

Glossary

Absolute Dating: These are methods that archaeologists use to find out the age of artifacts or features of a site. These methods test the chemical or atomic properties of the things archaeologists find. When these sorts of dating methods are successful, archaeologists get a specific age range for the things being tested (e.g., 2700 B.C. - 2200 B.C.).

Earthworks: American Indians built the mounds and C-shaped ridges at Poverty Point using nearby soils. Since these things are made of earth, they are called earthworks.

Late Archaic Period: (2000 B.C. - 800 B.C.) In Louisiana, the Late Archaic period is often described as a time when the climate shifted from hotter and drier to cooler and wetter. Mobile bands of people started settling down and forming small villages. It is also a period marked by the earliest use of containers made of stone and ceramic. People made other ceramic objects, too, like cooking balls, figurines and pipes.

Late Woodland Period: (A.D. 400 - A.D. 1200) This period saw a big rise in population. At this time, some people could also be born into, or gain, more social or political power than others. During the Late Woodland period, American Indians built lots of distinct places that were used just for ceremonies, often with large platform mounds. They also gave some people, who may have been leaders, special burials.

Postholes: A posthole shows where a wooden pole or post once stood. When they are found by archaeologists, postholes usually look like dark circular or semi-circular stains in the soil because the hole was filled with different dirt. Sometimes, there are stains remaining from the wooden posts, and they are called postmolds.

Radiocarbon Dating: Radiocarbon dating is a reliable way for archaeologists to tell the age of old organic remains like bone or wood. All living things absorb carbon, including radioactive carbon-14, from the atmosphere. When something dies, it stops absorbing carbon. The carbon-14 in its system decreases at a known rate through radioactive decay, but the other stable carbon atoms remain. Comparing the number of carbon-14 and stable carbon atoms reveals the age of the organic material.

Relative Dating: Unlike absolute dating (see above), relative dating is a way of ordering events rather than giving things a precise age. Relative dating is good for showing where something fits in a sequence. Archaeologists rely on this method a lot in their work. For instance, if they find an artifact between two layers of earth (layer X on top and layer Y below) they may not know how old the artifact is, but they would know that it ended up in that spot **before** layer X had formed but **after** layer Y.