

**Russell  
Cave**

**NATIONAL MONUMENT • ALABAMA**

# a record of 8,000 years of man's life on this continent



Here hundreds of generations of prehistoric Americans lived a rigorous and demanding life. For most of this time agriculture was unknown, and hunting and gathering were their only livelihood. These people had little time for anything but securing food and shelter.

The tools and weapons they used, the bones of the animals they ate, the charcoal of their fires, and the debris of their camps accumulated layer upon layer as the years—and thousands of years—passed. When the last occupants departed, Russell Cave held beneath its surface the record of life there.

This record was not laid bare until 1953. That year four members of the Tennessee Archeological Society began digging in the cave. As they bit deeper, they realized that they had come upon an important archeological site, one which demanded more intensive effort than they could give it. They told the Smithsonian Institution of their discovery. That institution, in cooperation with the National Geographic Society, conducted three seasons of archeological exploration. Other excavations were later carried out by the National Park Service. From this work has come our present knowledge of the people Russell Cave sheltered for 8,000 years.

## MAN COMES TO RUSSELL CAVE

Over 4,000 years before the building of the Great Pyramid of Egypt, the first Indians came to light their fires and live in Russell Cave. Man had come to this hemisphere thousands of years earlier and had gradually spread over both continents, but until about 10,000 years ago Russell Cave was uninhabitable. Waters from a nearby stream coursed through the cavern. No one could live there until a large rockfall from the roof raised the cave floor above the floodwaters.

The first inhabitants camped on an irregular floor of rock slabs. It is from measuring the radioactive carbon remaining in the charcoal of their fires that archeologists can date their arrival at about 6500 to 7000 B.C. For these early people, moving from place to place as food supply and the seasons dictated, Russell Cave was a seasonal haven. The cave sheltered them mainly in fall and winter. Water abounded nearby; the forest bore a rich crop of nuts; and the mountains and valley yielded game. In spring and summer small bands—several families—probably camped along the shore of the Tennessee River only a few miles from the cave.

Early Archaic  
5500—4500 B. C.

Late Archaic  
3500—500 B. C.

Earliest Archaic  
7000—5500 B. C.

Middle Archaic  
4500—3500 B. C.

Thousands of years ago, weapon points were a key to prehistoric man's survival. Today, these same tips are a key to prehistoric man's history. Through the changing styles of projectile points found in Russell Cave, 8,000 years of civilization unfold.

## THE ARCHAIC PERIOD (7000 to 500 B.C.)

For nearly 7,000 years the people who inhabited Russell Cave lived by hunting and gathering. The deer was the most commonly hunted animal, but wild turkey was also a favorite. Other quarry were squirrel, raccoon, rabbit, gray fox, skunk, and bobcat. The porcupine, today no longer found this far south, appeared in the earliest occupational levels. Turtles, fish, and shellfish were also part of the diet.

A short spear, tipped with a stone point and propelled by a throwing stick, or atlatl, was Archaic man's chief weapon. He chipped the points from chert, which occurs as nodules and veins in the limestone near the cave. The quantities of chips turned up show that projectile points were made in the cave.

Archaic man wasted little of his game. Meat was roasted or stewed by dropping hot rocks into water-filled containers of bark or skin. Hides provided him with clothing and shelter. Bones served as tools.

Many plant foods, such as fruits and berries, were scarce or unavailable during the time of year that Russell Cave was occupied. Nuts and seeds, gathered in quan-

ties, were staple fare.

Archaic man had few tools, reflecting the limited needs of the people and the necessity for household goods to be portable. Besides weapon points, he worked sharp, flinty stone into scrapers and knives. Bones made into awls and needles suggest that he worked leather. He also fashioned bone into fish hooks. No ornaments were found in these deposits.

The Indians probably made other articles that the ground has not preserved. Basketry and items of wood and leather have long since disappeared, leaving only scant evidence that they once existed. One piece of evidence pointing to the presence of perishable material was the discovery of cane matting impressions on clay deep in the Archaic deposits.

