

Did You *Really* Find an Arrowhead?

by H. W. Peterson

Probably not, although it is quite common for those not versed in archaeology to call most stone projectile points arrowheads. However, surprising as it may seem, most of these points probably never saw the end of an arrow.

The average person doesn't realize that the bow and arrow is a rather recent invention and came into general use by Native Americans only about 1100–1600 years ago. The true arrowhead is actually a very small point, seldom more than 1 1/2 inches long, such as the corner-notched, tear-drop-shaped, and triangular points shown here at about half size.

Although sometimes referred to as "bird points," they

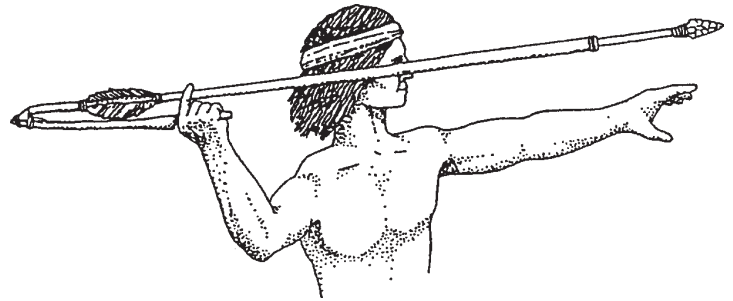


Scallorn, Nodena, and Mississippi Triangular points.

were used to kill not only birds but large animals as well, such as deer. Other artifacts we find are either too large to be arrowheads or were manufactured many thousands of years before the bow was used. They are most likely tools such as scrapers and knives, spear points, or dart points used along with the atlatl, which may have come into being some 10,000 years ago or earlier. This important innovation consisted of a spear mounted on a throwing stick. Socketed onto the end of the spear was a short shaft tipped with a stone or bone point.

With the atlatl, a hunter could throw a spear with much greater speed and distance than with the arm alone. Upon impact, the dart remained imbedded in the target as it separated from the spear.

Note if points are glossy and have a pinkish cast, which could indicate that they were heat treated. Also note if the stem has been ground so as not to cut the hafting ties. Check, as well, to see if the blade portion has worn edges, which would suggest that the point



had been used as a knife.

Knowing all of the above can make artifacts much more interesting, but being able to identify points and tell if they are Dalton, Archaic, Woodland, or Mississippian adds still another exciting dimension. To pick up a point and realize it was made 7000–9000 years ago (Early Archaic), and then near it find a Late Woodland (1100–1500 years ago) tells a story about the ground on which you are walking.

Further information on projectile-point types is readily available on the Internet. Also available is information on how we can take part in preserving Missouri's rich history by registering sites containing evidence of Native American habitation with the Archaeological Survey of Missouri.

Missouri Archaeological Society
901 S. National
Springfield, MO 65897
417- 836- 3773
LHaney@missouristate.edu