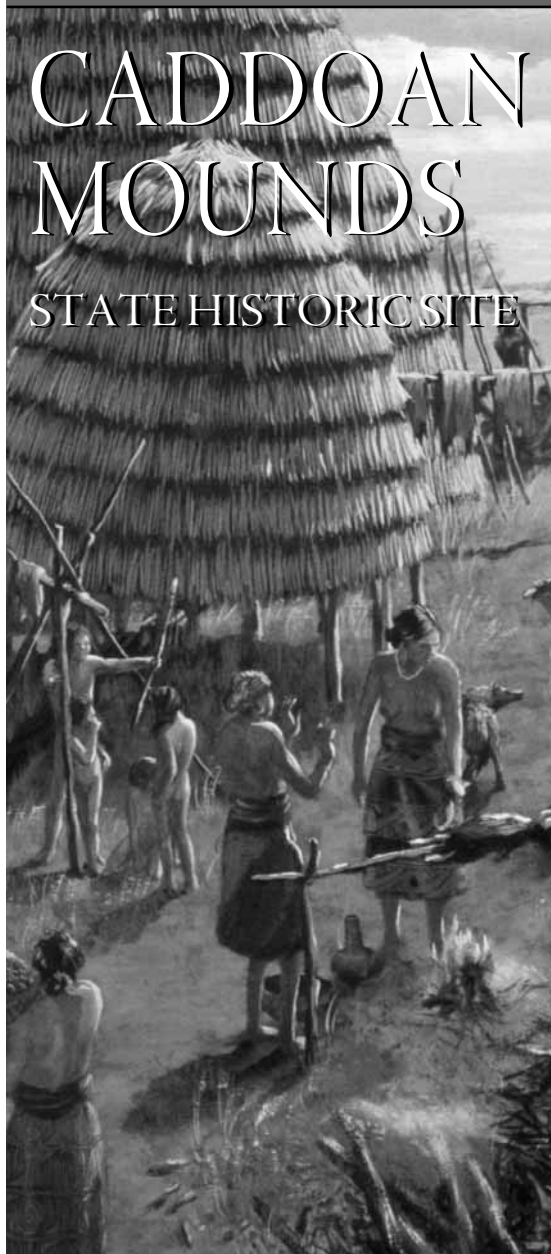


*Interpretive Guide to:*

# CADDOAN MOUNDS

STATE HISTORIC SITE



## STILL LEARNING

Story's excavations yielded much of what is presently understood about Caddoan Mounds, including the mound-building process, the identification and physical segregation of social classes, the apparent material wealth of the elite class and a clearer picture of the elaborate ceremonial system, especially in relation to elite burial practices. Close analysis of excavated material also revealed earlier occupations of the site by Paleoindian (10,000-6,000 B.C.) and Archaic (6,000 B.C.-A.D. 500) cultures, and a subsequent short-lived occupation by a Late Caddo culture.

Beginning in 1977, after acquisition by the state, excavations by UT-Austin field schools, Texas A&M University and a private contractor revealed concentrations of artifacts and cultural features which indicated the village was much larger than has been previously thought, extending beyond Weeping Mary Road to the north.

Excavations will continue periodically, and with each turn of the archeologist's shovel, more about the Early Caddoan life will be revealed.

## FACILITY INFORMATION

The site is six miles southwest of Alto on SH 21 and is day-use only (no picnicking). Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday through Monday and group tours are by appointment only.

NOTE: Texas State Law makes it unlawful for anyone to disturb in any way any historic or prehistoric, archeological or paleontological site, or any historic marker situated on lands owned or controlled by the State of Texas.

**TEXAS**  
PARKS &  
WILDLIFE

Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site  
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Human effigy pipe

## THE EARLY CADDO

Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site, known to archeologists as the George C. Davis site, was the southwestern-most ceremonial center of the great Mound Builder Culture which spanned the length and breadth of the woodlands of eastern North America for over 2,500 years – ca. 1,000 B.C. to A.D. 1,500. Located at the western edge of the traditional woodlands, Caddoan Mounds was a frontier settlement of the Early Caddos, the western-most group of Mound Builders, whose culture centered in the region of the Great Bend of the Red River in southwest Arkansas.

The Early Caddos selected this site for a permanent settlement about A.D. 800. The alluvial prairie possessed ideal qualities for the establishment of a village and ceremonial center: good sandy loam soil for agriculture, abundant natural food resources in the surrounding forest and a permanent water source in the nearby Neches River.

IN 1974 AND 1981, THE TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT ACQUIRED CADDOAN MOUNDS FOR ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS AN IMPORTANT PREHISTORIC CULTURAL RESOURCE. IT CONSISTS OF TWO TEMPLE MOUNDS, A BURIAL MOUND AND A LARGE PORTION OF THE ADJACENT VILLAGE AREA.



Pottery pipe bowl found near High Temple Mound

## LIFE AT CADDOAN MOUNDS

The Early Caddos dominated life in the region for 500 years. They drew local native groups into economic and social dependence through trade and a sophisticated ceremonial/political system. They traded with other native groups as far away as Central Texas. Caddoan Mounds' sphere of influence was only a small portion of the broader Caddoan cultural domain encompassing northeast Texas, northwest Louisiana, western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma.

