

Story of first Americans being rewritten

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Scientists have traditionally ascribed the first peopling of the Americas to the Clovis culture—big-game hunters thought to have roamed North American plains starting around 11,500 years ago.

Clovis spear- or arrow-heads recovered from the Gault site, Texas. (Courtesy Center for the Study of the First Americans, TAMU)

But that idea has been widely challenged in recent years. Now, an anthropologist has found evidence he claims could be the final nail in the coffin for the “Clovis first” model. Michael Waters, director of the Center for the Study of the First Americans at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, and a colleague detailed the findings in the Feb. 23 issue of the research journal *Science*. “The new dating that we did indicates that the Clovis Complex ranges from 11,050 to 10,900 radiocarbon years before the present,” Waters said. A radiocarbon year is a year as determined by radiocarbon dating, an analysis widely used to date organic materials based on their content of the radioactive element Carbon-14. The new-found dates contradict “an emerging archaeological record that supports a pre-Clovis human occupation of the Americas,” his team wrote. Stone tools and butchered mammoth remains dating to 12,500 radiocarbon years ago have been found in Wisconsin, they remarked; humans also appear to have been present around then in Chile. The newly clarified dates show that Clovis lasted no more than 200 to 400 years, making it almost impossible for the Clovis people to spread as far as previously thought in such a short time, Waters added. “How could people, in such a short period of time, reach the tip of South America? It doesn’t make any kind of anthropological sense that these people could have been moving that fast, nor would they have wanted to; it seems highly unlikely, given 20 generations, they could have made it that far that quickly.” Waters and co-author Thomas Stafford of Stafford Research Laboratories in Lafayette, Colo. tested samples from Clovis sites in an effort to re-date some of what Waters said were poorly dated sites. Because of technological advances, Waters argues that the pair was able to re-date more precisely some of the more than 25 dated sites found in North America.

Courtesy Texas A&M University and World Science staff

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