The First

Springboard:
Students should read "A Typical Textbook Account" and fill in the map at the bottom of the page as instructed.

Objective: The student will be able to explain some theories about how and when humans first populated the United States.

Materials: A Typical Textbook Account (Springboard handouts)
InspirEd Archaeology Monthly (handouts stapled and folded like a newsletter) **SUGGESTION:** Address the "mailing" before copying the pages.

Terms to know:
Beringia – land "bridge" that once connected Asia to North America
archaeology – the study of artifacts from the past
Pleistocene Epoch – the Ice Ages
prehistoric – before written records

Procedure:

- In discussing the Springboard, make sure students are able to identify Asia and Siberia at the top of the map and North America and Alaska at the bottom. Arrows should point downward through Alaska and fan out around North America. Then explain that *this "typical textbook" explanation is no longer the most accepted theory of how North America and the U.S. were first populated*.
- Tell students that *in order to learn more about how the U.S. was populated, they will be reading a past edition of a monthly archaeology newsletter devoted entirely to the topic*.
- Hand out copies of "InspirEd Archaeology Monthly." Explain that you or the media specialist *received this newsletter in 2000 and saved it because it offered such valuable information for teaching about America's past*.
- Students should read the newsletter individually or in groups and create a timeline giving information about when and how ancient people migrated to the United States. This assignment can be as simple or elaborate as you choose. The timeline can be written on notebook paper or drawn on butcher or construction paper with illustrations.
- Have students share their timelines and discuss. Answers will vary but should include information such as:

c. 20,000 B.C. (or 18,000 years ago) – Ancient sailors (Solutreans) arrived in "America," possibly in skin boats.
16,000-14,000 B.C. (or 14,000-12,000 years ago) – People from Asia crossed Beringia.
10,000-9.000 B.C. (12,000 -11,000 years ago) – Clovis culture dominated the Americas.
11,000 B.C. (9,000 years ago) – Last Ice Age ended.

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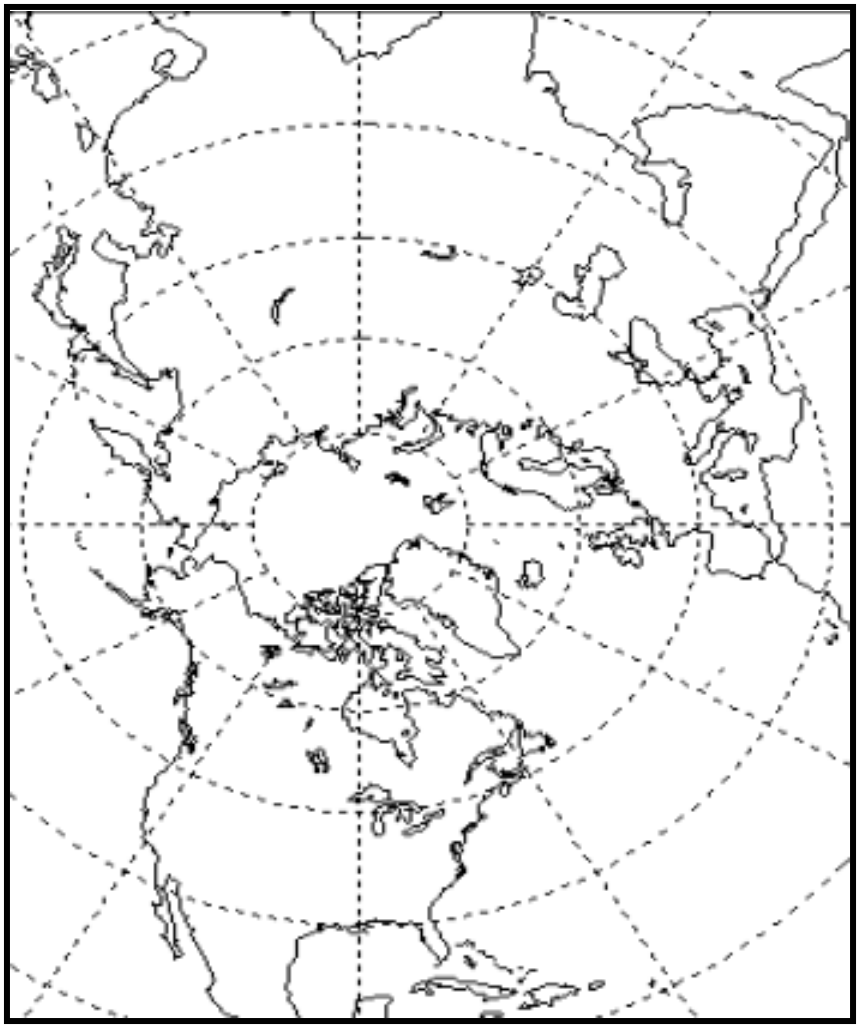
A Typical Textbook Account

