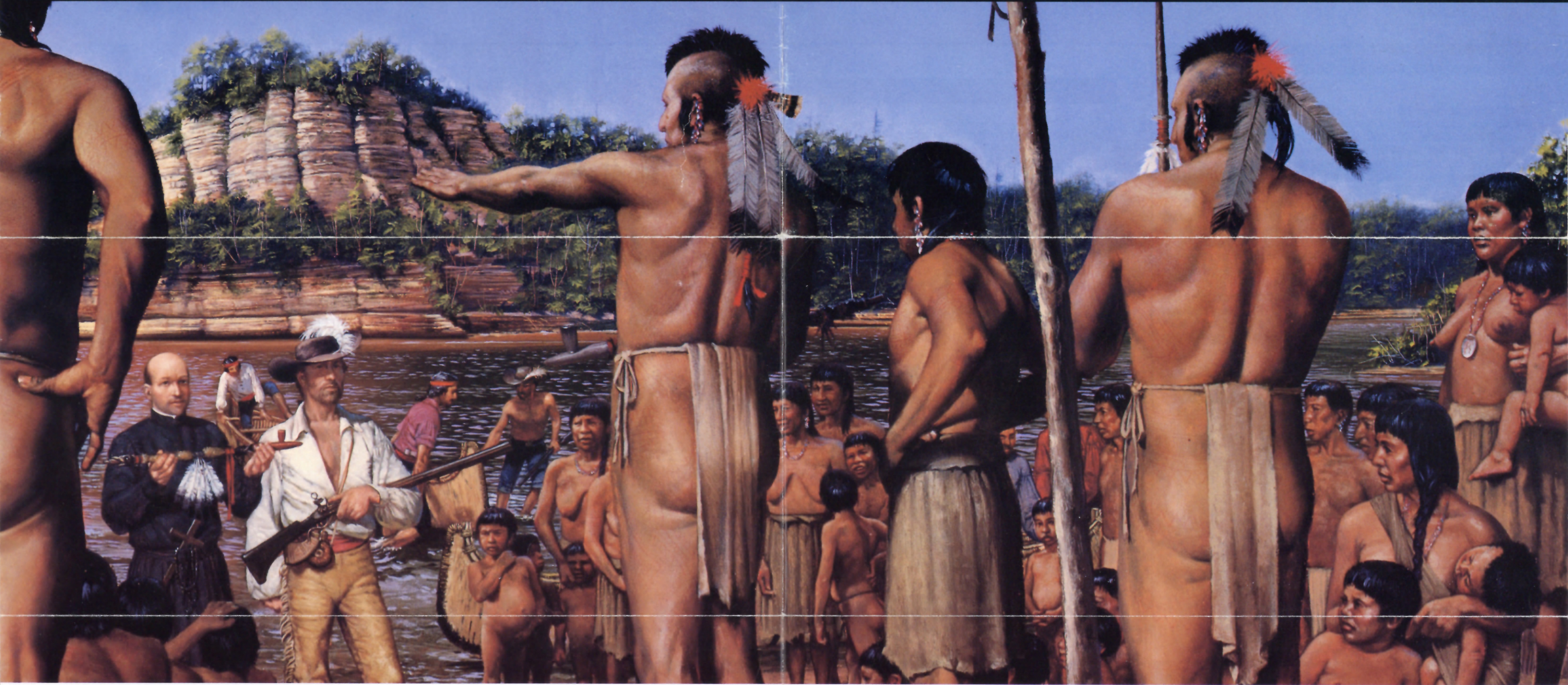


ARCHEOLOGY

Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor

Illinois and Michigan Canal
National Heritage Corridor
Illinois

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



This mural depicts the historic moment when Father Marquette and Louis Jolliet greeted the Illinois Indians at the Old Kaskaskia village in August 1673. Starved Rock stands in the background. Two years later he returned to establish the first mission in the Illinois

Country, which he named the Mission of the Immaculate Conception. After Marquette's visit the population increased greatly over number resident prehistorically. Additional groups of the Illinois tribe took up residence in the next 18 years. With the establishment

of Fort St. Louis atop Starved Rock in 1682, occupation grew more from their increased security. Old Kaskaskia was abandoned by 1691.

Painting is by Robert A. Thom. Used by courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.

