

Plum Bayou Mounds  
Archeological State Park

# Knapp Trail Guide

490 Toltec Mounds Road  
Scott, Arkansas 72142  
Phone (501) 961-9442  
PlumBayou@Arkansas.com  
[www.ArkansasStateParks.com](http://www.ArkansasStateParks.com)





# KNAPP TRAIL 0.8 MILES

Mound Lake



North Little Rock  
5 miles

U.S. Highway 165

England  
9 miles

Arkansas Highway 386



**VISITOR CENTER**  
Visitor Center/ Gift Shop  
Museum  
Restrooms

- Park Area
- Earthworks
- Former Earthworks
- Parking
- Plum Bayou Trail
- Knapp Trail
- Visitor Center/ Gift Shop
- Museum
- Wildlife Viewing
- Marker Location
- Restrooms



**NOTICE:** To preserve scenic beauty and ecology, fences and warning signs have not been installed in some park locations. Caution and increased supervision of your children and others in your care are required when visiting these areas.

Map not to scale





# STENZON

- 1 Map
- 4 Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park
- 5 Marker 1
- 6 Marker 2
- 8 Marker 3
- 10 Marker 4
- 12 Marker 5
- 14 Marker 6
- 16 Thank You for Visiting
- 17 Field Notes







# PLUM BAYOU MOUNDS ARCHEOLOGICAL STATE PARK

Welcome to Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park! If you have known us as Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park or have seen that name in other media, the change may have surprised you. The new name became official on November 1, 2022 after conversations between Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Archeological Survey, representatives of Arkansas's American Indian groups, and other stakeholders. The name Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park better reflects the distinct culture of the people who built these mounds. The history of the original name Toltec is explained in the text at marker number one.

You are about to embark on a very special tour of this prehistoric American Indian site. The Knapp Trail is 0.8 miles long, fully paved and ADA accessible. Part of this trail overlaps the Plum Bayou Trail, so follow the markers carefully.

In order to preserve the site, it is important that you stay on the trail. As this is a state park, all plants, animals and artifacts are protected by state law. Therefore, do not disturb any of the plants or animals, remove any artifacts, dig on the site, or climb any of these mounds. Keep an eye on your children at all times, and pets must be kept on a leash. Thank you for helping protect this window to our past.

## MARKER 1

Before you begin your journey through this prehistoric site, it may interest you to know that the former name "Toltec Mounds" is actually a misnomer. Gilbert and Mary Knapp, who owned this site from 1848 to 1905, mistakenly thought the mounds were associated with the Toltec people of Mexico. In 1883, this idea was disproved. Investigations by archeologists at that time showed that these mounds had been built by the ancestors of the Southeastern American Indians, not the Toltec culture of Mexico.

More than a century ago, early visitors reported that sixteen mounds within an earthen embankment wall stood at this site. Today, eighteen mound locations have been identified. Farming activities have caused considerable destruction to the archeological site, including most of the mounds and a large portion of the embankment wall. In 1975, this land officially became an Arkansas State Park, protecting the earthworks from further damage.

Due to a lack of written records, the builders of this site cannot be associated with any modern American Indian tribe. For this reason, the prehistoric people who inhabited this site from approximately A.D. 650 to A.D. 1050 have been named the Plum Bayou culture by archeologists. Plum Bayou refers to the name of a local stream. For unknown reasons, the site was abandoned around A.D. 1050. The Plum Bayou culture grew and flourished at this prehistoric ceremonial center for approximately 400 years and left mysteries that fascinate us today. Throughout this tour, you will learn more about this ceremonial center and these mysteries.



**Left:** Quartz crystal plummet stone and arrowhead found on site at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park.

## MARKER 2

As you look out, you will see what remains of this cultural and ceremonial site. Due to the farming and plowing conducted here, archeologists are left piecing together the mystery of how this site would have appeared when the Plum Bayou culture was thriving. Only the locations of the three largest mounds were known when this land became protected within Arkansas's State Park system. These mounds stand before you. Mound A, the tallest mound in Arkansas at 49 feet, is located between Mound B on the right and Mound C on the left.

Archeologists have determined the locations of 15 former mounds through sketches, written accounts, aerial photographs, and soil sampling. These mounds are designated by the red and white letter markers.

