



11,000 Years of Human Influence: The Archeological Record



What is Archeology?



Archeology is the study of past human cultures, technologies and behaviors based on artifacts, landscapes, written records and oral histories. Archeologists consider projectile points, animal bones, pottery, food remains, clothing and wood to be artifacts. Archeologists examine both historic and prehistoric (before written history) artifacts through surface and subsurface explorations, known as survey and excavation, to research and record the evolution of past human societies.

Archeologists attempt to understand aspects of past human culture and society, such as diet, housing, migration, and hunting and cooking methods. The goals are to put together a sequence of events and dates explaining human past; to identify ways of life that no longer exist; and to create an understanding of how and why human cultures evolve.

Archeology in Grand Teton National Park

In 1971, Charles Love began archeological research in Grand Teton National Park. Love discovered, recorded and analyzed an immense volume of archeological information from the park, creating the foundation for future work.

Since then, archeologists working for the National Park Service and other institutions have continued to study aspects of prehistoric lifestyles, establishing archeology as an important aspect of Grand Teton National Park.

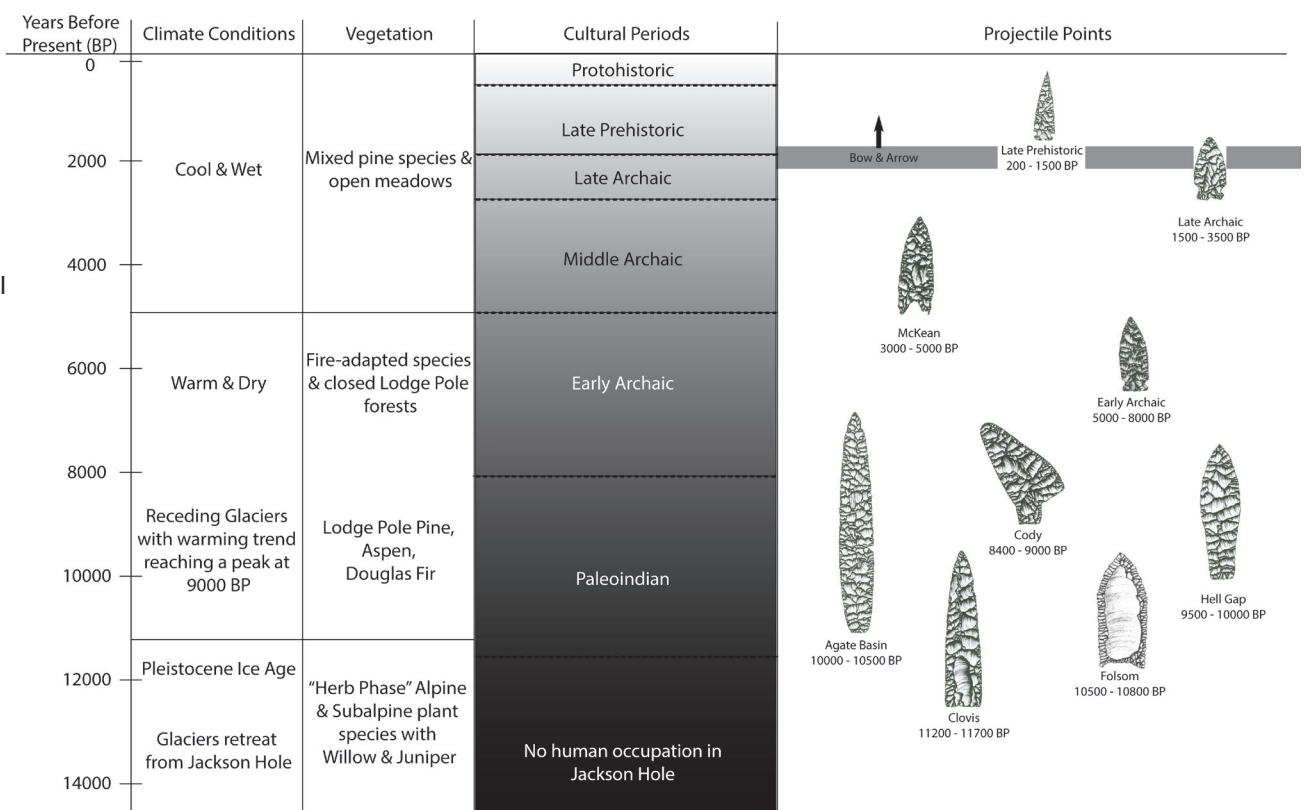
Jackson Hole Prehistory

The first humans entered the Jackson Hole valley roughly 11,000 years ago, shortly after ice-age glaciers retreated. Archeologists believe that Paleoindian hunter-gatherers, 11,000 to 8,000 years ago, spent the late spring and summer in the valley following wildlife and ripening plants. They killed large animals such as bison and elk with projectile point spears including: Agate Basin, Hell Gap and Cody-type points (Figure 1). Most of these points were flaked from obsidian, volcanic glass found in the area.