Our Cultural Heritage

The single most visible place important to our knowledge of Corridor archeology is Starved Rock. Well known in history, this sandstone butte is rich in cultural resources. It stands on the south side of the river near the town of Utica in the midst of one of the most intensely utilized areas of the Corridor. Your tour of the archeological resources fittingly starts with this famous geographical feature.



Aerial view of present day Starved Rock from the northwest.

Before introducing the archeological spots in the Corridor, a review of the significant periods of occupation is useful. Archeologists recognize that the Native Americans who met the first Europeans had long been in the area we call Illinois. Just as Europeans once lived in caves, became farmers, erected cities, waged war and became industrialized, so too did the lifestyles of Native Americans change. As a matter of convenience, archeologists divide the prehistory of the Native Americans into four periods in addition to the Historic Period. Each of these major time periods within the 12,000 year occupation of the region is marked by an important economic development. Distinctive artifacts stand out as important traces of these epochs of land use.

PaleoIndian Period (to 8000 BC)

Native Americans entered what is now Illinois during the late Ice Age, or Pleistocene. These early peoples were organized in small, highly mobile bands which hunted large game animals. Their principle weapon was the spear. Distinctively chipped stone spear tips, called Clovis points, are the principle remnants of this time period. Small camping sites are found mainly in well-drained upland areas on high ground, far back from the river. Another favored location is along the crest of the bluffs overlooking the Illinois and Des Plaines Rivers. Hunting probably focused upon herding animals, such as elk, bison, and caribou. Now extinct animals such as the mammoth and mastodon were probably hunted as well.

The climate of northeastern Illinois at this time was influenced by a mountain of glacial ice occupying the Lake Michigan basin.

Climate in the Corridor was cooler then, resembling that found today in Hudson Bay. The present-day Illinois River was filled with water and sediment flowing from Lake Michigan. A mixed tundra and open spruce forest occupied the area until about 8900 BC when a pine and ash forest replaced the spruce. About 600 years later with the transition to a milder, temperate climate came a moister deciduous forest dominated by oaks.

The Archaic Period (8000-500 BC)

Native Americans, with the end of the Glaciers, found northern Illinois increasingly congenial to hunting and gathering. Climate and vegetation patterns approached those of the present day, and in this newly established environment, Native Americans thrived. With the extinction of many large Pleistocene animals, the foragers living along the upper Illinois River turned to hunting modern species of game, especially deer and waterfowl, and to gathering wild plant foods. Grasslands expanded into the rolling uplands from the Plains regions. Today this prairie land is planted in corn and soybeans. Large chipped notched points are common indicators of this period. Less common, but just as distinctive, are the large grooved axes, various polished stone ornaments, and the occasional stemmed and socketed knife blades hammered out of nearly pure copper nuggets. Compared to those of other time periods, Archaic peoples made broader use of the numerous ecosystems throughout the Corridor. For the first time, Native Americans established a campsite on the summit of Starved Rock.

Archaic Period projectile point made of cold hammered native copper from Starved Rock

The Woodland Period (500 BC- AD 1000)

The introduction of crude, grit-tempered pottery marks the beginning of a period in which native plant foods gave way gradually to the increased use of domesticated plants. These plants, which include pumpweed, goosefoot, sunflower and squash, were domesticated from native stock over a long

period of time, providing food for an increasingly sedentary population. In this period, decorative arts became more elaborate, trading networks expanded across the continent, villages grew in size and became more permanent, and the dead were buried under mounds placed at locations that marked the heartland of settled territories. This development peaked during the Middle Woodland or Hopewellian Sub-period (200 BC - AD 400). Representative sites of this period were the Utica and Adler Mounds. These mounds housed the dead who were interred in sunken crypts with pottery and other objects, including copper and marine shell artifacts acquired through long-distance trade.

The Mississippian Period (AD 1000- 1673)

Large villages and cemeteries came into being. In the upper Illinois River valley, founded upon an economy that combined maize agriculture with older practices of hunting and gathering of natural foods. Maize (or Indian corn) and the common bean were introduced from Mexico via the American Southwest. These two tropical plants, in combination with native squash (of the pumpkin type), laid the foundations of an important agricultural system that swept the Midwest. The success of this system produced important changes to native lifeways. Settlements were now large, permanent villages composed of substantial, partly sunken earth lodges. Cooking pots became more spherical in shape to adapt to new methods of cooking food, particularly maize. Agricultural tools became more common. Substitution of the bow and arrow for the spear introduced small arrowheads (mainly triangles of chipped stone) into the tool inventory. Burials occurred in large cemeteries located in broad and low earthen mounds. Copper objects, ear ornaments, and copper and shell gorgets suspended around the neck set apart prominent individuals from the others in death. The Briscoe Mounds are examples of mounds of this period.

