Adaptation Type: Early Hunters
Cultural Complex: Folsom culture
Time Range: ca. 10,000-11,000 years ago

Geographical Distribution: Basically, distribution is in the Plains states; North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, northern Texas. However, sites of this culture are also found among the foothills of the Rocky Mountains; Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico.

Background: Folsom Culture was first identified from remains found at Folsom, New Mexico. Folsom spearpoints were found in association with an extinct form of bison. Subsequent to this discovery other important sites with Folsom materials were found at Lindenmeier, Nebraska; Blackwater Draw, New Mexico; Lipscomb, Texas; Agate Basin, Wyoming, and a number of other localities. Radiocarbon dates from these sites attest to Folsom being one of North America's earliest cultural complexes.

Environment: These Early Hunters occupied the Plains region at the end of the Pleistocene or ice age. Although cooler and wetter than today, it was not a time of bitter cold and snow. Generally, summers were cooler and winters were milder. Compared to earlier periods in the Pleistocene, it was becoming somewhat warmer and drier. There is evidence of coniferous forest moving eastward out of the Rockies onto the Plains.

Demography: Although Folsom people were not the first arrivals in the New World, their population was quite low. There are no estimates of how many people lived in North America 10,000 years ago, but the numbers are believed to be small. The Folsom people probably lived in groups of 30-50, perhaps forming a macro-group at certain seasons with over 100 people present. We have limited information on any of the Early Hunters. In appearance, they probably looked like the Indians that explorers encountered on their first journeys through the Southern Plains. The life expectancy is thought to have been relatively low with men living into their late thirties or early forties. Women probably lived shorter lives, due to complications arising from childbirth.

Technology: Early Hunters had a simple but sophisticated technology. Based on readily available natural materials such as wood, bone and stone, it was well suited to the needs of the Folsom people. Since they were principally hunters, much of their technology centered around tools used to hunt game animals and to process their hides and bones into tools, clothing and other items. The most distinctive artifacts of Folsom hunters were their finely-made fluted spearpoints called Folsom points. They also made knives, scrapers and chisel-like tools from chipped stone. Animal bones were made into spearpoints and into eyed needles for sewing hides (probably into clothing). However, they also used bone to make flat cylindrical disks and grooved bone segments, perhaps indicating a means of keeping count. Although there is no direct archaeological evidence, the uses of wood probably ranged from shafts for their spears to clubs, boomerangs and digging sticks. Wood may have been used in the construction of small, impermanent shelters.
**Settlement:** Folsom people lived in small temporary camps. They ranged over large areas looking for game such as *Bison antiquus*. Thus, their camps were seldom lived in for any great length of time. For much of the year, they probably did not have houses or shelters. However, they may have built small lean-to shelters to protect themselves from the winter weather. In other cases, they might have found greater comfort by staying in a small cave or rock shelter. The number of people in a Folsom camp might have been smaller than usual during times of food stress. Smaller groups of people need less area in terms of food resources to support them.

Folsom people sometimes brought meat back to the camp, where they worked hides into leather, and where the women had their babies, thus, the camps and the territories that surrounded them served as a focal point for Folsom people. Later, after roaming over a large part of the region, they might return to the same locality or nearby because a particular camp had good water or lots of animals to hunt.

**Subsistence:** For Early Hunters, the primary source of food was the bison, which also provided materials for tools and clothing. However, Folsom people also hunted small game such as rabbit, squirrel and turkey. In addition, they made wide use of edible wild plants to supplement the meat in their diet. These might include greens in the spring and seed plants such as pigweed and goosefoot in the fall. They maintained a balanced diet, in contrast to the popular view that they were starving hunters.

**Social System:** We know less about how Folsom society worked than about any other aspect of their culture. Based on the small size of their groups and their nomadic way of life, it is likely that they had a simple way of organizing their lives. Leadership in the group was probably collective, with those males who were successful hunters having some importance. It is also probable that people frequently moved back and forth between different groups. Folsom people undoubtedly had some concept of an afterlife. However, we know very little about their religious practices. We do know that they used red ochre (an earthen pigment) in some fashion, either as paint for rituals (possibly associated with the hunt) or perhaps for the decoration of clothing. In other early societies, ochre was frequently used in mortuary practices (treatment of the dead).