

Brief summary of what was going on prehistorically on Galveston Island

By Eleanor Stoddard

Galveston Island is not particularly old; so, the oldest artifacts we find are really only about 2,000 years old. Basically, the people living on the island were not Karankawa, like everyone mistakenly thinks; the Karankawa were living further south along the coast. They also had a very distinctive pottery that is decorated in asphaltum; it's very rare to find that kind of pottery on Galveston Island.

The people on Galveston would have been Akokisa. Their pottery has a sandy paste, it's very common around this part of SE Texas, and the clay for the vessels found here would have come from around Galveston Bay. They may have added in sand, or the clay could have just naturally included sand. Sometimes temper was added—that prevents the clay from cracking when drying out. Common tempers are sand, bone, or crushed up pieces of older pottery vessels (grog).

We do find stone here. There are no stone outcrops on the island, and the closest source for stone is about 75 km away. That means people had to travel to get raw materials to make into stone tools, or trade for it. Carrying big chunks of rock around is hard work; people were making their tools elsewhere and bringing in their finished products. We do find some stone flakes that have been chipped off from stone tools; they are generally very small, which indicates people were resharpening their tools. If they were creating tools from bigger cobbles or pieces, you'd find a whole lot of flakes of varying sizes.

Shell middens are prehistoric trash heaps. They usually consist of piles of oyster shells (as well as other shells, but oysters are definitely dominant). You often find very dark, heavily organic soils that contain things like animal bones mixed in with the shell. Shell middens erode easily, especially after storms. Many shell middens were originally recorded along the ship channel in the 1970s and have long since eroded away from wave action.

Here's a whole lot of info about middens:

<https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/coast/prehistory/images/shellfish.html>



Late Archaic shell midden, eroding from side of bluff at the Kent Crane Site (41AS3). Photo by Robert Ricklis.

<https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/coast/prehistory/images/intro.html>