The beginnings of this system took place around AD 1000 when cultures centered at Cahokia in the greater St. Louis area began to exercise powerful influence in the upper Illinois watershed. Emblems of distinction at



Spoon of mussel shell found at the Mississippian Period Gentleman Farm site.

Cahokia were exported widely, some finding their resting place in the upper Illinois River valley. Material culture in the Corridor took on an appearance that was to persist with minor changes until the advent of European explorers. Major villages that became established in this period were Old Kaskaskia and the Fisher site.

The Historic Period (since AD 1673)

Sometime before Father Marquette discovered the Illinois Indians living at Old Kaskaskia, native ways of life had undergone a change in one respect: greater village mobility. This shift resulted from the adoption of wide-ranging bison hunting twice a year. Although villages were large and permanent, occupants were used to moving their housing frequently. They lived in long wigwams which were covered with light-weight mats that could be erected and dismantled with ease. The Illinois Indians made heavy use of bison meat and starch-filled tubers of water lily plants. These food sources made use of natural habitats found in the Corridor. Bison were common on the grasslands, and edible tubers grew in quantity in the swampy wetlands along parts of the Illinois and Des Plaines, particularly in the swamps of the Sag.



Pottery jar of the early historic period from Old Kaskaskia.

Later, inter-tribal warfare in the 17th century increased the trend toward more mobile life, especially after 1660 when Iroquois raiding parties penetrated northern Illinois. The Iroquois carried guns which had a devastating effect on midwestern tribes. These weapons were unavailable in sufficient quantities to Illinois Indians until LaSalle and fur-trading Frenchmen penetrated the Illinois Valley. With the establishment of a steady influx of weapons, along with useful household items, beads and other ornaments, populations in Illinois stabilized.

The chief trading place in the 1680s was Starved Rock. As a consequence the upper

Illinois River valley became a magnet for native peoples over a very wide area, reaching a peak population of 10,000 for a brief time. Widespread traces of occupational use of the canyons, plateaus and bottomland plains around Starved Rock during these early decades of European contact testify to the impact of concentrated settlement on the area. During this period, Old Kaskaskia was a major village from which Jesuit priests wrote long, informative accounts of the Illinois Indians. Other places of Indian habitation were the summit of Starved Rock and the promontory, called Hotel Plaza, below the bluff on which the Starved Rock State Park lodge sits.



Small glass trade beads of the Historic Period from Old Kaskaskia.

After the Illinois tribes left the Corridor, it was occupied by other Indians as part of a general westward migration in advance of the spread of peoples of European descent. Disease and warfare took a heavy toll of Native Americans in this period. Of these Native Americans the Potawatomi and associated Ottawa and Ojibwa settled and utilized the Corridor the most extensively. Chicago was the base of a large population, but small villages were established throughout the Corridor. In 1816 these native peoples ceded lands within the corridor and by 1833 had left northern Illinois for Kansas.

Tracing Early Trade

Copper occurs naturally around Lake Superior where it was mined by Native Americans. However, glaciers carried small nodules of copper into the Illinois valley where it could be found in river gravels. The raw materials for making objects from seashells came from the eastern part of the Gulf Coast where shells of the forms traded prehistorically can be found today. Archeologists also locate the sources of flint or chert used to chip tools, such as: points to tip spears and arrows, steeply beveled scrapers to scrape heavy hides, massive chipped hoe blades, and large ovate pieces for general use. Distinctly different kinds of flint were used in each period, some of them coming from southern Illinois and eastern Iowa. These exotic flints were usually particularly high grade stones that were reserved for special artifacts, the more common local materials being relegated to less demanding tasks. Some objects that were traded into the Corridor were crafted elsewhere.

