Marksville
State Commemorative Area

Louisiana
STATE PARKS

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Marksville Site Features Ancient Indian Civilization

When Columbus set foot on New World soil, the Marksville ceremonial center was already 1,000 years old.

Archaeology buffs, whether serious or amateur, need not go west to observe remnants of ancient North American civilizations. There is much to see in central Louisiana at the 42-acre Marksville State Commemorative Area.

Located on a bluff overlooking Old River, adjacent to the town of Marksville, the prehistoric Native American ceremonial center is considered by professional archaeologists to be of unique national significance.

Marksville Period (1-400 A.D.)

The Marksville culture, a southeastern variant of the Hopewell culture centered in Ohio and Illinois, was characterized by elaborate mortuary ceremonialism, the construction of conical burial mounds, complex trade networks, decorative pottery, and the importation of certain raw materials. It is also possible that agriculture of a limited nature, such as the horticulture of native plants, had begun by this time.

Recent History

Although archaeological sites had been recognized throughout this area for many years, it was not until 1926 that the importance of the Marksville site was established. In that year, Gerald Fowke of the Smithsonian Institute conducted the first scientific investigation of the area and produced a detailed map of the Marksville site. In 1933, James A. Ford, an undergraduate student at Louisiana State University, and F. M. Setzler, also of the Smithsonian Institute, uncovered evidence that connected Marksville to the development of the Hopewell culture, which was then known to be based primarily in Ohio.

A third excavation occurred in 1938-39 under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration in conjunction with Louisiana State University. Robert S. Neitzel and Edwin B. Doran led the LSU-WPA group at Marksville. Neitzel maintained his interest in the site and was instrumental in the opening of the park in 1950, when he served as its first superintendent.
State Commemorative Area

Marksville State Commemorative Area was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1964, and thus joined a select group of properties which have since been recognized for their importance in American history.

Site Description

The main portion of the Marksville site is surrounded by a semi-circular earthwork which is 3,300 feet long and ranges from 3 to 7 feet in height. The open side of the enclosure is the edge of a bluff along Old River. Openings in the earthwork, one in the western side and two in the southern end, suggest that its purpose was ceremonial rather than defensive. This enclosure probably was built to delineate a special area where the dead were buried and formal affairs were conducted.

Five mounds of various sizes and shapes are located within the main enclosure, and others are built outside of it. The northernmost mound, Mound 6, is a flat-topped structure about 300 feet in diameter and 13 feet high. It has not been extensively excavated to ground level, so its exact age and use remain unknown.

Near the center of the site are two conical mounds: Mound 4 is 100 feet across and 20 feet high, and Mound 5 is 70 feet across and only 3 1/2 feet high. Excavations in 1933 showed Mound 4 to be a burial mound of the Marksville period. Mound 5, possibly unfinished, also dates back to the Marksville period.

In the southern section of the enclosure is Mound 2, which may have been a flat-topped rectangular structure. Roughly 290 feet by 235 feet and 14 feet high, it's not yet known when Mound 2 was built, but it is believed to have been a ceremonial mound.

Finally, Mound 3 is another small conical mound, 60 feet in diameter and 3 1/2 feet high. It was largely destroyed by farming and little is known about it.

Some researchers believe that some of the mounds may have been constructed during the earlier Poverty Point period (1700-700 B.C.), while others see an association with the later Coles Creek period (700-1000 A.D.).

In addition to the archaeological museum and the Native American mounds, there are nature trails, picnic...
grounds and restrooms. Special events and programs are scheduled throughout the year including basketry, pottery classes, story-telling and spearhead-making. Come enjoy a part of our nation's heritage at Marksville State Commemorative Area.

TYPICAL ARTIFACTS—
Among the numerous archaeological treasures typical of Marksville are ceramics that were common to the site. This slender pot has three repetitions of the raptorial bird motif.

Nearby Attractions:
Sarto Old Iron Bridge—(Next to LA 451 in Big Bend, southeast of Marksville)—The steel-truss swinging bridge built over Bayou des Glaises in 1916 is a rare surviving example of its kind. It was the first bridge in Louisiana listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is open to pedestrian traffic only.

Hypolite Bordelon Home—(LA 1 in Marksville)—This Creole cottage houses a museum and tourist center. It was built between 1800 and 1820, and the museum interprets the lives of early settlers of Avoyelles Parish.

Tunica-Biloxi Indian Center & Museum—(Located on LA 1 south of Marksville)—The museum is constructed in the shape of a Native American mound and features the famed Tunica-Biloxi Treasures Collection.

Spring Bayou Wildlife Management Area (WMA)—(3 miles southeast of Marksville), Pomme de Terre WMA—(6 miles east of Moreauville), and Dewey Wills WMA—(8 miles south of Alexandria)—This area features several thousand acres of forest and waterways for hunting, birding, camping, boating, fishing, canoeing or observing wildlife. Boat launches are available.

Kisatchie National Forest and Kincaid Lake Recreation Area—(Alexandria)—Hike on Louisiana's longest trail, the Kisatchie National Forest Wild Azalea National Recreation Trail: 31 miles of pine woods decorated with pink azaleas and snowy white dogwoods in season. Kincaid Lake offers picnicking, swimming, fishing, a campground and boat launches.

Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge—(Hwy. 1 south, Tunica-Biloxi Indian Reservation)—Visitors may view a large and varied bird population in the 6,000-acre migratory bird refuge. No hunting is allowed.

Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge—(Hwy. 1 south, Tunica-Biloxi Indian Reservation)—The 15,000-acre migratory bird refuge offers wildlife observation, fishing and limited hunting.
To Alexandria

Marksville State Commemorative Area
(700 Martin Luther King Dr., Marksville, LA 71351; 318-253-8954 or 1-888-253-8954) is located east of LA 1, adjacent to the town of Marksville, which is southeast of Alexandria. From LA 1, turn onto Preston St. (LA 452) and head northeast, then right onto Martin Luther King Drive. The site is of archaeological significance due to buried evidence of a Native American culture that flourished approximately 2,000 years ago.

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