

ARTI FACT

Caddo Capital



WHEN THE LAND AROUND ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT archeological sites in Texas went on the market in 2003, the Caddo immediately took action. Their heritage is literally in the soil of Hatchel Mound, located in an area that was once like “a capital,” says Robert Cast, the tribe’s preservation officer. Working with property owners, the tribe established a preservation covenant to ensure the mound’s safety and, thanks to an investigation funded with a \$50,000 grant from the National Park Service Tribal Preservation Program, learned new insights. **ALTHOUGH THE TRIBE TODAY RESIDES IN THE SOONER STATE,** centuries ago its people roamed the still unclaimed lands of Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. The bend of the Red River in Texas was home to the bustling clan of Upper Nasoni Caddo. An affable group, in the 16th and 17th centuries they began welcoming the French and Spanish explorers into their villages—a sprawling network of huts and mounds surrounded by game-filled woods and fertile prairies—and exchanging valuable goods such as beads, guns, and animal hides. For their generosity they paid the ultimate price: death from foreign diseases. **BY THE EARLY 1800S, THE VILLAGES WERE EMPTY WITH ONLY** a few European accounts to verify their existence. Some clues remained, however, the largest being the mound, built as a place for religious ceremonies and significant for its association with “important moments in the Caddo’s native history, as well as the history of the first European exploration and colonization of Texas in the late 17th century,” says Timothy K. Perttula, who conducted the investigation of the five villages once surrounding it. **UNEARTHED ARTIFACTS SUCH AS CERAMIC SHERDS, STONE TOOLS,** and cooking jars told of the “diverse social and ritual activities” found within the villages, and OCR dating proved the Caddo had been on the land since A.D. 1200, much earlier than previously thought. “This just went to emphasize how important the site was to Caddo peoples,” Perttula says.