

Iti Fabussa

## Lubbub Creek: An Ancient Choctaw Village Site



**Figure 1: Artist's conception of the Lubbub Creek site and its people.**

The Choctaw homeland is full of artifacts and archaeological sites bearing witness to the past presence of our ancestors. This month, Iti Fabvssa explores an important village site inhabited by Choctaw ancestors, during the pivotal time in our history spanning the period before and after European arrival.

This village was located in present-day Pickens County, Alabama, within a sharp, interior bend of the Tombigbee River where it intersects with a smaller stream called Lubbub Creek. The original Choctaw name for this ancient village has been lost, but we do know that the Choctaw name for the creek (Oka Lahba), means warm water, and that the original Choctaw name for the Tombigbee River (Hvcha Hattak), means river people. It could be that one of these names originally came from the settlement itself. In the early 1980s, an Army Corps of Engineers project largely destroyed the site. Before that, it was studied by archaeologists working under

the National Historic Preservation Act. They named it Lubbug Creek, and the work they did tells us some interesting things about the history of the community and the people who lived there.

The spot for the Lubbug Creek settlement was carefully chosen by its founders, who picked an ideal location placing it in close proximity to patches of Black Belt Prairie, to several types of forest, and to floodplains. Together, these diverse ecozones offered a great deal of food resources in the form of diverse, wild plant life, excellent hunting areas, good waters for fishing, and productive shellfish beds. It also offered fertile soils for agriculture, clay for making pottery, and river gravel for making stone tools. This favorably located spot had periodically been used as a camp site for more than 10,000 years. By AD 1000, it had become a large base camp, occupied during the fall. For reasons not fully understood, around AD 1050 the people living at Lubbug Creek, like other communities in the Southeast, rebuilt their way of life and their town around corn agriculture.

With the shift to corn agriculture, the whole complexion of the Lubbug Creek settlement was changed. Most of the community dispersed into individual family farmsteads located along the floodplains in order to make the most efficient use of the soil for agriculture. The Lubbug Creek site itself became a residence for community leaders, a place where the community came together for social and religious functions and a fortified place where the community could protect itself if attacked. At this center, the community members laboriously built a pyramid-shaped earth mound. A large plaza/dance ground/ball field was located east of the mound. The plaza and mound were bordered by a series of claycovered walls made of upright logs that stood about six feet high. The outermost of these walls was itself surrounded by a doughnut-shaped residential area. This is where a small group of community leaders lived, occupying only a few houses at any given time. The Lubbug Creek settlement was protected on two sides by a 6-foot wall, with bastions for shooting arrows at would be attackers. The other two sides were protected by the Tombigbee River.

In the summer, the people living in the farmsteads around Lubbug Creek planted and tended corn, beans, pumpkin and other domesticated plants. Boys protected the fields from would-be predators using blowguns and small bows. This preserved the harvest and provided some animal protein to the diet. People also fished and collected shellfish during the warm months. In the fall, they collected hickory nuts and acorns. Men hunted deer into the winter. The cool season seems to have been the time when the surrounding community gathered at Lubbug Creek for feasts.

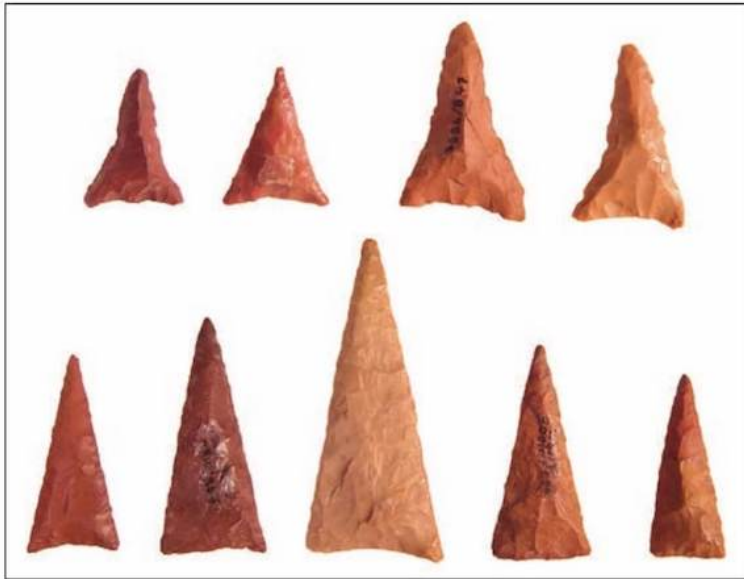
The people living at Lubbug Creek were politically aligned with Moundville, a major population center (see Iti Fabvssa dated March 2015), located on the Black Warrior River, approximately 30 miles to the east. The two groups had close cultural, social, and artistic ties. They participated in a trade network that brought them goods from hundreds of miles away. During the period from 1250-1450, when contacts with Moundville were particularly close, the defensive wall around Lubbug Creek was taken down, and a few more families set up permanent residence within the complex. This must have been a particularly good time to have lived in the community.

For reasons unknown, during the period of 1450-1650, the Lubbug Creek settlement shrank. The community again built defensive fortifications around the settlement's center. Surrounding farms stopped producing as much corn, and in its place people began relying more on wild acorns. By 1550 the great settlement of Moundville itself was uninhabited; the population had dispersed to other areas. People continued to live at Lubbug Creek for a few more generations, but according to European records, the area was vacant of permanent Indigenous settlements by 1700. Archaeologists have attributed the abandonment of the village, after its 600-plus years of continuous occupation, to 1600s slaving raids from the Muscogee (Creek), and other groups sponsored by the English Carolina Colony. It may be telling that the defensive wall around the settlement was burned at the very end of the site's occupation. What happened to the people who lived there? In all probability, they relocated to more protected areas closer to the heart of the Choctaw homeland. Through the colonial era until 1816, the area along the Tombigbee River was periodically a scene of confrontation between the Muscogee and Choctaw. Nevertheless, a few pieces of Choctaw ceramics from the site dating as late as the Trail of Tears, indicate that it was still revisited. One can only guess what interesting stories these visitors, closer to our own day and age, could have told us about the ancient lives that were lived in this place.

Today, although some parts of the history of Lubbug Creek are hidden in the mists of time, elements of the lifeway followed by the ancient people who lived there are still carried on by Choctaw people. Today's Choctaw language speakers could have understood the words spoken by the ancient people who lived at Lubbug Creek. Today's Choctaw traditional artists who do bow-making, pottery, basketry, and stone tools, carry on an unbroken line of traditional knowledge connecting them with Lubbug Creek. Choctaw social dances probably have roots at Lubbug Creek, as do our heirloom Choctaw crops. While Choctaw people fully live in the modern world, places like Lubbug Creek provide the foundation for what we are today.



**Figure 2: A cooking pot from Lubbud Creek, found with hickory nut shells in it.**



**Figure 3: Stone arrow points from the Lubbud Creek site.**