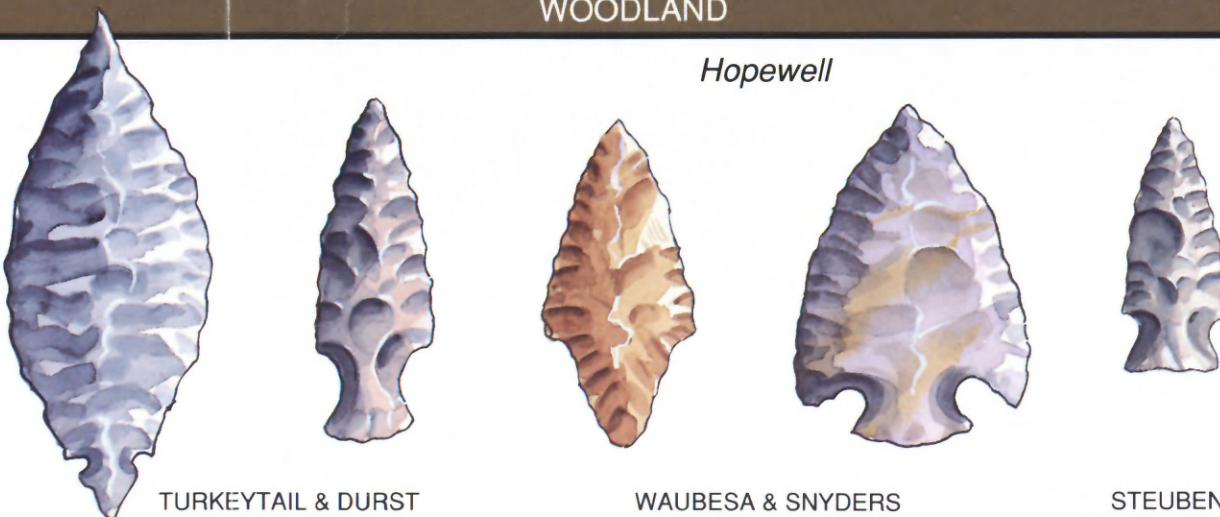
Patterns of Land Use in the Corridor

As you explore the hills and valleys of the Corridor, you might wonder where ancient peoples lived. Archeologists have, in general, a pretty good idea of favorite locations. Bluff edges have been favored from the earliest times, although these locations were rarely lived on very long or by many people. Archeologists think these bluff edge sites were selected in Ice Age times because they offered all-important vistas for sighting herds of roving game animals. Much more important was the high land in valley bottoms, particularly at places along the Illinois River where the woods made broad belts of habitat for forest dwelling animals. The resources of these forests, together with those of nearby prairies and rivers, provided the most secure sources of food for prehistoric peoples. Even with the introduction of corn or maize, wild foods of native plants and animals continued to have an important place in prehistoric diets.

In prehistoric times the river was just as important for transportation as today. But before the I&M Canal was dug, the rapids that punctuated the river forced early travelers to walk around them. As one ascends the river, the first of these rapids lies opposite Starved Rock. Although it is buried by the present lock and dam, the obstacle that the rapids presented led to the early development of villages and cemeteries by peoples clustered around this important break in transport.

Large mound groups, called the Utica Mounds, once occupied both banks near where the Rt. 178 bridge crosses the Illinois. The peak of burial mound construction was in the Woodland Period, particularly between 100 BC and AD 100. These mounds contained objects such as sea shells that testify to long-distance trade to Florida. Other villages and earthworks were located near other portages ascending the river.

Before the I&M Canal, low water during the dry summer months rendered river travel practically impossible. In these and other low-water periods, aboriginal peoples found it easier to strike off on overland trails. The more important of these were taken over by European settlers as the right-of-ways for the early plank roads. These have long since been improved to become our state and federal highways. One of these early routes was the Ottawa Trail. Today Joliet Road runs along most of its path. Where this trail crossed the Des Plaines, camps were set up along the bank. These trail crossing camps have a long history. The Ottawa Trail camp has been occupied for 2000 years.

ICE AGE HUNTERS IN NORTHERN EUROPE		PLANT DOMESTICATION IN ASIA		FIRST CIVILIZATION BEGINS IN MESOPOTAMIA AND LATER EGYPT		GREEK CITYSTATES AND ALEXANDRIAN EMPIRE		ROMAN EMPIRE		ROME DECLINES		RENAISSANCE		
PALEOINDIAN		ARCHAIC					WOODLAND					MISSISSIPPIAN		HISTORIC
														
CLOVIS 12000 BC - 8000 BC		HARDIN 8000 BC - 5500 BC		FOX VALLEY 7000 BC	MANTANZAS 3300 BC - 2500 BC	RADDATZ 3000 BC	TURKEYTAIL & DURST 1000 BC - 500 BC		WAUBESA & SNYDERS 100 BC - 350 AD		STEBUBEN 350 AD - 600 AD		MADISON 900 AD - 1750 AD	SAUK 1790 AD - 1810 AD

