

## TERMS COMMONLY USED IN ARCHAEOLOGY

### General Terms

**Prehistory:** Prehistory refers to the time prior to written records. Archaeologists will also refer to protohistory-- the time between prehistory and when written records and documentation were widely available (ca. A.D. 1540 - A.D. 1800).

**Artifact:** Any material object made or modified by man.

**Site:** A location where artifacts are found in place and represent past human activities, (rather than being washed in). However, if the location is less than 50 years old, we often refer to it as modern material culture.

**Assemblage:** A collection of tools and trash that are treated as a unit because they were found together. An assemblage (collectively) may refer to all types of materials from a specific level in a site or the assemblage can be further divided into types (e.g., the ceramic assemblage, ground stone assemblage, etc.)

**Midden:** An accumulation of refuse deposited by people living at a site. Because of the large amount of organic material deposited, middens are much like compost heaps.

**Feature:** This refers to certain sets of characteristics which together make a recognizable pattern. Examples of features are firehearths (identified by the set of burned rock, possibly charcoal and ash), postholes, trash pits, burials, etc. Sets of features may comprise a larger item. An ordered sequence of postholes and a hearth may identify the remains of a house.

**Type:** A pattern of attributes that distinguishes a group of artifacts and defines it as a class.

### Chronological Terms

**Component:** A collection of items that can be stratigraphically segregated from other similar sets at a site.

**Complex:** An assemblage from a number of sites within a region which bear similarities to one another but lack the spatial and/or temporal refinement to permit use of the terms focus or phase.

**Phase:** An archaeological unit possessing traits sufficiently characteristic to distinguish it from other similar units. The unit is spatially limited to a locality or a region and is temporally limited to a relatively brief interval.

**Focus:** A focus is roughly equivalent to the phase but lacks the temporal distinctions found within the phase.

**Local Sequence:** A series of components found in stratigraphic succession at a single site or a series of sequences from several sites.

**Regional Sequence:** A chronological sequence of phases within a region.

**Horizon:** An assemblage that may have special characteristics (e.g., tool forms) and has broad areal distribution and which exists for a limited time.

**Tradition:** Assemblages through time that maintain persistent characteristics within an area or region (e.g., the ceramic tradition).

**Aspect:** A set of foci within an area or region that have common characteristics.

**Period:** A unit of time for a specific part of the cultural sequence (e.g., the Plains Village period, the Archaic period).

### **Cultural Units**

**Paleoindian:** This term refers to people living in Oklahoma and other parts of North America between 15,000 and 10,000 years ago (and perhaps longer). They lived in small nomadic groups and hunted extinct animals such as the woolly mammoth and giant bison. Another name for these Paleoindians was the Big Game Hunters.

**Archaic:** A term which refers to prehistoric Indians following a hunting and gathering way-of-life. This period lasted from roughly 10,000 years ago to about 2000 years ago. They also lived in small nomadic societies (ca. 30-100 people) and hunted modern day animals (deer, bison, rabbits, etc) and gathered edible wild plants. By the end of this period, Archaic societies were becoming more sedentary and were involved in long-range trade with other groups and were developing greater sophistication in their cultural patterns.

**Woodland:** The Woodland period lasted from roughly 2000 years ago to about 1200 years ago. Woodland peoples lived in larger groups and also in more permanent settlements. During Woodland times, pottery manufacture was invented and later in the period, the bow and arrow were adopted. It is also during the Woodland period that greater efforts were spent on intensively harvesting or growing plants. By Woodland times, it is clear that domesticated plants are being grown with some of these being tropical varieties from Mexico.

**Village Farming:** The last prehistoric period. Village Farmers lived in Oklahoma between 1200 and 500 years ago. They lived in settled villages and grew a variety of crops including corn, beans, and squash. Hunting of game also continued to be important. In eastern Oklahoma, the Caddo also developed elaborate rituals regarding treatment of the dead.

**Protohistoric:** The Protohistoric period refers to the time after Coronado's journey across the Southern Plains in 1541 until roughly 1800 when we have more detailed historic records. Protohistoric peoples in Oklahoma include the Wichita, the Caddo, the Osage, and possibly the Apache. The Wichita, Caddo, and Osage lived in semi-sedentary large villages and had a mixed economy based on farming and bison hunting (although other game as also taken). The Apache were thought to have had a more nomadic lifestyle with less focus on farming.

**Historic:** The Historic period extends from 1800 to present and includes contemporary historic events. A diversity of groups inhabited Oklahoma during this latest period. These groups range from the removal tribes to reservation Indians to white settlers.

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