Foraging in a New Land

Archaic Period - 8000 B.C to 1000 B.C.

A Forested Land

By 8000 B.C., the people of the Americas faced new challenges. Deciduous trees replaced pine forests as the climate warmed. Oak, hickory, and other nut-bearing trees became more numerous. The nuts not only provided food for humans, they also attracted deer, bears, and other animals that could be hunted or trapped. Along the edges of the woods there were edible plants such as wild berries.

Seasonal Movement

Indians of this time -- called the Archaic Period by archaeologists -- continued to live by hunting and gathering everything they needed. After the Ice Age, the rivers began to support large quantities of fish and shellfish. People took advantage of seasonal fish runs in the major streams. They may have dried and smoked fish on racks over big fires to store them for winter.

 Territories

Families likely came together to form bands, sharing a territory that would have included a variety of habitats, such as nut tree groves, good fishing spots, and wetlands. As the population gradually increased, the size of each band's territory grew smaller. Within a territory, people still moved seasonally to take advantage of various foods and other resources as they became available. Larger groups may have come together when food was abundant, and split into smaller families to hunt and gather separately during lean times of the year. Their shelters were probably made of sapling frames covered by hides, bark, or reed mats.

The Earliest Gardens

By 2000 B.C., Archaic people were experimenting with new foods and inventing new tools. Some people began to grow a type of gourd in small gardens. Dried gourds would have been used as containers or fishnet floats, while fresh gourds provided edible, oil-rich seeds. Plants with nutritious seeds such as sunflower were added to the gardens towards the end of the Archaic Period. The need to collect, store, or cook new foods eventually led to the production of stone bowls and, by 1500 B.C., the use of pottery. The spread of these new inventions accompanied an increase in trade between groups of people.