

KENTUCKY BEFORE BOONE

Poster

The **Kentucky Before Boone** poster commemorates our state's unwritten past as recorded through years of archaeological research. It does this by illustrating aspects of prehistoric lifeways during Kentucky's four archaeological time periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Late Prehistoric. In preparing the scenes, the artist consulted archaeological evidence from Kentucky as well as studies of living groups worldwide. Flowing through the various lifeway scenes are artifact timelines. These timelines show stylistic and technological changes in projectile points (spears and arrowheads) and pottery vessels. The left branch shows artifacts found in western and southern Kentucky, while the right branch shows materials from central and eastern Kentucky.

Archaeologists have learned that changes in diet and food gathering methods were linked to the development of new technologies. Through time, prehistoric peoples made lighter and better weapons. Containers in which to prepare and store food also changed. Yet, even as they adopted new inventions, prehistoric Kentuckians continued to use older technologies. For example, people used baskets even after they began making pottery.

Changes in diet and new inventions often affected the way people lived. Through time, a mobile lifestyle gave way to a settled way of life. Communities became larger and societies became more complex. Changes illustrated on the poster took place over hundreds of generations and thousands of years. But not all aspects of culture changed at the same rate. Change was often so slow, living people were not aware of it.

Archaeologists think **Paleoindian** groups arrived in Kentucky by at least 14,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age. At that time, Kentucky's climate was much colder and wetter than today. Perhaps people first came to Kentucky on the trail of the mammoth, mastodon, or giant bison. These animals not only provided meat, but skins for shelter and clothing. Undoubtedly, the Paleoindian people also collected wild plant foods. *The poster shows a small family group searching for game, a mastodon being butchered, and a woman scraping a hide.* At this time, people lived in small groups and moved frequently. *They may have carried their belongings in skin bags and built shelters for protection from the cold and rain similar to the ones illustrated in the poster.*

Paleoindians made well-crafted spear points and a variety of cutting, chopping, and scraping tools. Spears with distinctive "flutes" are unique to the Paleoindian period. *The poster shows a man making stone tools.* It seems likely that Paleoindians also made tools from wood and animal bone, but these objects have not survived in the archaeological record. Little is known about the ritual or ceremonial life of Paleoindians.

By the **Archaic** period, the climate had become more like it is today. Climatic changes led to the extinction of the mastodon and giant bison, so Archaic peoples hunted smaller game, such as deer, turkey, and rabbit. They also collected wild plants for food, medicine, and dyes, and began to grow small gardens. *Near the center of the poster a woman is shown collecting and processing nuts.* Archaic groups made baskets for collecting, transporting and storing their food. *The lower right-section of the poster shows an Archaic woman wearing a basket.*

Although Archaic people tended to live for longer periods of time in one place, they were still nomadic peoples, never staying in one place longer than a few months. *Archaic groups often lived in base camps, such as the one illustrated along the lower left-side of the poster.* They built their camps in areas rich in a variety of natural resources. *Sometimes they used rockshelters, like the one illustrated on the right-side of the poster, as smaller, seasonal camps.*

Archaic people had a rich ceremonial life. *The poster shows a shaman performing a ritual to make sure a hunt will be successful, and a family paying their last respects to a loved one.* In some graves, Archaic peoples placed objects made from marine shell or copper from the Great Lakes region. They got these items by trading with other groups. *Shown on the poster are two men traveling by canoe to trade goods with their neighbors.*

During the Archaic period, prehistoric peoples developed a spear-throwing device called the atlatl. *A drawing in the lower center of the poster shows men using atlatls to hunt deer.* Using atlatls meant that a hunter's throw was longer, more powerful, and more accurate. Spear points, too, did not have to be as large to do the job. *As the poster shows, Archaic spear points varied in shape and size.* Archaic peoples also made grooved axes and celts from hard stones such as granite. *Drawings on the left margin of the poster show how they were made and mounted in a handle.*

The **Woodland** period begins with the use of pottery by native peoples. Although early pots were thick, heavy, and fragile, they had important advantages over baskets and skin bags. Pots could be used for cooking directly on the fire. As storage containers, these vessels could be sealed up, keeping pests out. *Scenes on the poster show a woman making a large pot and a pot being used for cooking.* Woodland peoples continued to use baskets, gourds, and other containers, too.