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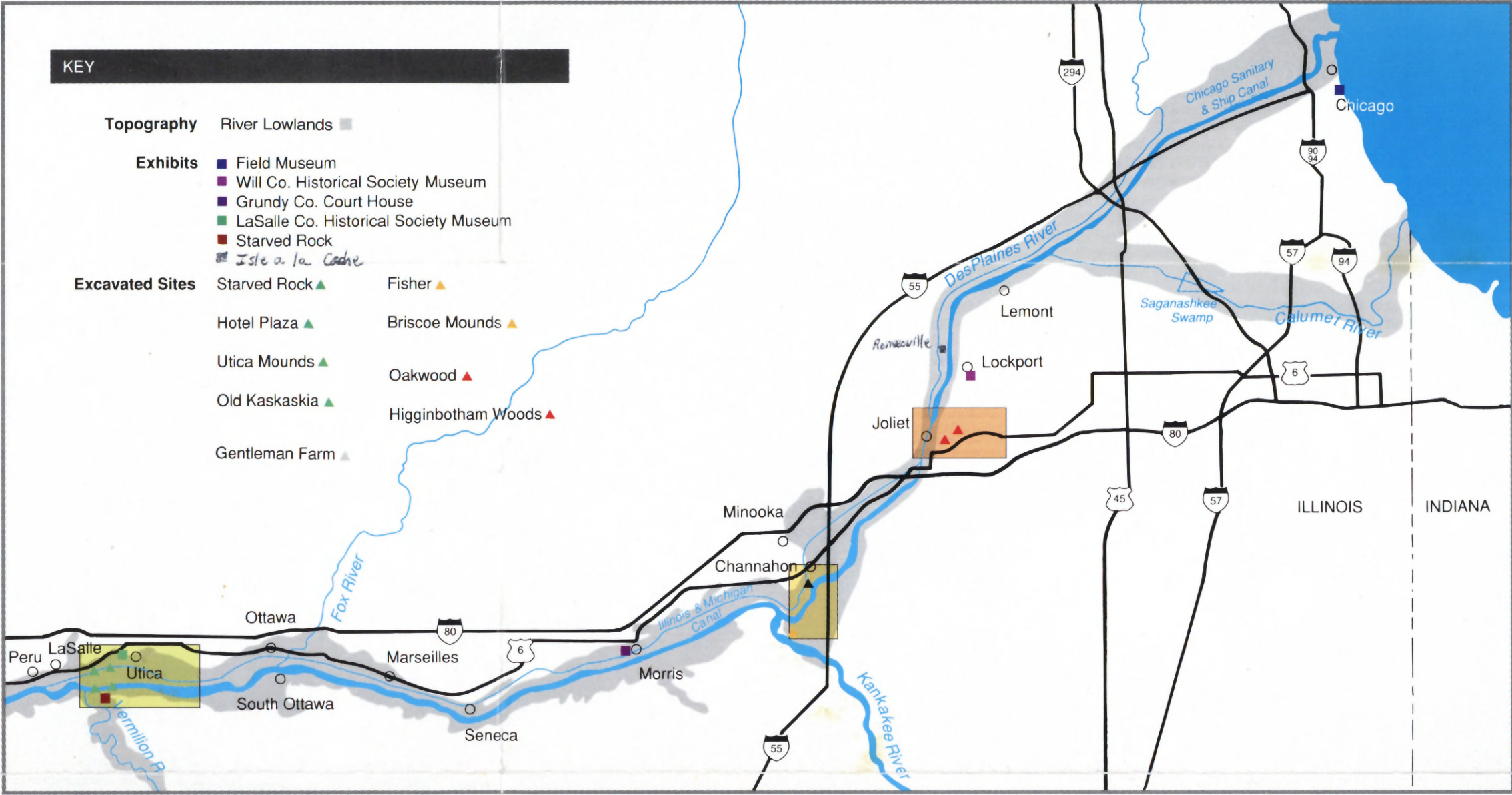
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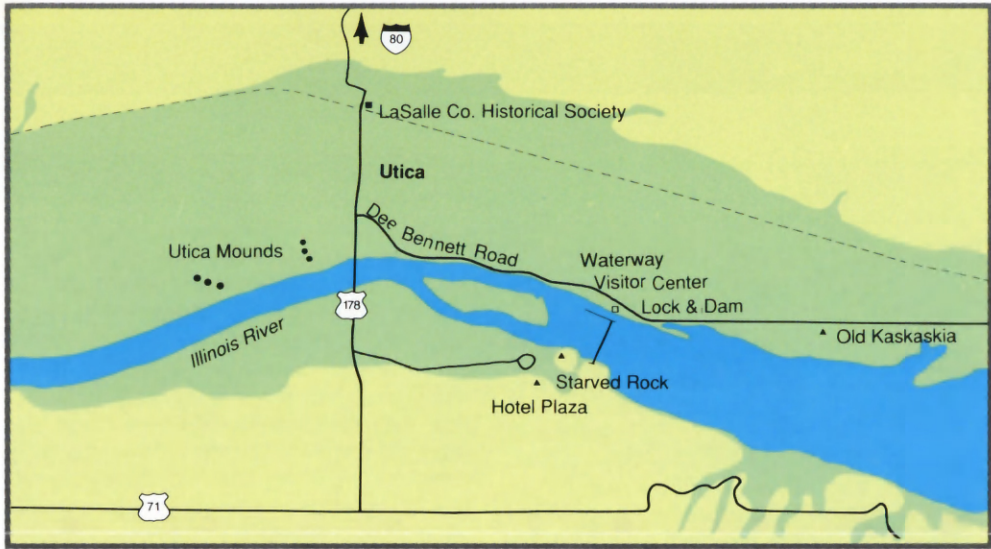
Representative Archeological Sites

