

3 - Wildlife

A Great Place to Hunt and Gather Plants for 12,000 years



Paleo-Indian Big Game



Image by Victor Leshyk

The presence of big-game animals, such as the giant sloth, mammoth, saber-tooth tiger, horse, bison and camel, in a savanna-like climate in the Verde Valley would have been an attractive area for the Paleo-Indian people (12,000 to 8,000 B.C.).

Archaic and Sinagua Wildlife

The mobile Archaic cultures that followed the big-game hunters adapted to this change over time by hunting smaller game animals such as deer, elk and bear. Later, the Sinagua continued to hunt even after the introduction of agriculture.



Smaller game were also hunted such as rabbit, gopher, coyote, wild turkey, squirrel and beaver. They used wild animals for a variety of purposes. The meat and marrow were sources of nutrients and fat which were otherwise deficient in, or missing from, a diet primarily of corn, beans and squash. Birds were also captured for their feathers and bones.

The hides were used to make clothing, blankets and containers. The bones and antlers were often turned into tools such as awls, needles and hammers, as well as leisure items such as gaming pieces and jewelry. Sinew was useful for lashing objects (such as arrow shafts and arrowheads) together. Fat was useful for mixing with ground mineral pigments in the preparation of paints.

Current Wildlife

The following wildlife may be seen during your visit.



Coyote



Jackrabbit



Desert Cottontail Rabbit



Deer



Bobcat



Rattlesnake



Distinctive projectile points used by the big-game hunters of this time period.

The end of the big-game hunting appears to have occurred very abruptly, sometime about 8,000 B.C. when most of the big-game disappeared. Scholars are divided on the reason(s) for their disappearance, although currently they are leaning towards a natural disaster combined with a changing climate. It is possible that the extinction was helped along by over-hunting.

Gathering Wild Growing Foods

A wide variety of plant foods have always been an important part of the diet of prehistoric peoples, for both hunter and gatherers and for agriculturalists. The unreliability of agriculture due to limited rainfall and water shortages, and to pest infestations, made the existence of alternative food sources mandatory. Seeds, fruits, leaves and tubers were all utilized.

Agave, yucca fruits, walnuts, berries, piñon nuts, acorns, cactus fruits, and various small seeds -- these are only a few of the wild-growing foods that sustained hunter-gatherers and farmers.

STORAGE -- It would have been of great benefit for the Sinagua to have stored any agricultural surpluses that occurred during good years to provide a buffer against poor ones. Ceramic vessels, basketry, cloth and skin bags were used for storage.



The Dyck Cliff Dwelling (Rimrock) artifacts included a cloth bundle filled with amaranth seeds.



This Verde Brown Olla is one of several large storage jars on display at the Center.

This exhibit is sponsored by Joseph and Sonya Landholm