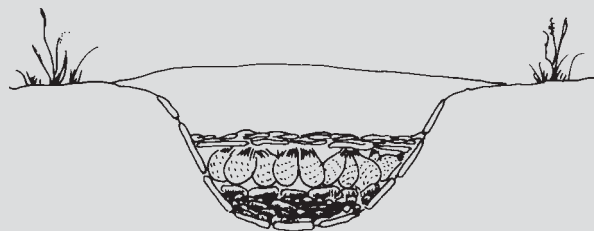


# THE LOST MIDDEN SITE

THE AREA IMMEDIATELY WEST OF THE PARKING LOT AT THE VISITOR'S CENTER OF SEMINOLE CANYON STATE PARK AND HISTORIC SITE, VAL VERDE COUNTY, IS THE LOCATION OF A RECENTLY DISCOVERED PREHISTORIC BURNED ROCK MIDDEN SITE, NOW IDENTIFIED BY THE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE NUMBER 41VV1991 OR THE NAME "LOST MIDDEN" SITE. BURNED ROCK MIDDENS, WHICH TYPICALLY APPEAR AS LOW, DOME-SHAPED OR RING-SHAPED MOUNDS OF HEAT-FRACTURED ROCK, REPRESENT THE REMAINS OF ROASTING OVENS THAT WERE USED BY NATIVE AMERICANS.



*Do your part to help archeologists unravel the mysteries of the past. If you see artifacts during your stay, such as projectile points, burned rock or even chipped stone, leave them precisely as you find them and inform someone on the park staff. Context is extremely important in the science of archeology.*



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PWD BR P4501-082J (8/08)

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TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

# PREHISTORIC EARTH OVEN TECHNOLOGY

The Lost Midden Site:  
41VV1991



SEMINOLE CANYON  
STATE PARK AND HISTORIC SITE



These roasting ovens, also referred to as earth ovens, were used by Native Americans for roasting certain desert plants, such as sotol and lechuguilla. Some of these plants required extensive cooking, up to a couple of days, before they were edible.

Cooking of these plants was accomplished by first digging a shallow pit, referred to as an oven pit or baking pit. A wood fire was then built within the pit, upon which large rocks were placed. These rocks would become very hot, and as the fire burned down, a long pole was used to arrange these rocks along the floor of the pit, creating a flat or concave cooking surface. This cooking surface was quickly covered with a thick layer of green vegetation, referred to as packing material, such as wet grass or prickly pear pads. This layer prevented the food from coming into direct contact with the hot rocks, and it released steam, helping to keep the food moist while cooking. The food was then added and covered over by another layer of packing material. Finally, soil was placed over the top of the entire pit to hold the steam and heat within this earthen oven. These ovens could stay hot for considerable periods of time, sometimes up to 48 hours.

After the desired cooking time had elapsed, the earthen cap, upper layer of packing material, and the cooked food were removed from the pit. The bottom layer of packing material and burned rocks were left in place. These pits were often reused, during which time the remaining ash and burned rocks would be removed. Any of the rocks that could still be used as heating elements were saved for that purpose, while the smaller ones (generally fist-sized or smaller) that could no longer effectively retain heat were discarded around the pit. This process eventually formed debris piles or rings around the pit, resulting in the kinds of features that have been discovered at the Lost Midden site.

Four projectile points, also commonly known as arrowheads, have been recovered from the Lost Midden site that give archeologists clues about when Native Americans occupied the site. A Darl point, illustrated on the back of this brochure, is the earliest of these points. This point type, which dates to about 1,500 years ago, was used on a long dart that was thrown with the use of a throwing stick, or atlatl. The latest of the point types from the Lost Midden site are known as Perdiz points. These points, which were used from as early as 800 to about 450 years ago, were

used on arrows and were fired through the air with the use of bows. The projectile points from the Lost Midden site suggest to archeologists that the site was used and re-used for almost 1,000 years.

Other items recovered from the site include chipped stone flakes and debris, resulting from the production of stone tools. Several stone tools found on the site were used for scraping and cutting, including an artifact commonly referred to as a sotol knife. These items may have been used to harvest and process the plants that were cooked in the pit ovens on this site. Although it is not known with certainty whether mussels were cooked at 41VV1991, several mussel shells were found on the site. This same species of mussel is still found in Lake Amistad today and may provide information about the ancient environment when 41VV1991 was occupied. Likewise, numerous shells of two species of land snails have been recovered from this site. While there are early historic accounts of Native Americans consuming at least one of these species of snails (*Rabdotus patriarcha*), it does not appear that snails contributed to the diet of the inhabitants of 41VV1991.

Further analysis of the artifacts from the Lost Midden site may help answer additional questions about the people who lived in the Seminole Canyon area 1,500 years ago.