Archeological sites representative of all of the major periods of Illinois prehistory and early history can be found within the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. Among these sites are a handful that are either unique or rare survivals of site types that were more common before the Illinois landscape was given over to agriculture and development.

The canal follows the Upper Illinois Valley whose natural bounty in plant and animal life has been a major attraction to human settlement since its formation thousands of years ago. Although sites from all archeological periods usually can be found along most of the Corridor, certain sections have been chosen to stand as representative. These contain sites in parks and forest reserves that are accessible to the public. From west to east the first of the three sections is the Starved Rock area that was important because it lay next to the lowest rapids on the Illinois River. The second is the Channahon area where a major concentration of prehistoric life was concentrated. The third is the Hickory Creek section where some important prehistoric earthworks remain preserved.



Starved Rock Area



Starved Rock is probably the single most prominent historic place connected with early Indian life in the Corridor. This striking pedestal of sandstone has a colorful history to match. Its name comes from a semi-legendary disaster that befell a group of Illinois Indians besieged on its top in the aftermath of Pontiac's Uprising around 1769. Prior to this calamitous event,

archeological investigations of a large part of the top of the rock has disclosed this landmark to have witnessed approximately 5000 years of continuous human use. All but the Paleo-Indian Period is recorded in this long sequence of repeated occupation. The rock, or as it was called by the French, Le Rocher, became famous in 1682 when LaSalle constructed Fort St. Louis on top to

induce the Illinois Indians to remain in their village (Old Kaskaskia) after they had been scared off by an Iroquois war party in 1680. The fort's wooden design was tailored to fit the topography on top and utilized locations where the surface soil was anchored most securely. Several sunken bunkers were dug in areas where the mantle was sufficiently deep. Archeologists excavated a deep deposit of early 18th century trash in one of these bunkers. When the fort was abandoned in 1691, it remained in use by Native Americans, however. Deep pockets of trash that filled the bunkers of LaSalle's fort testify to this use, probably by one of the Illinois tribes—perhaps the Peoria who were recorded to be living near the rock as late as 1736. The rock's present-day name was not to come into use until sometime after 1769. Clues to the rock's prehistoric use are buried in the soil that occupies a deep basin-like depression in the rock surface. Here ancient camp fires were found.

Several hundred feet east and downslope of the Starved Rock Park lodge lies the Hotel Plaza Site, occupied repeatedly in ancient times. This encampment was heavily occupied in the 17th and early 18th centuries by Indians concentrated around Starved Rock as a defensive measure. Its rich history was disclosed by excavations in 1948.

Across from Starved Rock lies the Old Kaskaskia Village or the Zimmerman site. This large village has a 1000-year old history of settlement as a preferred location for farming. This village, much of which lies under the water of the flood pool behind the Starved Rock Lock and Dam, achieved fame as the site of Father Marquette's visit to the Kaskaskia Indians in 1673. When first found by the French, the village held 74 cabins of long, loaf-shaped wigwams covered with reed mats. The size of the village grew shortly thereafter by the addition of other groups of Illinois Indians. It attained a size of 460 cabins before the Iroquois raid of 1680. Later many thousands were said to have occupied the site.