"The first inhabitants of North America came across from Asia thousands of years ago. (Scientists think any time from about 40,000 to 13,000 years ago.) In those days most of the northern parts of Asia and North America were covered by layers of ice thousands of feet thick in places. Because so much of the earth's water was taken up by ice sheets, the oceans were lower. This drop in sea level exposed a land bridge, called the Bering Land Bridge or Beringia, between Siberia and Alaska. The bridge and parts of Alaska were mostly free of ice. The people who would become the first Americans walked across this land connection while following the big mammals they hunted. Some of the new arrivals began to move south along an ice-free corridor between the ice sheets. Some reached Texas. Others spread all across North America and farther south into Central and South America."

From **www.tpwd.state.tx.us/edu/indian/journey.htm**

DIRECTIONS: Study the view of the Northern Hemisphere and label: **North America**, **Asia**, the **"Bering Land Bridge," Siberia**, and **Alaska** on the map below. Then draw arrows showing the route taken by North America's first inhabitants, as described in the passage.



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InspirEd
ARCHAEOLOGY
Monthly

The Monthly Newsletter for the InspirEd Institute of American Archaeology

June 2000 Edition

To Our Readers,

As all of you know, each month our Institute newsletter publishes articles about discoveries and updates in the field of archaeology, and we normally run articles covering a wide range of topics. This month, however, is a little different.

A report presented last month at the Society for American Archaeology meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, prompted our team of writers to spend an entire issue on a topic which is of great importance to many Americans: Who were the first people to populate our land and when did they arrive?

Of course much has been written about this subject in the past, but last month's presentation may, at least for a time, offer an answer to this long-debated question. We, therefore, decided to revisit the various views on the topic one last time, along with providing a complete explanation of the new theory. (We use the word "theory" since "factual information" in our field can always change with some new discovery.)

The article by I. Sage describes the world of the earliest inhabitants. Hugh Zuel looks back at the usual story of the first Americans and Newt Theerie explains the newest views of America's first people. In her article Clovis Point discusses some key archaeological finds around the country and other articles examine still more aspects of the topic.

We at InspirEd Archaeology Monthly hope you will enjoy this special edition and that you will find it both interesting and educational. As always, the staff of our newsletter wishes you, "Happy learning!"

H.E. Digs
Editor-in-Chief

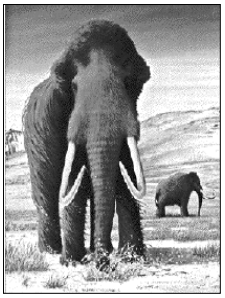
A DIFFERENT WORLD

By I. Sage

The period called the Pleistocene Epoch lasted from about 2 million years ago to around 9,000 years ago. It was a time when Ice Ages alternated with warming trends, each lasting tens of thousands of years or more. During the Ice Ages the polar ice caps expanded and huge continental glaciers covered large portions of the Northern Hemisphere.

The overall climatic conditions of the Pleistocene Epoch were very different than they are today. During the Ice Ages the average global temperature decreased by approximately 5 degrees. Winters were long and cold and summers were brief.

Interior regions of what is now the United States were much cooler and wetter than they are now. Dense forests, lakes, and wide areas of grasslands covered the Great Plains, the Midwest, and eastward. Savannas with their rich variety of grass-eating animals covered most of the southern tier of the country.



Huge mammoths (left), mastodons, giant bison, and other herd animals roamed the grassy plains. The Dire Wolf, wild cats, and many other predators hunted the savannas for deer, elk, beaver, rabbits, and other prey. The waters in and around the region held salmon, sturgeon, pike, trout, seals, otters, whales, and more.

It was to this cold, game-filled land that the earliest Americans first arrived. Did they come by land, by water, or both? The answer to this question has been sought for many years.

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THE USUAL EXPLANATION

By Hugh Zuel

In 1589 a Catholic missionary, José de Acosta, wrote that the North American Indians looked very similar to people from Asia, mainly Mongolians. This observation led to the theory that the early ancestors of Native Americans followed herds of game onto the continent from Asia.

It has long been accepted that the first people arrived around 12,000 to 14,000 years ago from Asia. They came near the end of what is known as the Pleistocene Epoch, a time when glaciers covered most of Canada and other parts of the continent.

The huge ice sheets locked up large amounts of water and sea levels dropped by as much as 350 feet, exposing a vast land "bridge" from Siberia to Alaska. At nearly 1,000 miles in width, Beringia, as this land was called, was really much more than a bridge: it was more like a sub-continent.

