6-1a North America's Archaic Period

In the centuries that followed 9000 B.C.E., the climate became progressively drier, and the megafauna soon disappeared. Hunters turned increasingly to bison, elk, and deer as their prey, and smaller, fluted *Folsom* (FOHL-suhm) *points* replaced the larger Clovis spearheads. Wherever archaeologists have discovered Folsom cultural sites, alongside these missile (for example, spear, dart, and arrow) heads they have discovered hammer stones, used for breaking bones from which marrow was extracted; stone scrapers that were used to remove hair from hides; and cutting tools and bone eye needles for preparing hides as clothing and containers. As these missile heads grew smaller, the Folsom hunters attached them to the tips of spear throwers called **atlatls** ((aht-LAH-tl) Throwing stick used in place of a bow for propelling a dart at a high velocity.) (aht-LAH-tls).

As had happened with the Clovis culture, the Folsom complex disappeared as the climate continued changing. Conditions everywhere became warmer and drier, and in the American Southwest and northern Mexico, desert conditions eventually replaced grasslands. Therefore, during what archaeologists call the North American **Archaic period** (8000–2000 B.C.E. in Native American history; period when gathering slowly replaced large-game (megafauna) hunting.) (c. 8000–1000 B.C.E.), people were forced to rely more on gathering wild plants as their primary sources of food. Unlike the highly task-specific implements of the Paleolithic period, Archaic tool kits were less specialized and included more equipment for processing plant foods, such as rice grass, goosefoot, dropseed, and prickly pear cactus. Deer, elk, bison, and mountain sheep continued to be hunted, although discoveries of snares, small traps, and smaller cutting tools among the bones of rabbits, desert mice, rats, squirrels, birds, and snakes and other reptiles imply that humans were forced to rely on much more humble daily fare. Hunting, gathering, and fishing remained the best choices in much of North America.

Little is known about the social organization of these early Americans. Members of their small bands relied on interdependence and mutual cooperation for survival; they revered elements of the natural world, and probably connected with these elements through personal guardian spirits. The small size and temporary nature of most Archaic campsites suggest that most groups consisted of relatively few, highly mobile families. Such mobility seems to have been considerably more restricted than in the Paleoindian period, largely because of the scarcity of groundwater. One result of this phenomenon was the growing isolation of groups from one another. Out of this separation gradually grew cultural and language differences.