Artifacts that date from the Archaic period, 8,000 to 1,500 years ago increased in number and variety. This shift suggests more people entered the valley and they needed new technologies due to a changing environment and different wildlife.

Prehistoric people began using roasting pits, large cooking pits lined with heated stones, around 5,900 years ago.

Figure 1. Timeline of Grand Teton National Park prehistory



Jackson Hole Prehistory (continued)

Projectile points made of obsidian evolved to have side notches, indentations on the sides of a point used to attach a point to a spear. These points include McKean and Pelican Lake-type points (Figure 1). Tipi rings, stone circles used to hold down the bottom of skin-covered structures, and stone-grinding tools, rocks used to grind food, also date to the Archaic period (Figure 2).

Tools continued to evolve from the Archaic to the Late Prehistoric period 1,500 years ago. Late Prehistoric populations began using the bow and arrow as their primary hunting tool (Figure 3). Using an arrow decreased the size of the projectile point from the larger spear point. People also started shaping soapstone bowls and clay pottery (Figure 4). Archeologists believe hunter-gatherers in Jackson Hole decreased their seasonal travel during this period, remaining in the valley for a longer period of time.

The Protohistoric period lasted from 1700 to 1850 in Jackson Hole. During this period, Indians traded European goods such as beads, axes, knives, kettles and horses, but kept no records. After 1850, survey crews began documenting information about the valley.

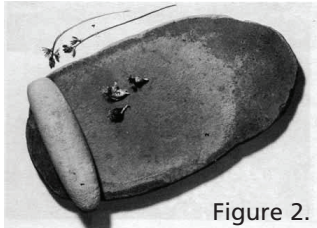


Figure 2. Grinding Stone

There is no archeological evidence suggesting prehistoric populations cultivated crops or established permanent settlements in the valley. Throughout prehistory people hunted deer, elk, bighorn sheep, bison and fish; and gathered cattail, berries, roots and tubers for food. Food remains combined with other artifacts help archeologists interpret the prehistory of Jackson Hole.

Archeological research in Grand Teton National Park and the Jackson Hole valley continues to expand our understanding of past human cultures, technologies and behaviors. Archeology is an integral part of the National Park Service's mission to preserve natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.



Figure 3. Bow and Arrows



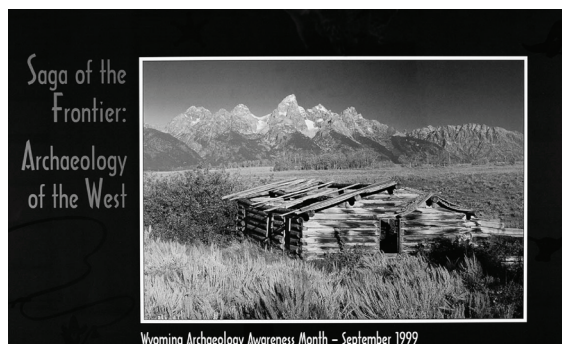
Figure 4. Soapstone Bowls

How you can help: Saving the Past for the Future

- Do not collect archeological artifacts. Collecting artifacts from federal land is illegal. Artifacts are fragile, easily disturbed, and nonrenewable. If properly studied, artifacts may provide new and important information about the past. If artifacts are disturbed, vital information may be lost.
- If you find an artifact, record the location as accurately as possible, do not disturb the item and contact a park ranger.
- Do not buy, sell or trade artifacts. Vital research information will be lost. Artifacts sold on the commercial market may be looted from federal lands, destroying research potential and sometimes desecrating sites and graves.
- Never dig or excavate a site without proper permission and supervision. Permits are given to museums, universities, colleges and other recognized scientific or educational institutions for research to expand our understanding.

Archeological Opportunities

- Visit the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center in Moose to view natural and cultural history exhibits of Grand Teton National Park.
- Visit the Colter Bay Visitor Center to view Native American arts and artifacts.
- Visit the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum in Jackson, Wyoming to view artifacts, photographs, documents, and media about the history of Jackson Hole.
- Participate in Wyoming Archaeology Awareness Month in September and attend Wyoming archaeology celebrations. For more information: wyoshpo.state.wy.us/AAmonth/Index.aspx.
- Volunteer in Grand Teton National Park, or for archeological projects throughout the country.



For More Information

- For an in depth look at cultural resources in Grand Teton National Park: www.nps.gov/grte/historyculture/index.htm
- Read "A Place Called Jackson Hole." A great reference containing the prehistory and history of Jackson Hole: www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/grtez/hrs.htm
- The National Park Service Archeology Program: www.nps.gov/archeology/
- The Smithsonian Institution's Department of Anthropology: anthropology.si.edu/index.html
- Archeological volunteer opportunities with the US Forest Service Passport in Time Program: www.passportintime.com/
- More archeological volunteer opportunities: www.nps.gov/archeology/public/archvol.htm