

POVERTY POINT EARTHWORKS

GPS Coordinates: Latitude: 32.63622 Longitude: -91.405026

Driving Directions:

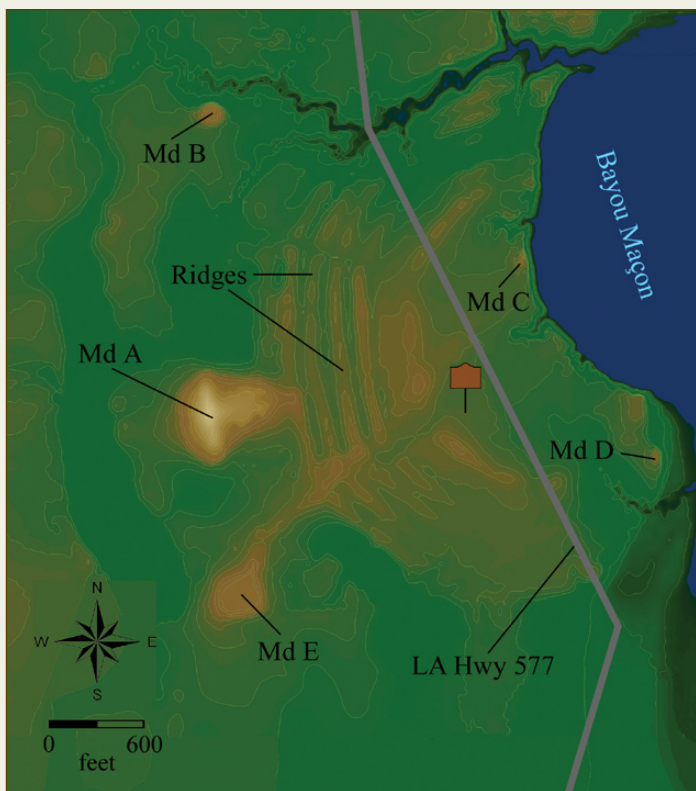
- From La 134, head north on La 577. Go 1.2 miles to marker on left at the Poverty Point State Historic Site.
- From La 17, head east on La 577. Go 5.7 miles to marker on right at the Poverty Point State Historic Site.

Number of Mounds: 6, 6 ridges

Number of Visible Mounds: 5, 6 ridges

Summer Viewing: Excellent

Winter Viewing: Excellent



At the time Poverty Point was built (about 1500 BC), its earthworks were the largest in the Western Hemisphere. There is a wealth of information available about the site at the Poverty Point State Historic Site museum, which is a good starting point for a tour of the Ancient Mounds Trail. Visitors also may take a tram tour or a self-guided walking tour of the site.

Briefly, Poverty Point is a huge complex of 6 mounds, 6 semi-circular ridges, and a plaza; one of the mounds is owned privately and is not accessible to visitors. The largest mound is about 70 feet tall and more than 700 by 640 feet at its base. Some archaeologists believe it is an effigy mound, built in the shape of a bird. The function of the mounds is unknown, but they were not used for burials. They may have been used ceremonially, although few artifacts have been found in or on them. The outermost ridge is .75 mile in diameter, and all of the ridges laid end-to-end would stretch 7.5



miles. The ridges served as living surfaces; archaeologists have found postholes, pits, hearths, earth ovens, and domestic debris in and on them. Construction of all the earthen mounds and ridges required about 981,000 cubic yards of dirt. Investigation also has shown that the builders filled in low areas and gullies to create the level 35-acre plaza, but how much dirt was required is unknown.

The signature artifacts from the site are cooking balls called Poverty Point Objects (PPOs). They're about golf-ball size, formed from local soil into a variety of shapes. Excavations revealed that they were used as a substitute for cooking stones: to steam, bake, and possibly boil their food. Atl-atl (spear-thrower) weights and plummets (fishing net weights) are commonly found artifacts that were used in hunting and fishing. Red jasper owl beads represent Poverty Point's lapidary (stone-working) industry. The Poverty Point people had an extensive trade network, as indicated by raw materials from Arkansas and Mississippi, the southern Appalachians, and the Ohio and upper Mississippi River valleys; these materials were likely transported via watercraft.

The people of Poverty Point did not practice agriculture; they were fisher-hunter-gatherers. They did not eat maize (corn), but subsisted mainly on nuts and acorns, aquatic roots (lotus, cattail), fish, deer, small mammals, and turtles. □

