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NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

## Prehistoric People

- The first remains from ancient people in the United States were found in Folsom, NM in 1927. Archaeologists found a stone spear point in an ancient bison's ribs. Prior to this discovery, scientists doubted the antiquity of humans in North America. At the time, 2,000 years was the accepted time frame that humans had occupied the "New World." The discovery placed humans in North America at the end of the last Ice Age.
- This culture, approximately 10,000 years old, was dubbed the Clovis culture because Clovis, NM was the first place remains were found. Many Clovis sites have since been found throughout North America.

## How did Prehistoric People Arrive in North America?

- There are a few theories, but none have been accepted as fact and the origin of ancient people in the Americas is still largely a mystery as well as how long people have lived in this part of the world.
- **The Beringian Land Bridge Theory** – Over the last 50 years, archaeologists have found clues that there was once a land bridge between Alaska and Siberia called Beringia. There was also a corridor that formed between two giant glaciers of thick sheets of ice in North America. These glaciers covered most of Canada and some of the northern United States. Some archaeologists believe that people followed game animals across the land bridge and through the corridor. This was the most widely accepted theory for quite some time.
- **The North Pacific Route Theory** – Dr. James Dixon, who works at sites on islands in Southeast Alaska, proposed this theory. The theory holds that instead of coming over land, ancient people used boats to follow the ocean shore from Siberia. This theory holds that people would have eaten sea mammals and shellfish and been able to camp on the icy shoreline.
- **The North Atlantic Paleomaritime Theory** – Dennis Stanford and Bruce Bradley agreed with Dr. James Dixon that ancient peoples arrived here by boat, but they proposed that the route was from Southwest Europe to the Americas instead.

## Possible Questions

- Which theory do you think is the most logical way Prehistoric People Arrived in North America? Why?
- Why do you think these people traveled to the North American continent anyway?
- What do you think some of the hardships/challenges would have been for ancient people traveling on any one of the proposed routes?
- What would have been some advantages/disadvantages of each route?





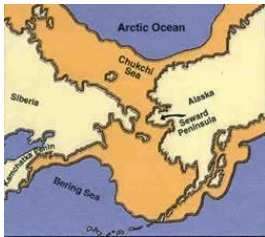

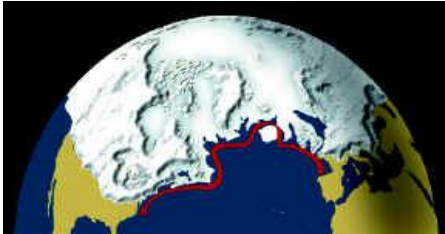
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Proofs and Disproofs

Prehistory

Proofs and Disproofs		
<p><b>Beringian Land Bridge Theory</b></p>  <p>www.artictravel.net</p>	<p>Since 18,000 years ago, the sea level has risen 300 ft. due to melting glaciers. Old sites confirming this theory may very well lie under the ocean, waiting to be explored.</p>  <p>Pubs.usgus.gov</p>	<p>Artifacts recovered from prehistoric societies in Siberia do not match up with ancient tools of the Clovis people. Siberia's prehistoric settlers used mostly small blades set into groves in a piece of wood or bone. North America's ancient people used spear points.</p> <p>There are sites older than Clovis sites that have been found south of the corridor. The theory cannot explain how people reached these sites before the corridor was opened.</p> <p>Additionally, recent information infers that the corridor was not actually even open for passage until around 11,000 years ago, making the theory unable to account for numerous sites in North America.</p>
<p><b>North Pacific Route Theory</b></p>	<p>Since 18,000 years ago, the sea level has risen 300 ft. due to melting glaciers. Old sites confirming this theory may very well lie under the ocean, waiting to be explored. Could explain away the issue of the corridor.</p>	<p>Presents the issue that ancient people would have had boat technology and been able to navigate miles of sea and ice shelves. This route would have been 3,000 miles long before people reached major ice-free places on the continents.</p>
<p><b>North Atlantic Paleomaritime Theory</b></p>	<p>Some sites in eastern North America suggest this theory, namely Meadowcroft and Cactus Hill because they date back to 17,000 and 15,000 years ago, long before the corridor would have been open for passage. An ancient culture of Southwest Europe called the Solutrean, which lived about 22,000 – 17,000 years ago made artifacts that resemble later Clovis artifacts.</p>	<p>Presents the issue that ancient people would have had boat technology and been able to navigate miles of sea and ice shelves. This route would have been 1,500 miles long before people reached major ice-free places on the continent.</p>  <p>www.clovisandbeyond.org</p>

Information obtained from **The History Mystery Examiner, Vol II, No I**, The Bureau of Land Management's Cultural Division, Special Edition. Summer 2004 and **Survival by Hunting: Prehistoric Human Predators and Animal Prey**, George C. Frison. 2004.





