

Prehistoric People in Duluth Township

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Nobody knows when the first person arrived in Duluth Township. It may have been as long ago as 11,500 years in a time when the first Americans were known as "Paleo-Indians" or "Clovis people." There is some scanty evidence as to their presence in the region, but it is so limited that little can be said about their way of life here. This was a very harsh country at that time immediately following the retreat of the glacier. The land was still basically tundra, but was in transition to a boreal forest. This type of environment was not the best suited for herds of animals. Paleo-Indians were well known as big game hunters. Their tools and projectile points have been found in mammoth and giant bison kill sites.

Recently two mammoth kill sites have been excavated in Wisconsin. Surprisingly, one of these new finds is in northern Wisconsin. It seems likely that the Paleo-Indian may have hunted animals such as this on the north shore as well. So far, no evidence has surfaced locally to confirm this sort of activity here. By 8,000 years ago most of the large mammals had succumbed to extinction. During this period (Late Paleo) there is a considerable amount of evidence of habitation in our region. Generally speaking, these sites are usually discovered around lakes or river systems. The dugout canoe came into use during this period, and for the first time, native copper was worked into tools, weapons, and other items. The level of Lake Superior was close to what it is today. In Duluth Township and all along the north shore, a system of trails connected villages and waterways providing necessary access to different areas. Trade was widespread and thus travel must have been widespread as well. Hixton quartzite tools and arrowheads are often found in Paleo-Indian habitation sites. This stone originates from farther south in central Wisconsin. Another stone that has been excavated is Knife River flint, which had to be brought in from North Dakota.

It appears that these first residents of Duluth Township and the north shore had a trading network that was vast. We may never know the complete story of these ancient people. Nevertheless, it is fun to imagine them sitting around the campfire, munching on a mammoth steak, and debating the attributes of Knife River flint versus Hixton quartzite.