

Archaeology Part 3: Mountain Archaeological Sites and Discoveries ^[1]

Archaeology

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Mountain Archaeological Sites and Discoveries

Evidence of the Paleo-Indians in the North Carolina mountain region is rare. No buried or stratified sites have been found. The only indication has been the find of eight fluted points from the Appalachian Summit, reported by Phil Perkinson in 1973. These specimens were made of local material, suggesting that Paleo-Indians did occupy the region and were not just passing through.

Little [Archaic period](#) ^[5] research has been conducted in the Appalachians. Most archaeologists have drawn their conclusions on this period from two Early Archaic sites: the [Warren Wilson](#) ^[6] site in [Buncombe County](#) ^[7] and the Tuckasegee site in [Jackson County](#) ^[8]. Both contained Archaic artifacts including scrapers, tools, and a possible mano (grinding stone).

As in the piedmont, the Late Archaic period in the mountains was a time of rapid population growth and larger and more numerous sites. In the Upper Watauga Valley a wide range of habitats were discovered; at higher elevations, only a few small hunting camps were uncovered. In the Warren Wilson site, extensive Late Archaic occupation was evident. Based on its location and the large number of spear points and butchering and hide-working tools at the site, it is thought that fish, turtles, and game were important to the Late Archaic people. They also harvested acorns and hickory nuts. There is evidence that sunflowers, maygrass and chenopodium, and squash and gourds were cultivated at the end of this period.

The [Woodland period](#) ^[9] in the mountains was a time of increasing cultural diversity stimulated by ideas from outside the region. It is apparent that ceramics were introduced during the [Early Woodland period](#) ^[10], or Swannanoa phase. These vessels were cord-marked or fabric-impressed. Weapon points were also used by archaeologists to chronologically place this period. In the Middle Woodland period, or Pigeon phase, ceramics had crushed quartz as temper, compact paste, and a well-burnished interior produced by rubbing with a steatite pebble. Settlement patterns reveal that food was harvested and processed in floodplain areas, as well as in upland valleys, coves, and ridge tops.

People who lived during the second half of the Middle Woodland period-the Connestee phase-produced another pottery series as well as engaged in mound construction. A site reflecting this era is the Garden Creek Mounds in [Haywood County](#) ^[11]. The [Late Woodland](#) ^[12] is poorly understood, and differences between that and the [Mississippian period](#) ^[13] are vague. From excavation of the Cane Creek site in [Mitchell County](#) ^[14], it is clear that the pottery was significantly different from the Connestee phase pottery. Much of the information is speculative about burial practices, as Cane Creek's site was badly disturbed and there was a great deal of relic collecting before archaeologists examined it.

The cultural evolution in the Mississippian period, or [Pisgah phase](#) ^[15], appears even more abrupt, as evidenced by its ceramics, stockade villages, substructure mounds, and agricultural economy. Sites that reflect this period are the Garden Creek site (Mound 1) and the Brunk Site in northern [Buncombe County](#) ^[7].

The Late Mississippian period, or [Qualla phase](#) ^[16], is characterized by smaller points and other chipped stone tools, as well as weaponry influenced by Europeans in the later Qualla phase, such as chipped gunflints. This phase reflects the archaeology of the very late prehistoric and early historic [Cherokee](#) ^[17] culture. The artifact styles, house and mound forms, and civic and ceremonial life of the Pisgah and Qualla cultures displayed continuity, but the diagnostic artifacts, as well as community structure and regional settlement patterns, of the two phases were significantly different.

A reconstruction of [Hernando de Soto](#) ^[18]'s exploration route offered a broad interpretation of archaeological data for much of the mountains and piedmont in North Carolina. This reconstruction was a result of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's

appointment of a commission to document De Soto's route in 1935^[19]. Some of these "route sites" reflect fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century occupation by Europeans.

A sampling of mountainous archaeological sites by 2003 were Kituhwa in Bryson City (the thermal imaging technique for noninvasive archaeology was used at this site before actual digs occurred), Blue Rock Soapstone Quarry ^[20] in Yancey County ^[21], the Deaver site ^[22] in Transylvania County ^[23], the Donnaha site ^[24] in Yadkin County ^[25], the Time Tunnel ^[26] in Watauga County ^[27], and the Appletree site in Macon County ^[28].

Keep reading >>Part 4: Underwater Archaeology ^[4]  ^[1]

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UNC-TV. *The Warren Wilson Site*. YouTube video. 2:54. Posted May 10, 2012 by UNCarchaeology. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kS2wmpbB8zY> ^[29] (accessed October 9, 2012).

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[30]

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