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## We can infer that...

- The first Americans were nomadic people.
- They probably built temporary shelters from animal skins.
- These skins were probably stretched over poles to make tents.
- Animal hides were probably also used as a warm bed or blanket.
- In addition to hunting, these people probably ate wild plants, seeds and roots.

## Did they hunt mammoths?

- The excavation of Brixham Cave in England yielded 15 unquestionable stone tools in association with extinct Ice Age animals such as mammoth, mastadons, rhinoceros, cave bear and hyena.
- The notion that people with stone technology lived during the Ice Age was accepted as scientific fact in 1859.
- By the late 1880s, there seemed to be a consensus in the scientific community that Ice Age people inhabited North America and that they were similar to early people in Europe.
- A number of sites in the West have been found that contain mammoth remains in association with Clovis tools. These sites, in particularly one found in the northwest where a Clovis point was found embedded in mammoth remains, imply that Clovis people ate mammoths.
- No sites in Nevada have been found where the remains of an extinct mammoth are in unquestionable association with artifacts of ancient tools. This however may be because mammoth remains found in Nevada date back some 14,000 years, whereas evidence of ancient people in the region has not been found for that long ago.
- The mammoth remains recovered in the Black Rock were disarticulated (not whole skeletons). This could be an indicator of human involvement at the time of burial because people dismember and move skeletal parts in the process of butchering and eating animals. Bones could have also been scattered by carrion eaters.
- The Black Rock mammoths, however, also died in or near the channel of a stream. The bones could have also been misplaced as they were moved by flowing water.
- Basically, there is enough evidence to assume that ancient people did hunt mammoths. But on what level? Many archaeologists do not acknowledge that people would hunt megamammals for a living.

Information obtained from: Science, Values, and the American West, Mammoths, Prehistoric Archaeology, and Interdisciplinary Research. By Stephanie Livingston and Claudia Mine, The Early Settlement of North America: The Clovis Era. By Gary Haynes





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# Prehistory



Clovis Points



Folsom Points

(Points above shown approximately actual size.)

- Could it be that the kill sites were just lucky hunters?
- Was hunting mammoths common practice or a chance occurrence?
- Is it possible that people in North America may have hunted mammoth to the point of extinction?
- Did all ancient people that shared the Clovis point also have the same practices to feed, house and clothe themselves?
- How much of their diet do you think consisted of hunting. How much was dependant on gathering plant sources?

• [www.floridafrontier.com](http://www.floridafrontier.com)



Points found by volunteers during a Soldier Meadows Restoration Project.



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## Prehistoric People

*So much remains a mystery about prehistoric people in addition to how they arrived in the Americas...*

### Prehistoric people and the Paiute Tribe

- The Paiutes believe that their cultures have been here forever. They have creation stories that have been passed down via oral histories for years. While these stories vary, they are similar in the way animals and humans co-exist and solidify the basis for all life.
  - Remains found in Spirit Cave in Nevada date back to around 10,000 years ago. These remains quickly became a controversial topic, as tribal members desired to bury the remains of their ancient ancestors, while some anthropologists wanted to study them to learn more about ancient life.
  - There is no right answer in this situation. In fact, it is an inherent conflict in tribal culture and modern culture. Native Americans firmly believe that the past should be left in the past; the buried should remain buried. Modern society can lend itself to science and the desire to fully understand the past.
  - Some studies indicate that the remains were genetically different from the Paiute tribe and may not be ancestral remains of the modern Paiute.
  - However, it is also possible that 10,000 years ago the environment of the Great Basin was conducive to supporting a larger population. A great drought occurred 7,000 to 5,000 years ago and people presumably would have left the area in search of a more hospitable environment.
  - These same people could have adapted to deserts as they traveled and mingled with additional people. These original occupants of the Great Basin could have adapted to different environments, derived different skills and returned to the area.
  - The Paiutes of today could be the adaptation of ancient people from long ago. The case could also be that these ancient people were a different culture from the Paiutes.
  - The fact is that we know that people occupied the Great Basin 10,000 years ago, regardless of their origin. What their lives were like and what became of them is still in the process of discovery, as well as whether or not the answer really matters. ***What do you think?***
- ***What do you think these people ate?***
  - ***Where do you think they lived?***
  - ***What do you think an average day consisted of 10,000 or more years ago?***

Above picture is an illustration by Ron Oden based on a bust created by Sharon Long