Archeology and history agree upon the lifeways of these villagers. They lived in their village during the spring and summer. In early winter and in mid-summer before the corn harvest they roved the upland prairies in search of bison or American buffalo. Although these large game animals were not as plentiful as they were west of the Mississippi, herds were an important source of food. Prehistoric occupants of this village lived in very different housing and pursued a more sedentary existence. Dwellings were earth-covered and set part-way into the ground to resemble the earth lodges of the Plains Indians. Hunters concentrated on game available locally and on plentiful fish.

Channahon Area



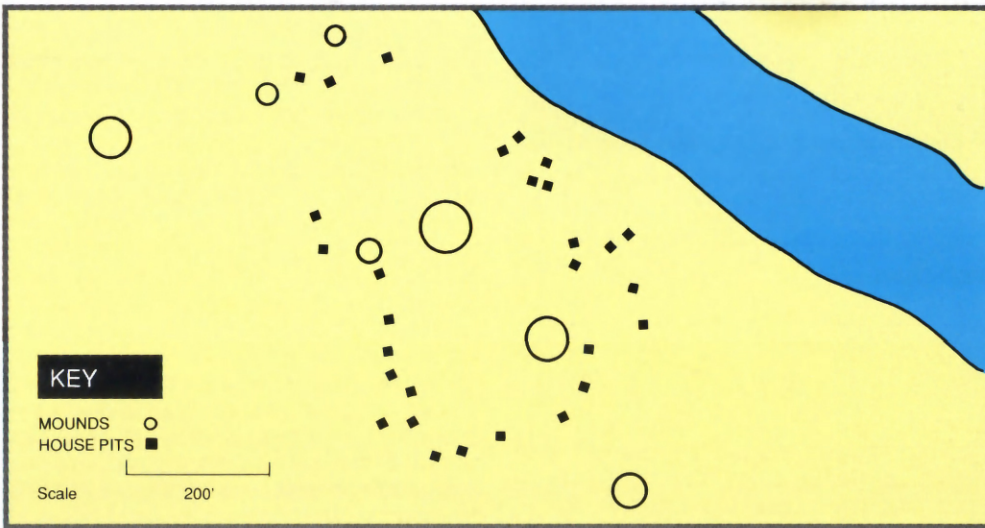
The largest village site in the valley was the Fisher Site, which once stood strategically on the south bank of the Des Plaines River opposite Dresden Heights (above the I&M Canal State Trail), a few miles upstream from the Des Plaines' confluence with the Kankakee River. This large 16.5-acre village site originally contained 9 mounds and over 50 earthlodges marked by saucer-shaped depressions. A large plaza stood at one end encircled by houses, and along one side stood two large low burial mounds. Although repeatedly investigated by archeologists since the 20s, most of the site remained unexcavated by the time it was destroyed by gravel quarrying. Most of the occupation at the site was during the Mississippian Period, although the Woodland Period was represented by one of the mounds.

sent by one of the mounds.

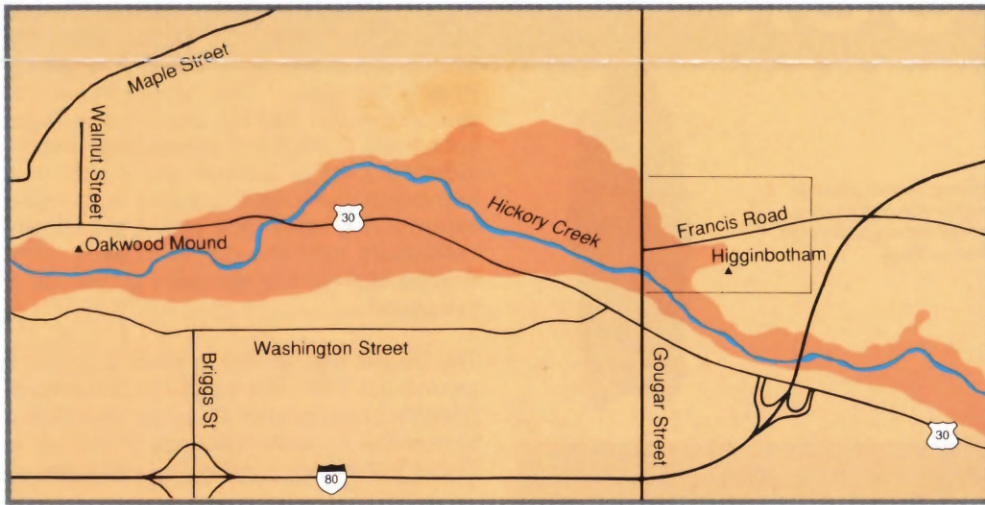
The best preserved of a now rare earthwork are the two Briscoe burial mounds. Constructed approximately A.D. 1100 to 1200 during the Mississippian Period, these mounds occupy a prominent overlook on the north side of the Des Plaines River valley, just west of the Interstate 55 crossing near Channahon. They are now owned by the State of Illinois.