Occasionally the Indians buried inside the cave family members who died while living there. Several burials, of both adults and children, have been found in the Archaic layers. Their bodies had been placed in shallow pits scooped out of the cave floor. No objects were found with these burials.

There are hints that during the last 3,000 years of this period the Indians of the Tennessee Valley relied



Mississippian  
A. D. 1000—1500



Woodland  
500 B. C.—A. D. 1000



on the river for their chief source of sustenance. The cave then may have been less frequently occupied. But in most other respects the Russell Cave Indians' way of life remained unchanged until the end of the period.

## THE WOODLAND PERIOD (500 B.C. to A.D. 1000)

**B**eginning about 500 B.C. the implements of the inhabitants of Russell Cave underwent a dramatic change. Pottery appears for the first time and in quantity. Smaller weapon points suggest that the bow and arrow had replaced the earlier throwing stick. Bone tools are better finished, and there are a variety of bone and shell ornaments.

These changes, widespread throughout the eastern United States, mark the beginning of the Woodland Period. It was during this time that burial mounds came into use and ceremonialism increased.

The richer and more complex way of life indicates that the Woodland Indians had more time for activities not directly concerned with staying alive. Probably a stable and more abundant economy underlay this

## COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY

<b>Historic Period</b>		
	A. D. 1500	Discovery of America
<b>Mississippian Period</b>	1000	Magna Carta Battle of Hastings
<b>Woodland Period</b>		Charlemagne Fall of Rome
	0	Birth of Christ
	500	Golden Age of Greece
	1000	Fall of Troy
<b>Archaic Period</b>	2000	Hammurabi Code
	3000	Great Pyramid of Egypt
	B. C. 7000	New Stone Age in Europe

development. Increased use of plant foods, perhaps even rudimentary farming, provided this base. At least we know that by the end of the Woodland Period primitive agriculture had taken hold in the east.

In this period the Indians used Russell Cave also only seasonally. When they left in the spring they probably joined other groups at a summer village that was larger than those of the Archaic Period.

Changes in the shape and style of artifacts are the basis for sub-divisions within Woodland Period at Russell Cave. The early pottery is decorated with fabric impressions on the surface. Later pottery is decorated with impressions from wooden paddles carved in a variety of designs. The shapes of arrowpoints also changed during the period.

### THE MISSISSIPPIAN AND HISTORIC PERIODS

Shortly after A.D. 1000 the Indians began to make less and less use of Russell Cave. Occasionally small parties, probably hunters, left a scattering of objects that differed from those of the Woodland Period. But the basic way of life had changed. Now the Indians lived in permanent villages. Rich bottomlands near the river supported their fields of corn and other plants. This time of settled villages, most often containing large, flat-topped temple mounds, is known as the Mississippian Period.

In historic times the Cherokee Indians occupied this part of the Tennessee Valley. The Cherokees, and the white settlers who followed them, made little use of the cave. The few objects they left are found very close to the surface.

### ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The monument is best approached by U.S. 72 leading to Bridgeport, Ala. Turn north on County Road 91 to

Safety is free &  
non-polluting

Help your self

the community of Mt. Carmel, then turn right on County Road 75 to the monument entrance. The distance from Bridgeport to the monument is about 8 miles over paved road.

The monument is open all year. Exhibits are in the visitor center, and an exhibit of the archeological excavation is in the cave. There are no camping facilities. Please help preserve the natural and archeological scene.

Entrance into cave passages (except at the archeological exhibit) is allowed only with written permission of the superintendent.

#### ADMINISTRATION

Russell Cave National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation on May 11, 1961. Some 310 acres, a gift of the National Geographic Society to the people of the United States, was set aside for the protection of the site and its surroundings. It is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

A superintendent, whose address is Russell Cave National Monument, Bridgeport, Ala. 35740 is in immediate charge.

#### AMERICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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