone tool kit had skillfully crafted stone spear points, as well as tools for scraping animal hides and wood. People also used bone and other organic materials that rarely survive. Bone, antler, and ivory awls and sewing needles would have been used to make bags, clothing, and shelter from animal hides and plant materials.

A common belief is that people living at this time only hunted now-extinct megafauna, like mammoths and mastodons. This is a myth. Through archaeology we know that people used a mixed foraging strategy. This means people gathered a variety of plants, like nuts and berries, and hunted large and small game animals, fish, and birds. Changes in foodways and stone tool technology help archaeologists divide the Paleoindian period into three parts.

## **Early Paleoindian: Clovis Technology (ca. 9,500 to 9,000 B.C.)**

The Clovis stone tool technology is the earliest clue that people were living in the area of Kentucky. People who invented this technology crafted unique lance-like, fluted spear points. These points are found across North America, showing that people were very mobile. Local and non-local stone was used to make these tools. Clovis spear points were not just used as weapons. They also could be used as knives to cut and prepare meats and other foods. Their tool kit also had stone blades, scrapers, and cobble tools. Perishable bone, antler, and ivory were used to make awls, sewing needles, and other items.

The people living during the Early Paleoindian moved often and did not leave a lot behind. Sites found in Kentucky are often small. A few possible places where megafauna were butchered have been found in Kentucky. These include the Adams

Mastodon site in Harrison County, Big Bone Lick in Boone County, and Clay's Ferry Crevice in Fayette County. These sites are rare in Kentucky. More archaeology research is needed!

### **Middle Paleoindian: Changing Foodways (ca. 9,000 to 8,500 B.C.)**

Archaeologists have found more Middle Paleoindian period sites in Kentucky than sites dating to the Early Paleoindian period. During this time, large mammals like the mammoth, mastodon, and giant beaver started to go extinct. Kentucky's environment and vegetation went through many changes. Kentucky's forests changed from spruce and jack pine to the mixed hardwoods we see today. People living during this time hunted both large and small game and added more plant resources to their diets. They moved around less because their food was more local.

The Middle Paleoindian stone tool kit has a wider range of tool types than the Clovis tool kit. As people moved around less, they used more local stone for their tools. Stone tools also showed up in different styles. For example, Gainey and Cumberland spear points are typical of this time.

### **Late Paleoindian: End of the Ice Age (ca. 8,500 to 8,000 B.C.)**

By the Late Paleoindian period, the Ice Age was over and most megafauna were extinct or had moved to cooler regions. Because of the vegetation changes, people continued to eat a broad variety of foods. Archaeologists know from sites found in neighboring states that people were eating a wide mix of plants, like nuts, and small and medium sized mammals, like deer. As the environment became stable, people did not have to be as mobile as their ancestors, but they still travelled more than we do today. They also began to occupy caves and rockshelters.

Changes in tool kits occur at this time. Ivory tools disappear because the large tusk-bearing animals (mastodon and mammoth) were extinct. There were also new styles in stone tools because hunting practices changed. In Kentucky these points include the Lanceolate Plano and Dalton types. These points are often made from local stone materials.

The story of the Paleoindian period doesn't end here. To learn more, please visit us online: <https://heritage.ky.gov/archaeology/publications>

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