Highway Access: Fisher I55 to Arsenal Rd. south via the frontage road to Blodgett.

Highway Access: Briscoe I55 to Bluff Rd. south via the frontage road to Channahon.



Joliet Area



The Oakwood Mound is a low, broad burial mound that has been partially excavated. It is representative of the same type of burial place as the lower of the two Briscoe mounds although Oakwood may be a little older.

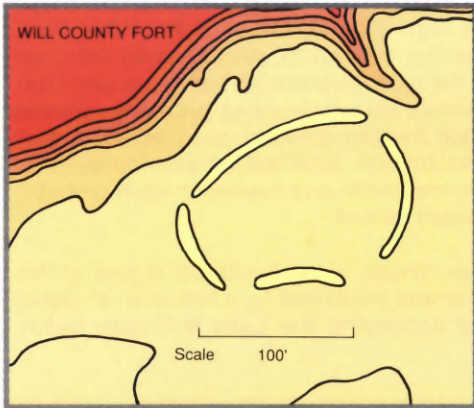
The Higginbotham Woods Earthwork is an irregularly-shaped earthen embankment located in a City of Joliet park. It probably

belongs to the Hopewellian Period when earthworks of similar design were created up and down the Illinois River valley. Although little has been found at this site by archeologists to date this earthwork, there is no evidence that this is a historic fort as commonly believed. Higginbotham is the last of the ancient earthworks that once lined the Illinois-Des Plaines rivers.

Highway Access: Oakwood Mound I-80 to U.S. 30 westbound. Oakwood Cemetery entrance at Walnut St. Drive directly south.

Highway Access: Higginbotham I-80 to U.S. 30 westbound. North at Gougar Rd., east on Francis Rd. Roadside parking on northside. Follow trail north.

Topographic map of the Higginbotham Woods Earthwork. The embankment has entryways in the low wall.



The Past Around Us

Archeologists are trained to read the soil much as you would read a book. The major difference is that in order for archeologists to read the soil they must destroy each page before they can read the next one. Stains in the soil that would indicate where wooden posts once stood, where pits and graves were dug or where fires were built must be carefully recorded. The relationship among these features can be established later to reconstruct what life might have been like at any given period. Trash left behind whose association with features can be documented, such as broken pottery, discarded tools, and food refuse, allow the significance and age of features to be determined. If you find an occasional point or tool in a field, it will do no harm to pick it up. However, digging for artifacts should never be undertaken without the presence of a trained archeologist to record the findings. Many collections are worthless to archeologists because they were made without record of location. The Corridor has already lost much of its prehistory through highway and building construction, quarrying and erosion. All of us need to cooperate to conserve the pieces of the past that remain. Because many sites have already disappeared without a trace, we will never know certain aspects of the past that these sites once represented uniquely. What is left should be treasured all the more.



Archeologist Richard Hagan inspecting an excavation cut in 1950 during his investigations on Starved Rock

The Nation's First National Heritage Corridor

The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor came into being in 1984 when Congress enacted legislation that recognized the area's unique contributions to the nation's development. The 1984 law specifies recreational and economic resources will be retained, enhanced, and interpreted for the benefit and inspiration of present and future generations.

A 19-member federal Commission provides direction and oversight for Corridor planning and operations. It works in cooperation with State, county and local agencies and private organizations to achieve its goals.

While most of the areas identified in the brochure are in public ownership, the majority of land in the National Heritage Corridor is privately owned. If you wish to visit an archeological site, get permission from the landowner first.

Requests for further information about the National Heritage Corridor may be addressed to:

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Brochure concept and text provided by J.A. Brown, Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University

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