

Native Carolinians ^[1]

How we know what we know — or what *wethink* we know — can't be separated from any story we tell about the people who lived in North Carolina before contact with Europeans. We know that they have been here since at least 9,000 BCE. We know that over thousands of years they developed complex and diverse societies, cultures, languages, agriculture, belief systems, and means of political organization. But because all that remains of them is artifacts buried in the ground, the details of when, where, and how people lived are lost or open to interpretation. When new discoveries are made, our understanding of the past changes — often dramatically.

In this chapter we'll explore the archaeology and history of North Carolina before Europeans arrived. The story of North Carolina's native peoples begins with their migration from Asia thousands of years ago. By the sixteenth century CE, North Carolina was home to diverse peoples, and we'll look at the ways of life of several of those peoples in turn. Just as important, we'll consider the work of archaeologists — people who explore the past through physical remains — and how our understanding of North Carolina's first peoples continues to evolve.

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