Beringia allowed many groups of people to cross easily into America. Some traveled along the southern coastline and others overland to the interior plains. Their migration occurred gradually, over a long period of time and over many different routes. The various groups grew, moved, and changed and eventually became the many native tribes of the Americas.

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STUDYING PREHISTORIC TIMES

By Clovis Point

Many important archaeological finds have provided clues to the first people in North America. Such discoveries have allowed archaeologists to piece together a picture of the prehistoric world of North America's earliest dwellers.


Clovis Point

In 1926 spear points called Clovis for their distinct style were discovered in Clovis, New Mexico. These offered the first evidence that early people hunted animals that are now extinct. Scientific dating of the spear tips proved that humans were in the Americas before the end of the Ice Ages. Many Clovis points have since been found throughout North America and Asia, supporting the theory that prehistoric people crossed Beringia into Alaska.

20th century excavations around the continent have revealed skeletons, tools, and rock shelters dating back 17,000 years or more. There are even estimates of artifacts dating back as far as 35,000 years, however these are questionable. Pre-Clovis tools from the Cactus Hill site in Virginia have been some of the oldest, most important artifacts found.

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SO MANY SCIENCES

By O. Lee Gist

Though archaeology plays a key role in learning about the earliest people in the United States, many other sciences are involved in such study. Anthropology, geology, chemistry, botany, and zoology, as well as many others, are also important in unraveling the mysteries of the past.

Anthropologists typically work hand-in-hand with archaeologists in using discoveries to explain the lives of the early people. Based on their knowledge of many cultures, anthropologists can make educated predictions about the ancients and their way of life.

Geologists, chemists, zoologists, and botanists are all involved in dating any bones or artifacts that are found. Geologists are able to tell much from layers of earth that can provide information about various time periods, while chemists use the breakdown of materials into carbon to estimate the age of finds. The zoologists' and botanists' knowledge of prehistoric animals and plants can also be helpful in dating objects found.

Archaeologists need a great deal of help in doing their work. There is far more to studying the past than just digging and tagging artifacts and bones.

RETHINKING THE "FACTS"

By Newt Theerie

Last month at a Philadelphia meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Joseph and Lynn McAvoy presented important information about the well-known Cactus Hill site. At first many spear tips and other artifacts dating from the Clovis culture (c. 10,000 - 9,000 B.C.) were found, but later discoveries revealed much older items at lower levels.

The tools found at the lower strata did not have Clovis points. They were more primitive, and radiocarbon dating and other evidence showed them to be 15,000 to 17,000 years old. These discoveries strongly support a new theory about the origins of the earliest Americans.

According to the new theory, the first people in the Americas may have come by boat more than 18,000 years ago. Spear points found in Europe similar to those found at Cactus Hill (and other sites) show that these early people may have traveled from Spain, Portugal, or France. These people, the Solutreans, are believed to have sailed in skin boats.

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The idea of ancient sailors crossing the oceans is not hard to believe. Evidence shows that by 20,000 B.C., people of the South Pacific had long been sailing the open waters. Some finds suggest, in fact, that some of these Pacific sailors may have arrived in the Americas long before the Asians crossed Beringia.

There is no question that at least some of the early "Americans" did cross the land bridge as long-believed. However scientists no longer consider these Asians to be the earliest ancestors. It has now been proven that the Clovis culture from northeast Asia is not the oldest in North America. Cactus Hill and other sites (which have not been fully dated) have many artifacts that are indeed older.

HOW TO KNOW "WHEN?"

By Anna Lize

Perhaps the most difficult task in the study of ancient people in the Americas and elsewhere is figuring out "when" tools and weapons were used or determining "how old" bones and artifacts really are. The process of dating archaeological finds is a difficult and complex one. In order to estimate the ages of bones and artifacts, archaeologists use a number of techniques.

Radiocarbon dating, or carbon dating, is used most often to find the age of items that were once alive. All living things contain carbon, which is partly radioactive. After an organism dies, the radioactive carbon decays. The rate of decay can be measured and the date when the organism died can be estimated. This method is used to date bone, charcoal, leather, and more.

Radiocarbon dating is also used for finding the ages of non-living things by dating living things found within the same strata, or layers, as artifacts. Plant fibers or bones found near a pot can be used to determine the age of the pot.

Recently DNA testing has also been used to provide information about people of the past. Using DNA, scientists can uncover relationships among ancient people and discover connections between the ancients and the Native Americans.

Though this technique can be useful for learning about the past, it can and does cause problems. Native American religious beliefs forbid disturbing the remains of their ancestors in any way. Since the ancient people are in fact the ancestors of Native Americans, this process has put modern scientists at odds with today's native tribes.

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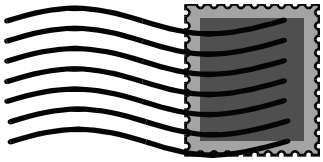

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