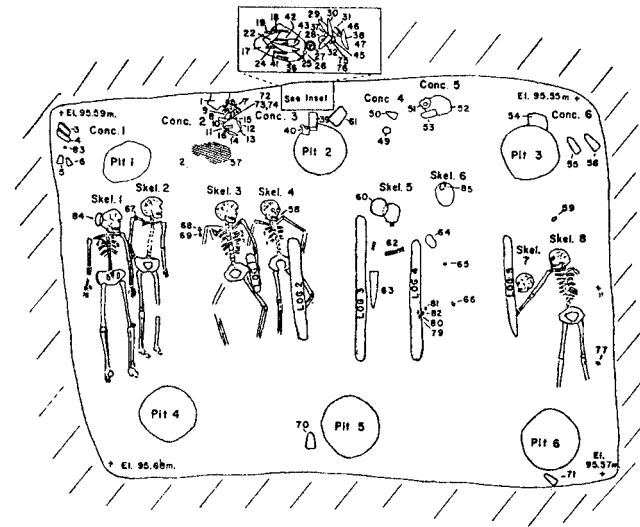
The Caddoan culture, in turn, had trade connections, and perhaps religious and political ties, with similar cultures farther east in the Mississippi Valley and beyond. Many of the exquisite artifacts unearthed by archeologist at Caddoan Mounds bear a striking resemblance to artifacts discovered as far away as Illinois and

Florida. The raw materials for some of these artifacts originated in distant places, such as shell from the eastern Gulf Coast and copper from the Great Lakes region, all acquired through the broad trade network of the Mound Builders.

Life at Caddoan Mounds apparently centered on the religious, political and economic practices of the "elite" ruling class, who lived on or around the ceremonial temple mounds. The common people of the village and surrounding farming hamlets grew and harvested food for the settlement and provided the labor force to construct mounds and temples. At their zenith, ca. A.D. 1,100, the Early Caddos had attained the most highly developed prehistoric culture known within the present state of Texas.

Caddoan Mounds flourished until the 14th century, when the Early Caddos suddenly abandoned the site. Most archeologist agree that the elite ruling class left Caddoan Mounds after the loss of their regional influence as outlying hamlets and trade groups became self-sufficient and grew less dependent on the cultural center in religious and political matters. There is no evidence that war played a major role at Caddoan Mounds, either in the maintenance of local influence or as a cause of abandonment. The Late Caddo culture that remained in the area was similar to the earlier culture in many ways, but lacked much of the sophisticated ceremonialism and material wealth.

Mound C - Premound Pit  
From *A Preliminary Report of the 1968, 1969, and 1970 Excavations at the George C. Davis Site, Cherokee County, Texas* by Dee Ann Story.



Pottery and earspool recovered from the Caddoan Mounds site

## UNCOVERING THE MYSTERIES

More than two centuries ago, travellers crossing the northern edge of the site on the well-known Camino Real recognized it as an ancient Indian settlement. Athanase de Mezieres, a Frenchman in the service of Spain, made the earliest known mention of Caddoan Mounds in 1779 during a trip from Louisiana to San Antonio.

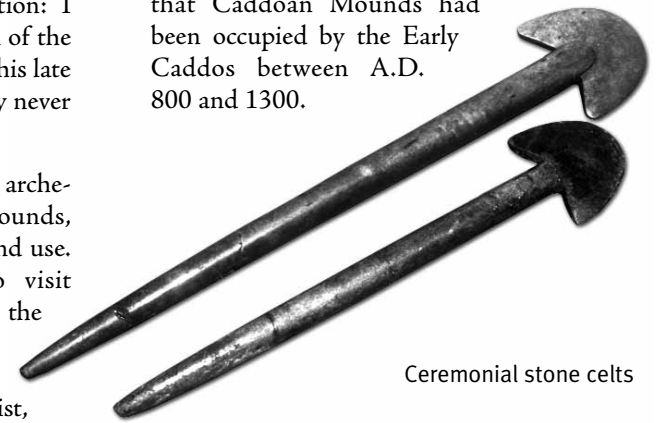
In 1834, an American traveller, Amos Andrew Parker, paused to investigate the mounds and entered into his journals an astute observation: "I have seen no satisfactory explanation given of the origin and use of these mounds ... and, at this late stage of the world, their origin and use may never be fully and satisfactorily explained."

Periodically for over 60 years, professional archeologists have investigated Caddoan Mounds, attempting to learn more of their origin and use. The first professional archeologist to visit Caddoan Mounds, J.E. Pearce, recorded the site in 1919 for the Bureau of Ethnology, a federal agency created to study native cultures. E.B. Sayles, an Arizona archeologist,

collected surface artifacts in 1933, and theorized that the site had been occupied by prehistoric peoples of the Southern Caddo tradition.

Not until 1939-41 were the first systematic excavations conducted. Under a grant from the Works Progress Administration, H. Perry Newell of the University of Texas excavated half the large temple mound southeast of Highway 21. Conclusions drawn from Newell's work by Alex D. Krieger of the University of Texas indicated that the site had been an important Caddoan community inhabited for several centuries, possibly as early as A.D. 500.

Krieger's suggested origin date stirred debate in archeological circles, with many experts claiming it was several centuries too early. The arguments were not resolved until the 1968-70 excavations of the low temple mound, the burial mound and scattered portions of the village area, conducted by the University of Texas-Austin under the supervision of Dee Ann Story. Utilizing more refined excavating techniques and advanced analytical technology, including radiocarbon dating, the investigations produced evidence that Caddoan Mounds had been occupied by the Early Caddos between A.D. 800 and 1300.



Ceremonial stone celts