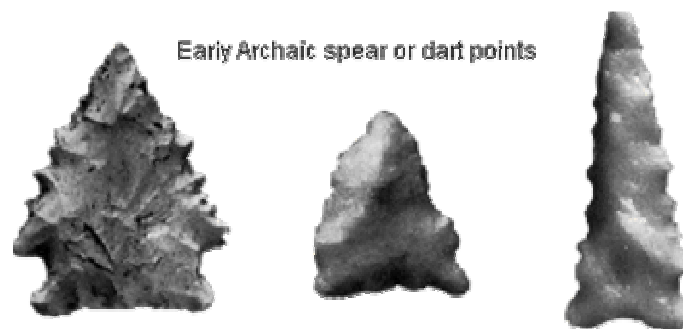


Archaic Indians in Virginia

The end of the Paleo-Indian period is defined by a shift in the design of points:

"The replacement of fluted point forms by nonfluted points is believed to reflect a change in the adaptive strategy, away from hunting Late Pleistocene megafauna toward a more generalized hunting of small, modern game, such as deer, and a collecting subsistence strategy within the southern pine forests as they replaced the boreal forests."¹



Archaic points, without flutes

Source: National Park Service Southeast Archeological Center, [Outline of Prehistory and History](#)

Virginia had no glaciers in the last Ice Age (the southernmost edge of the last ice sheet was in Pennsylvania and New York), but the forest reflected the cold temperatures and included a high percentage of spruce and fir trees. As the climate warmed, deciduous forests (including oaks, hickories, maples and beeches) extended up the mountains. Those trees produced fruits and nuts that were food for a wider variety of animals. The Ice Age megafauna - large mammoths, for example - disappeared at the end of the Paleo-Indian and start of the Archaic periods. Perhaps those species died out as their habitat changed, or perhaps the large animals were hunted so heavily for their meat by Paleo-Indians that the animal populations could not recover.

In the Archaic period, Virginians spent less time concentrated in the river bottoms. The bands of hunters and gatherers scattered more across the landscape, settling in new areas and increasing the total population in the state. The Archaic Indians were able to use less-specialized rock for their tools, because smaller forest and grassland game was more common as the Ice Age ended. The shaping of the tools - especially the way they notched the base of their points - shifted as well, to reflect the different approaches to hunting.

During the Archaic Period, family units joined into a "residentially stable hunting and gathering band society that seasonally occupied base camps along major water courses and exploited lithic and food resources within individual stream drainages."² In other words, they took fewer long journeys and settled down.



think an Archaic settlement looked like this?

Source: National Park Service Southeast Archeological Center, [Beneath These Waters](#)

They got to know a particular valley that provided water, fruit and nuts, plus fish and game. They developed a better way to throw sticks, the atlatl. Archaic Virginians knew where to hunt and when to harvest food from plants, because they knew their territory. In brackish and saltwater areas, people would have relied heavily upon oysters, turtles, crabs - and feasted on the occasional beached whale as well, on beaches now under the waves of the Atlantic Ocean since sea level has risen since the time of Archaic settlement.

Not surprisingly, it appears that these more-settled groups may have defended their territory and excluded competitors. Protein sources had value, and places that provided a reliable supply of seafood were worth defending. That behavior led to some social isolation, and different regions developed different styles of notching their points to hunt the type of game that was most common in their local area.

Using 20th Century anthropology terms, settling down and developing the atlatl distinguishes the Archaic period culture from the Paleo-Indian period culture. The next significant change in culture, the shift from Archaic to the Woodland Period, is marked by the later adoption of agriculture, construction of burial mounds, and the development of pottery. Virginians during what we define today as the Archaic Period had the atlatl and lived in defined locations for significant parts of the year, but did not have the technology that would be developed later - the bow and arrow, and pottery.



the "atlatl" that enhanced Archaic technology for throwing a spear

Source: National Park Service - [Effigy Mounds](#)

[Paleo-Indians in Virginia](#)

Woodland Indians in Virginia

References

1. *Outline of Prehistory and History: Southeastern North America and the Caribbean*, "Southeastern Prehistory Paleoindian Period," National Park Service, www.cr.nps.gov/seac/outline/02-paleoindian/index.htm (last checked September 22, 2002)
2. *Ibid*, "Southeastern Prehistory Archaic Period," www.cr.nps.gov/seac/outline/03-archaic/index.htm (last checked September 22, 2002)

[From Paleo-Indian to Woodland Cultures: Virginia's Early Native Americans](#)
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