

Top Site FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Q1. What American Indian tribe(s) built Poverty Point?

To date, archaeologists have not found anything that links the site to a specific tribe or tribes. Proving that a tribe has a direct cultural link to Poverty Point would be very difficult because culture changes over time. Sometimes, pottery styles, folklore, or other clues can make these links clear. Yet, rarely, if ever, are those links to the past still clear after more than 3,000 years!

Q2. Why did American Indians build the mounds at Poverty Point?

We do not know. Archaeologists think that American Indians built mounds for many reasons. One reason was to mark important places. This could be where a notable event happened, where an important person lived, or it could be a sacred space. They may have also built the mounds for religious and/or civic ceremonies.

Q3. Have there ever been any burials found at Poverty Point?

To date, archaeologists have not found any American Indian burials at the site. The only known graves on the site are those of historic settlers and slaves.

Q4. What kind of religion did the American Indians of Poverty Point practice?

We do not know. Many historic tribes have clans, often named after an animal (bear clan, deer clan, etc.). Each clan has its own animal and its own sacred duties (performing rituals, healing, hunting, etc.). Membership in these clans may have been based on someone's gender, ancestry, or something else. Perhaps the people of Poverty Point had similar beliefs.

Q5. Why did the American Indians who built Poverty Point use spears and darts instead of bows and arrows?

Simply put, the bow and arrow had not been adopted in North America yet. In fact, the bow and arrow was not widely used in the southeastern U.S. until around A.D. 700. Spears and darts served the needs of the people who lived at Poverty Point just fine.

Q6. What did the American Indians who lived at Poverty Point use to cook and eat their food?

The people who lived at the site cooked their food in earth ovens. They used heated cooking balls (called Poverty Point Objects, or PPOs for short) and stones to cook their food in these ovens. Soapstone and ceramic bowls could have been used for storing and serving food.

Q.7 How did the American Indians of Poverty Point dress?

We do not know. People at Poverty Point probably wore clothes made of animal hide or woven textiles made from plant or tree fibers. Color dyes from plants, bug shells and minerals could have been used to color their clothes and skin. Tat-toeing could have also been popular. Some of the objects found at the site, like beads, pendants and gorgets, could have been worn like jewelry or sewn onto people's clothing.

Q8. Why did European settlers who farmed on the site choose the name Poverty Point?

Many nineteenth century farmers gave their farms names that mirrored the hardships they had to endure. Names with allusions to poverty, hunger and death were common!

Q9. How far down did archaeologists have to dig to find artifacts at the site?

Poverty Point archaeologists have found some artifacts right on the surface of the ground. Other artifacts have been found nearly ten feet below the surface, either in gullies or under mounds. However, researchers have found most of Poverty Point's artifacts just below the surface. Because the site is elevated, it is protected from flooding, and layers of silt have not had the chance to build up on top of artifacts over time.

Q10. How do archaeologists know if a mound is natural or built by people?

Mounds will often have artifacts on or under their surface. This can be an archaeologist's first clue that a rise is a mound and not a hill or knoll, although natural rises often have artifacts on them and some mounds lack artifacts. Another clue is called an "A horizon." The A horizon is the black layer of dirt found just under the surface of the ground if the soil has not been disturbed. Most people call this the topsoil. Mounds often have A horizons beneath them because people piled up dirt on top of the A horizon of the natural ground surface. Hills, on the other hand, will not have a buried A horizon. Archaeologists also look for different kinds of soil that cannot occur together naturally.