

6. What Was the Material Culture of the Karankawa Indians?

Archeologist _____ **Archeological Team** _____

To learn more about the Karankawan life and culture, archeologists look at the tools they made and used. The kinds of bones, tools, pottery and other materials at each individual site can provide clues about the activities at each site. Archeologists have found that there are materials that are distinctive or only found in the Karankawan culture. You and your team will analyze information about the materials to determine what you can learn about life of the Karankawa Indians.

Materials: none

Procedure:

1. The stone tools include several arrowpoint types. The main arrowpoint type is the Perdiz point. The knives were different shapes and lengths. See Figure 6.1. There was a greater variety in knives at sites where bison were the main source of meat. What are some possible explanations for this?



Fig. 6.1. Perdiz arrowpoints commonly found in Karankawa sites. (Source: Ricklis: The Karankawa Indians of Texas)

2. Sandstone metates or grinding stones were also present. For what could these have been used?

3. Shell tools were made from conch and whelk shells. These shells were used to make adzes. Adzes are ax-like tools with an arching blade at right angles to the handle. These were probably used in woodworking. Examine Figure 6.2, which shows a portion of a large lightning whelk shell. Use a marker and shade the part that could be used to make an adze.

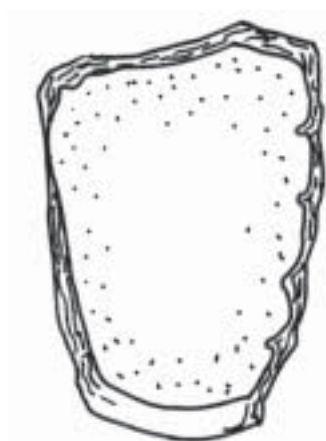


Fig. 6.2. Portion of lightning whelk shell used to make an adze. (Source: Ricklis: The Karankawa Indians)

4. Oyster shells were used as weights on fishing nets. Ornaments as well as different kinds of beads were made from shells. Venus clamshells were used to make knives or scrapers. How would the scrapers have been used?

- The clamshells were also used to make awls or perforators. These are sharp pointed tools used to pierce holes in materials. How might these have been used by the Indians?
- What part of the whelk shell could be used to make awls or perforators? What part could be used to make hammers?

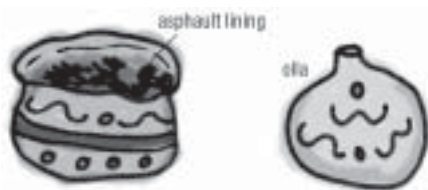
- Tools and ornaments were also made from bones. They had perforators and flint-making tools from bones. The deer ulnas (small leg bones) were used to make these. Perforators, needles and pins were made from splinters of deer or bison bone. Beads made from cross sections of the long bones of birds and were often highly polished. What inferences can you make about the life and activities of the Indians based on these tools?



- The most distinctive artifact category found were the ceramics. Ceramic smoking pipes were found and may have been quite common. They had a cylindrical shape and sometimes were decorated with lines or dots. Different types of pottery were quite abundant. However, very few complete ones were found. Why were mostly broken pieces found?



- Using the curves of the pieces and the few complete and partially complete pieces it has been determined that the pots always had a round bottom. The types of pots were bowls, wide-mouth jars and narrow-mouth ollas. Ollas are shaped like globules and had narrow necks or were neck-less. The openings to the wide-mouth jars and bowls were from 15 to 30 centimeters. These deeper bowls and jars would have held 4 to 6 liters. What inferences can you make about how each type was used? The large wide-mouth jar? The large bowls? The ollas?



Some vessels had material added to harden the clay to prevent them from breaking when they were heated. Some had an inside coating to prevent them from leaking. How would this information help explain the use of the item? Explain.

They were decorated with painted bands, squiggles, and dots that were applied after the vessels had been fired. They used natural asphaltum to decorate the pottery. **Asphaltum** is a naturally occurring tar that washes upon beaches from natural petroleum seepages.

Why is asphaltum painting only found in pottery in the area that the Karankawas lived?

10. Based on the materials found in the Karankawa sites, write a description of or draw the activities you might see in a Karankawa site.