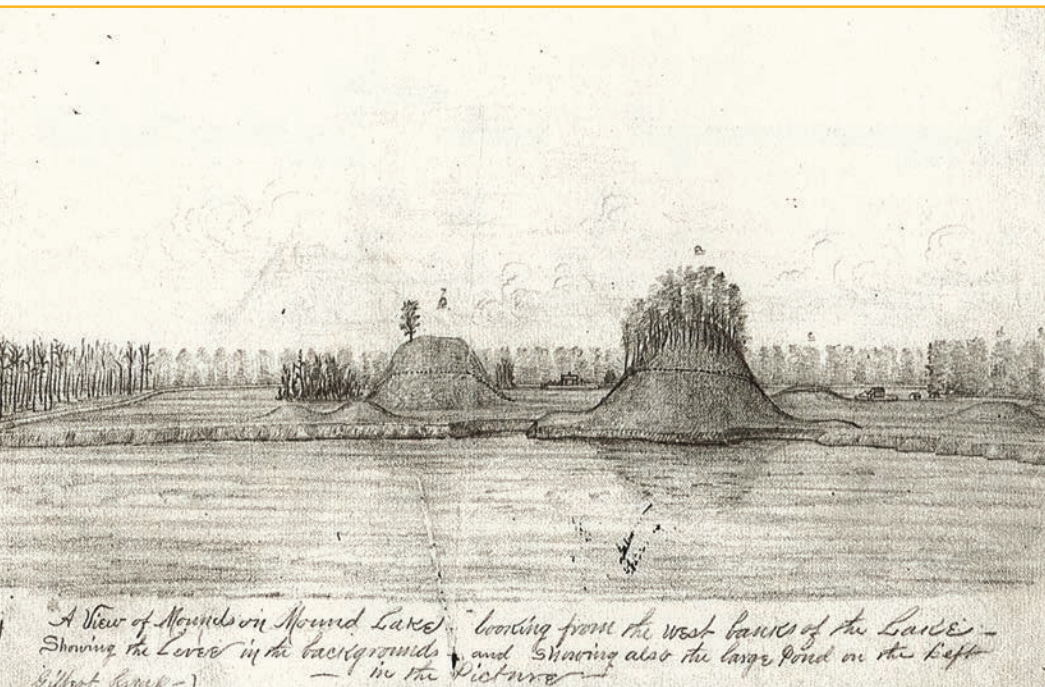
Another mystery left by these American Indians can be seen from this location. Visible on the left side of the trail is a portion of what the archeologists call the embankment wall. A ditch filled with water once stood on the outside of the embankment wall. Except for this small

section in front of you and another area in the woods just to the south, the majority of the embankment wall was destroyed by plowing and the ditch being filled in. Archeologists used the same techniques that helped locate the destroyed mounds to determine where the embankment wall originally stood. When the Plum Bayou culture occupied this ceremonial center, the 10 feet tall embankment wall and adjacent ditch was built on three sides of the site. On these three sides, white markers indicate where the embankment wall once stood. The fourth side was, and still is, bordered by an oxbow lake named Mound Lake.

One idea was that it was used for flood control. Since no embankment wall was found along the bank of Mound Lake, that idea was disregarded. Another thought was that it was constructed for protection from invading tribes. As stated earlier, this wall was only about 10 feet tall. There is also no evidence to suggest that a palisade or fence sat atop it. In addition, there were several gaps in the embankment wall, allowing people to freely enter and exit. Since only about 50 people lived at this site, it would have been improbable that individuals were stationed on the wall for defensive purposes. For these reasons, it is unlikely that this embankment wall was constructed for protection from enemies. Instead, archeologists have come to think that the embankment wall was built as a boundary marker. Research indicates that this site was a religious gathering center. So, it is thought that the embankment wall was used to indicate the boundary between the sacred land inside and the more secular world outside.

The 50 or so individuals who lived within the boundaries of the embankment wall are thought to have been the religious and civic leaders of the Plum Bayou people and their families. The general population, it is believed, lived in scattered villages and farmsteads in the surrounding area. Archeologists speculate that several times a year the whole population of the Plum Bayou culture would have traveled to this site for special ceremonies and to renew social and family ties. Looking at what remains of these impressive earthworks, try to imagine this site overflowing with American Indians—the food, smells, games, and festivals. What must it have been like?

The next stop on your tour will be at the heart of this ceremonial center, one of two central plazas. To reach marker three, stay to your left and on the pavement.



**Above:** Site Map Drawing by Henry Jackson Lewis, late 1882 - 1883





**Above:** One artist's rendition of the site when the Plum Bayou people were present.

## MARKER 3

Before you is a rectangular area called a plaza. As mentioned at the previous station, this site was first and foremost a ceremonial center for the Plum Bayou culture. The plaza, the heart of the ceremonial center, may have been used for dances, festivals, feasts, ceremonies, or games. An American Indian game called "Chungke" was played by many tribes throughout the Southeast and may have been played in this plaza. In Chungke, two people played against each other, sometimes representing two clans within a tribe. A person would roll a round stone, called a chunkee stone, and then both players would run after it with long poles called 'tchung-kee's. The object of the game was to throw your pole as close to the stone as possible before it stopped rolling. Archeologists can only make educated guesses as to what the plaza was used for. The details of the activities are unknown and will likely always be a mystery.

