

Paleo Indians

Paleo Indian refers to the small bands of nomadic people who first populated North America. After crossing the large expanse of land that appeared between Alaska and Siberia during the last glacial period, they kept traveling until some of them had reached as far as the southern tip of South America and as far east as Virginia and West Virginia. No one knows why these people journeyed from one continent to the other, but archaeologists have thought for a long time that they may have been following herds of **horses, caribou** or **mammoth**. While concentrating on hunting various large game, people from this time period also foraged for locally available foods.

Paleo Indian sites are often found on the outskirts of what used to be large bodies of water such as old glacial lakes and rivers. Perhaps they camped at the water's edge hoping to hunt the animals that went there to drink. In northeastern Pennsylvania, archaeologists have found the remains of blackberry and ground-cherry plants on Paleo Indian sites, suggesting that these foods were an important part of their diet. Other artifacts found at Paleo Indian sites include a variety of stone tools that were designed to efficiently acquire and process meat. The tools may also have been used to work on animal hides, bone and wood, but because these items decay with time, they are typically not found on sites this old.

Concentrations of Paleo Indian artifacts have been reported in **Mason, Wood** and **Hampshire Counties**, West Virginia. Currently, however, we know very little about the everyday life of the people who left them behind because archaeologists have not been able to excavate any of the sites in West Virginia that date to this time period.