During the Woodland period, more time was spent gardening, and cultivated plants became an

important part of the diet. *Near the center of the poster, squash, sunflower, goosefoot, and maygrass are shown growing.* Woodland peoples also hunted a variety of animals and collected wild plants. They began to build bigger houses and to live in larger communities. *A circular Woodland house and a Woodland village are shown near the center of the poster.*

Large earthen enclosures and the mounds the Woodland peoples built reflect the richness of their religious and ceremonial lives. These people often held religious ceremonies within the earthen enclosures. They built burial mounds that they added to over several decades. *Some people were placed in logs tombs similar to the one illustrated on the poster.* Woodland people smoked tobacco, which they grew in their gardens, at important events. *Woodland ceremonial life is reflected on the poster by the man smoking a pipe, the stylized bird-like figure on the clay tablet, and the turkey tracks being pecked on a stone.* During the Woodland period, people also began to explore caves, as illustrated on the poster.

Late in the Woodland period, Kentucky's prehistoric peoples began to use the bow and small, true arrowheads, although spears continued to be made and used. *The straight bow shown on the poster is typical for the eastern United States. This change is reflected on the artifact time-line by a reduction in the size of projectile points.* Woodland peoples still used ground stone tools, especially when they processed nuts and seeds.

By the **Late Prehistoric** period, village life revolved around the planting, growing, and harvesting of corn, beans, and squash. For the Mississippian people of western Kentucky and the Fort Ancient people of eastern Kentucky, corn made up most of their diet. Late Prehistoric peoples used stone or bone hoes to work their agricultural fields. They continued to hunt a variety of animals and to collect wild plants. *A scene near the top-center of the poster shows a woman tending corn with a stone hoe. Another woman is shown processing corn with a wooden mortar and pestle.*

New pottery vessel forms were developed during this period. *Illustrated are jars, bowls, plates, bottles, and colanders.* Potters added handles to jars and attached human and animal effigies to some bowls and bottles.

During the Late Prehistoric period, people began to build rectangular houses. They also began to live year-round in large communities. Stockades protected some settlements; palisades surrounded others. *A Fort Ancient village and a Mississippian town are shown on the poster. As many as 2,000 people may have lived in some Mississippian towns. Hereditary chiefs ruled these communities, such as the man shown in the upper left-hand corner of the poster.* These people lived in houses built on top of large platform mounds. *As shown on the poster, conflicts arose.*

Late Prehistoric religious and ceremonial life is reflected in part by stylized figures engraved on shell gorgets (ornaments worn around the neck). Other religious practices included placing objects with the dead, such as pipes, shell necklaces, and whole ceramic vessels with shell spoons. *As shown on the poster, some people were buried in stone box graves.*

The arrival of Europeans on America's eastern shores began a new chapter in Kentucky history. Long before the first explorers and traders arrived, items made in Europe filtered into Kentucky through native trade networks. *The figure in the upper right-hand corner is a Shawnee man holding a rifle and wearing ornaments and clothing received in trade with Euro-Americans.*

Diseases unknown to native peoples arrived in Kentucky before the Europeans. These diseases often wiped-out entire villages, and the native populations rapidly decreased. By the mid-1700s, only a handful of native settlements existed in Kentucky. By the early nineteenth century, native settlements had disappeared from the state. Native traditions live on in Kentucky, however: through the descendants of native peoples exiled to other states; through those who continue to live in Kentucky; and in Kentucky's rich archaeological record.

Archaeologists have explored only a small part of Kentucky, yet they have recorded over 16,000 places where prehistoric villages and camps once stood. These sites are a fragile resource. Some archaeological sites are lost due to erosion and development. But looters and grave robbers destroy many more. These people vandalize thousands of years of prehistory, our only record of Kentucky's native peoples, just to add a few objects to their private collections. If you see people looting archaeological sites and graves, report them to law enforcement officers. Unless we preserve important archaeological sites today, there will be few left for future generations to visit or study.

The Kentucky Heritage Council was created in 1966 and challenged with the task of preserving the state's abundant historic and prehistoric resources. The sixteen members of the Council are appointed by the Governor. A staff of professional archaeologists, historians, architectural historians, historic architects, and planners carry out the Council's programs. The Council offices are located in Frankfort. If you have any questions concerning the poster, please feel free to contact us:

Kentucky Heritage Council
State Historic Preservation Office
300 Washington Street
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601-1967
Phone: 502-564-7005
www.heritage.ky.gov

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