It may be difficult to visualize because most of the mounds are not present, but this plaza is surrounded by mounds. As you walked to this marker, you passed one of these mounds on your right. This mound is referred to as Mound C. The shape of this mound created another

mystery for archeologists. As you have probably noticed, the two larger mounds have flat tops. For this reason, they are called platform mounds, and it is believed that residences or temples sat atop them.

Mound C, however, has a rounded top. At other mound sites in the southeastern United States, mounds with rounded tops are known to have been used for burial purposes. Therefore, archeologists hypothesized that Mound C was also used for burial purposes. Through the partial excavation of Mound C in the 1960s, archeologists gained evidence in support of their hypothesis. They learned that the mound itself was constructed by placing individuals at a single location and then covering them with soil. This was done over a period of time, resulting in the low dome-shaped mound you see today. The partial excavation of Mound C helped to solve the mystery behind the shape of this mound.

Without archeology, we would not be able to learn about the people of long ago. However, most people believe that the remains of their ancestors and grave goods must be treated with respect and remain in the earth forever. In recent years, American Indians have protested the digging of remains and artifacts. The 1990 passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act now provides a way for American Indians to reclaim remains and special artifacts, and have them returned to their tribes. In Arkansas, by way of the 1991 Arkansas Act number 753, it is illegal to disturb or excavate human burials except in special circumstances with permission. You can help protect the cultural heritage of Arkansas by reporting any violation or suspected violation you observe to law enforcement.



**Top right:** Excavated fragments of pottery made by the Plum Bayou people.

**Bottom right:** A remaining piece of the embankment wall located on the south side of the archeological site.



Another mound that borders the plaza and stands on the other side of the trail is Mound S. This mound was fully excavated from 1988-1990 and then reconstructed to form the low, flat mound you see today. The results from this excavation provided another piece to the overall mystery that is Plum Bayou Mounds.

During the excavation, archeologists uncovered a large amount of animal bone, mostly white-tailed deer, as well as an abundance of charred seeds and nuts. In fact, there were more animal remains found in this one mound than could have been consumed by the few people living here. This discovery led archeologists to believe that Mound S was the location of many feasts.

The fourth stop on our tour will be on the boardwalk. As you are walking along the boardwalk, remember to keep an eye out for turtles, ducks, and other aquatic wildlife. Marker four is located on the observation deck with the replica dugout canoe.

## »»» MARKER 4

You are standing on what was once the Arkansas River over 4,000 years ago. Although the Arkansas River is now over five miles away, when the Plum Bayou culture was thriving, it was only a mile from this site. When the Plum Bayou people inhabited this area, they would have seen this waterway as an oxbow lake, just as you see it today. Over time, rivers and their channels meander back and forth within their floodplain. This meandering eventually creates lakes such as this one. This oxbow lake is known as Mound Lake.



Waterways, such as the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers, were an important part of life for American Indians at this site. It is quite likely that many of the Plum Bayou people would have used the surrounding waterways to reach the mound site for their ceremonies. Dugout canoes, such as the one in the visitor center and the replica on the observation deck, are believed to be the main mode of transportation for these Americans Indians when they traveled by water. These canoes were made from a variety of trees, including pine and bald cypress. The large trees you see at the edge of the lake with the spreading trunks are bald cypress.

During excavations, archeologists uncovered fragments of a conch shell from the Gulf of Mexico as well as copper from the Great Lakes area. This discovery provides another sliver of insight into the mystery of the lives of the Plum Bayou people by presenting evidence that the American Indians who lived here had contact and traded with people along the Mississippi River.



**Left:**  
Excavation  
of Mound P

**Left:** It is believed that the Plum Bayou people would have made and used vessels similar to this dugout canoe which was found buried in the Saline River in the neighboring county and is currently on display in the park's visitor center.

**Citation:** Rolingson, Martha A. (1984). Griggs Canoe: dugout canoe found on the Saline River [Photograph]. Arkansas Archeological Survey





**Above:** Various artifacts unearthed by archeologists at this site.

## MARKER 5

Excavations have helped solve certain mysteries at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park such as the purpose of the embankment wall, the reason for the shape of Mound C, and the feasting location at Mound S. Excavations have also shed light on the actual building of the mounds, the kind of food the Plum Bayou people consumed, the weapons they used for hunting, and the type of pottery made and used by the Plum Bayou culture.

