

Archaeology Part 2: Discoveries of the North Carolina Piedmont ^[1]

Archaeology

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Discoveries of the North Carolina Piedmont

[Paleo-Indian](#) ^[5] sites remain elusive in the piedmont, but their presence is occasionally indicated by sporadic surface discoveries of fluted projectile points. The most notable exception is the [Hardaway site](#) ^[6], discovered and excavated since 1948 by the [Research Laboratories of Anthropology](#) ^[7] of the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[8]. Unfortunately, almost every serious relic collector has also "excavated" the site, and by 2003 a great deal of its potential had been destroyed.

In contrast to the Paleo-Indian inhabitants, the bearers of Archaic culture covered the piedmont landscape, leaving a network of tracks that has been easily followed. In almost every plowed field some trace of the [Archaic period](#) ^[9] can be found. Archaic cultures did not live in permanent villages and did not make pottery. They were organized in small groups of 20 to 30 individuals who usually moved within well-defined territories to take advantage of seasonal food resources.

There are several known Archaic sites, including the Doerschuk site on the east bank of the Yadkin River, the Gaston site in [Halifax County](#) ^[10] on the [Roanoke River](#) ^[11], and the Lowder's Ferry site in [Stanly County](#) ^[12]. These sites each had distinctive styles of spear points, from which archaeologists could define specific time periods.

The [Late Archaic](#) ^[13] period saw a dramatic increase in the population of the piedmont and a gradual trend toward a more sedentary life due to improved climatic conditions. Cultivation of squash, gourds, sunflowers, maygrass, and [chenopodium](#) ^[14] was evident, and permanent camps were found. The Late Archaic is distinguished from earlier periods by the presence of ground and polished stone tools, steatite bowls, and decorated bone and shell ornaments. The most characteristic artifact of that period is a large, broad-bladed spear point with a square stem called the Savannah River stemmed point. These points were probably multipurpose tools used for a variety of cutting tasks as well as for spear tips.

The [Early Woodland and Middle Woodland](#) ^[15] periods (1000 B.C.-800 A.D.) came into being with the introduction of pottery making and the cultivation of gardens. One of the earliest archaeological phases in the Piedmont Village Tradition is called [Badin](#) ^[16], named for the small Stanly County town of Badin in the southern piedmont. Its pottery, defined as the Badin ceramic series, was well made and tempered with sediments of clay that were welded together using a cord- or fabric-wrapped paddle. Vessels were simple, straight-sided jars with conical bases.

In the Early and Middle Woodland periods, the piedmont seems to have been an area of merging influences from different regions. The [Roanoke Rapids Reservoir sites](#) ^[17] suggest that freshwater mollusks and other aquatic resources were important food resources during the first half of the Woodland period. Birds and mammals were also eaten. The bow and arrow completely replaced the atlatl as the weapon of choice. The earliest evidence of these new arrow points for the use of the new weapon appeared along the Yadkin River. Another distinguishing feature of the Early and Middle Woodland periods was the Woodland people's concern for the dead. The Thelma site reflects the presence of group burials.

In the [Late Woodland](#) ^[18] period (800-1600 A.D.), major cultural changes took place. This was a time of population consolidation and the beginning of intertribal conflicts. Larger villages were often surrounded by stockades to protect inhabitants from raids from hostile neighbors. Linguistic and tribal groups described by European explorers could begin to be identified by archaeologists. Late Woodland locations include the Dan River, Eno River, Haw River drainage, Uwharrie River, Hillsborough, and [Town Creek](#) ^[19] sites.

The southern piedmont saw the arrival of new ideas and innovations from the south during the later Woodland period.

This infusion of knowledge is known as [Pee Dee culture](#) [20]. The Pee Dees built mounds on which they placed temples but chiefly residences. Pee Dee people participated in a cultural tradition known as [South Appalachian Mississippian](#) [21] (1000-1400 A.D.), which was felt from Minnesota to Florida and from Texas to Georgia. The cultural pattern revealed highly stratified political systems headed by a hereditary elite.

In the late seventeenth century, the trade of pelts, thousands of ornaments, and controlled firearms spread between Europeans and Piedmont Indian tribes, which were generally hostile to the European presence. In 2003 Piedmont archaeological sites included the [Town Creek Indian Mound](#) [19], [Neuse Levee](#) [22], [Occaneechi Town](#) [23], [Historic Bethabara Park](#) [24], [Central Catawba River Valley](#) [25], [Latta Plantation](#) [26] in [Mecklenburg County](#) [27], [Confederate Prison in Salisbury](#) [28], and Brattonville in Rock Hill (scientists at the last three sites have used thermal imaging or infrared camera technology as a noninvasive form of archaeology).


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