

The Peopling of the Americas



Archaeologists originally theorized that humans arrived in the Americas about 13,000 years BP. Paleoindian finds at the Clovis and Folsom sites in the 1930s revealed the Clovis culture, characterized by fluted projectile points, and radiocarbon dating placed the artifacts after the opening of the ice free corridor. Throughout the 1900s, the discovery of more Clovis style points and genetic evidence at sites like Anzick and Colby also supported the land migration model; remains recovered from these sites had striking similarities to ancient indigenous populations of Beringia, and this led archaeologists to conclude that Native Peoples migrated from Northern Russia, across the Bering Land Bridge, and through the ice free corridor while hunting mastodon.

However, recent analysis of sites like the Bluefish Caves and Monte Verde have forced archaeologists to reconsider the land migration model. Both of these sites date to thousands of years prior to the opening of the ice free corridor. Furthermore, the discovery of fishing sites along the Pacific coast of the Americas, also predating Clovis culture, suggest that early arrivers took a coastal route instead.

Though genetics point to migrants from Northern Russia, archaeologists had long been puzzled by the presence of Pacific Islander DNA in cultures indigenous to South America; neither migration model could explain this enigma. However the discovery of remains on various Pacific Islands have allowed for a more detailed comparison between archaic populations. The results point to the possibility that Polynesian explorers arrived in South America by canoe, and intermingled with local populations, hundreds of years before Europeans. Overall, all of these competing models hold portion of the truth; in all likelihood, the indigenous populations of the Americas at the time of European contact were descendants of explorers who arrived in numerous waves over many thousands of years.



Glaciation of North America 16 thousand years ago; migration by land was impossible at the time

- ★ Key Site
- 🐘 Land Migration Site
- 🐟 Coastal Migration Site
- 🚢 Pacific Migration Site
- 🟡 Land Migration Route
- 🟠 Coastal Migration Route
- 🟢 Pacific Migration Route



David Willadsen
 Lambert Azimuthal Equal Area, CM: -103°, Scale 1:67,500,000
 Inset Map: Lambert Azimuthal Equal Area, CM: -103°, Scale 1:200,000,000
 Data Sources: Natural Earth
 Site information from Anthro 354, 310
 Glacial and Bering landmass data courtesy of Dan MacGuig
 Site Symbols from the Noun Project
 Mammoth: Ian Rahmadi Kurniawan
 Fish: Alena Artemova
 Canoe: Christopher T. Howlett