You are now standing beside Mound B, the second tallest mound here at about 39 feet. An excavation on the southeastern corner was conducted in 1979. Through this study, archeologists learned that Mound B was not built all at one time but in several stages. Other excavations showed this to be true of several of the other mounds as well. At Mound B, three different stages were identified by the presence of midden, or trash. Layers of midden typically indicate the location of a residential structure.

Through the excavation of several of the mounds, it is known that the Plum Bayou people ate a variety of foods both wild and domestic. They hunted many different kinds of mammals including deer, squirrel, and raccoon. They also ate turkeys, geese, ducks, and a variety of other birds including the passenger pigeon which is extinct today. Archeologists have found evidence that these people also ate fish and

**Right:** Owl effigy, made of trachyte, found here at the ceremonial site.

**Citation:** Horton, Elizabeth (2018 Bird Effigy [Photograph]. Arkansas Archeological Survey



turtles, as well as acorns, nuts, berries, and greens. They cultivated several native plants such as maygrass, little barley, pigweed, amaranth, squashes, and a small amount of maize.

Excavations indicate that the Plum Bayou people used different types of weapons for hunting, but primarily relied on the bow and arrow. River cane growing nearby was most likely used to make shafts for arrows. Archeologists at this site have uncovered many stone tools including arrow points, knives, drills, awls, axes, and adzes. These tools were made through the process of flintknapping.

Prehistoric people created sharp points or blades by knocking off flakes around the edges of one rock with another rock or by using a billet made from an antler of a deer. The people at the Plum Bayou site commonly used a type of rock called chert, collected from gravel bars along rivers, to make their stone points. Less commonly, they used novaculite and quartz crystal, found in rock formations near the Ouachita Mountains to the southwest of here.

Evidence also shows that the Plum Bayou people made and fired pots from clay they collected locally. The containers they made were commonly bowls and deep jars that were used for cooking and for holding and storing food. Most of the decorations on the pottery were simple, with a few incised lines or notches placed around the upper edge. Some of the bowls were coated with a slip or film of red clay.

Had excavations never been conducted, most of this information would still remain a mystery to us today. Examples of artifacts, found through excavations at Plum Bayou mounds, can be seen in the museum located in the visitor center.



## MARKER 6

On this walk, you have learned that the Plum Bayou people were very concerned about the size and shape of the mounds. In addition, the American Indians at Plum Bayou Mounds were concerned about the placement of these mounds. Some were placed to line up with each other, while others mark the position of the sun at sunrise and sunset on the solstices and equinoxes. The Plum Bayou people most likely aligned the mounds to the shifting sun in order to identify the change of seasons for planting and harvesting, as well as for scheduling ceremonies and feasts.

From Mound H, on the summer solstice, you can watch the sun set behind Mound B. On the spring and fall equinoxes, from this mound, the sun sets behind Mound A. The sun sets behind Mound S on the winter solstice. From Mound H, the Plum Bayou people could mark the changing of the seasons just by watching where the sun set. Although archeologists have been able to determine how these mounds align, the extent of the astronomical and solar knowledge of the Plum Bayou people remains a mystery.

The biggest mystery of all surrounding the Plum Bayou culture is why they abandoned this site around A. D. 1050. After all the hard work put into this site and countless ceremonies held here, the culture seemingly disappeared. Archeological research has been unable to explain where they went or why they left.

As you come to the end of the trail, take a moment to look back at the mounds. Imagine this village more than a thousand years ago when the Plum Bayou culture was thriving. Imagine an overflow of American Indians all coming together for a large ceremony. Maybe they're dancing and feasting, or maybe they're playing games, maybe the children are listening to an elder tell stories of their past, or maybe the men are returning from a successful hunt. Many mysteries still remain about the people who flourished here and the ceremonies they held at this site, but the mounds continue to provide clues, allowing us a glimpse into the fascinating past of the mysterious Plum Bayou culture.

*Bottom left and right: Visitors enjoy the Winter Solstice at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park.*





# THANK YOU FOR VISITING PLUM BAYOU MOUNDS ARCHEOLOGICAL STATE PARK

Thank you for taking this journey through a part of Arkansas's history. We hope you have enjoyed your visit. If you have any questions or comments, our staff in the visitor center will be happy to talk with you.

We encourage you to get out and explore YOUR Arkansas State Parks.

For a list of activities and interpretive programs at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park, please pick up a Calendar of Events in the visitor center or visit us on the web at [www.ArkansasStateParks.com](http://www.ArkansasStateParks.com).



## FIELD NOTES

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

