

## ARCHAIC FORAGERS

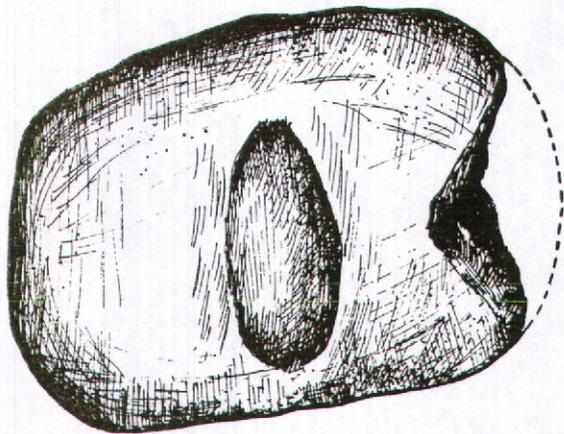
About 6000 B.C., the climate of the Great Plains began to change. Weather became hotter and drier, and the big game herds began to dwindle. Many animal species became extinct due to disease, a lack of adequate food in the changed environment, and possibly even because of overhunting by man in the preceding periods. Species that survived, like the modern bison, moved from the plains, especially in the west, to more desirable habitats. The Paleoindian big game hunters were forced to abandon their life-style focused mainly on hunting and begin a foraging existence. Fishing, plant collecting, and collecting of shellfish, as well as the hunting of small and some large game were all part of the food-gathering process.

The Paleoindian culture pattern had evidently been very much the same throughout North America, but now, during the Archaic period, cultures began to differ from region to region. People were still nomadic, but they wandered less and began to adapt to local environments since they no longer followed the big game herds over wide areas. New types of tools were made to exploit the environment to the fullest. The spear thrower was now used in addition to such things as ground stone axes, bone awls, needles, fish spears, and fishhooks. Milling stones are characteristically found at Archaic sites along with burned rocks which were probably used in roasting or boiling food.

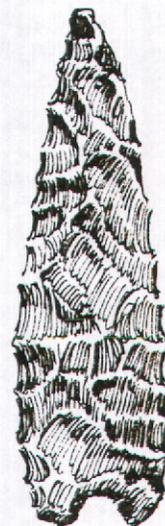
Archaic projectile points consist of a great variety of stemmed, corner-notched, and side-notched types. The key characteristics of the Archaic people were extreme efficiency and a broadened perspective in exploiting the environment for food.

On the Great Plains, sites of the Plains Archaic tradition are found. In the extreme western plains, the Archaic peoples carried out a true foraging existence. Their culture was similar to the Desert Culture to the south where people depended heavily on seeds, nuts, roots, and other such food. Archaeological sites on the plains in Wyoming contain numerous grinding stones indicating that vegetable foods were prepared and used. Bone and shell debris indicates that antelope, deer, and bison, along with birds, reptiles, and mussels were all used for meat. Many stone-lined hearths and some storage pits are found at these sites which are often deeply layered, indicating repeated occupations. The Archaic foragers may have moved through a "seasonal round" of food gathering activities, returning to the same camp sites season after season to obtain the foods that could be found at that particular place during a particular time.

The McKean Site, on the Belle Fourche River in Wyoming, was a typical Plains Archaic site. Hearths, cache pits, milling stones, and other tools were found here along with McKean points, characteristic of the Plains Archaic. McKean points are short, slender, and widest at the midportion with a deeply concave base. Duncan and Hanna



*Milling stones are common Archaic artifacts. Vegetable material was placed on a flat stone and ground by hand with a smaller stone.*



McKean Point

points, similar to McKean points, were also found at the McKean Site. Many sites that are part of the McKean Complex have been found on the edges of the Black Hills. The Gant Site, near Bear Butte on the northeastern periphery of the Hills is the best known of the nearly 50 McKean sites tested. The site yielded McKean, Duncan and Hanna points, typical butchering and hide preparation tools, grinding stones and burned rock. McKean sites in South Dakota have been dated to between 3000 B.C. and 1000 B.C.

Some suggest that the Archaic peoples of the more eastern prairie were still predominantly big game hunters because the climate in the east was still fairly favorable for herds of animals. These peoples' life-style was still Archaic in nature, but they probably relied somewhat more on big game than the Archaic people in the west. In eastern and central South Dakota there are some evidences of Archaic occupation. Many sites in the Gavin's Point area, like the Tramp Deep site, may be Archaic. Projectile points found here are similar to the Archaic points of western McKean sites. In the Big Bend region of the Missouri River, McKean and Duncan points have been found, and layers of the Medicine Crow, Travis 2 and Walth Bay sites contained Archaic materials. Mounds at some other sites along the Missouri are underlain by Archaic remains as well.

As in the case of the Paleoindians, little is known about the nonmaterial aspects of Archaic culture. Archaic existence was really not much different from the preceding big game hunting peoples; especially in east and central South Dakota. Although some technological changes were made so that more kinds of food could be utilized in the changed environment, a nomadic life-style was still required. Nomadism may have been more regular, according to a seasonal pattern, and groups may not have wandered so far as before, but subsistence still did not allow any degree of permanency or social complexity. The quest for food was still clearly the main goal of the Archaic societies, and they were probably very similar to the Paleoindians that had lived before. The Archaic foragers had learned to make their culture move and change with the unpredictable environment. Their generalized subsistence system allowed a very stable existence in spite of environmental challenges. People began to "settle" into the changeable local environments.

#### SOURCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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