

PALEOINDIAN CULTURES OF THE PAST

The oldest archaeological remains in the Southwest date to the end of the last major Pleistocene glaciation. These artifacts were made by a people living as hunters and gathers at a time before agriculture was practiced anywhere in the world, a time when the landscapes of the Southwest were quite different from those of today. Archaeologists refer to these first inhabitants of the Americas as Paleoindians, people ancestral to modern Native Americans. The natural environments of the late Pleistocene in North America, from the last glacial advance, termed Wisconsinan, until about 8000 years ago were characterized by glacial or periglacial climates, great fluctuations in climate, unusual distributions of plants and animals and the presence of some 35 now extinct species of Pleistocene animals. The cultural environment was one in which only hunting and gathering peoples occupied the hemisphere. The modern day horse was not introduced to North America until the 1600's meaning that Paleoindians performed all their activities on foot, including hunting , gathering, and transportation.

Clovis is the oldest undisputed Paleoindian complex in North America and dates from around 13,000 BC to about 8,000 BC. Artifacts of the Clovis complex have a distribution throughout those regions of North America that were unglaciated during late Wisconsinian times. These areas occur in Alaska, Canada, most of the lower 48 states, Mexico, Central America and south into Chile. Clovis artifacts were deposited at a time when it was drier than periods before it or after it but wetter than today. Research suggests a fairly equable climate with mild winters and cool summers.

Clovis sites are rare in North America. The San Pedro River Valley in Arizona has yielded more mammoth remains in association with Clovis points than any other locale in North America. The Naco, Murray Springs, Lehner, Escapule and Leikem sites reveal that in addition to mammoth, Clovis people relied on bison, tapir, bear, muskrat, camel, horse, mountain sheep, antelope, rabbit, fish, small mammals and plant foods as part of their diet. The principal hunting tool was the atlatl which combined a separate foreshaft and mainshaft. The two part system allowed the recovery of spent weapons and afforded faster rearming of spear mainshafts.

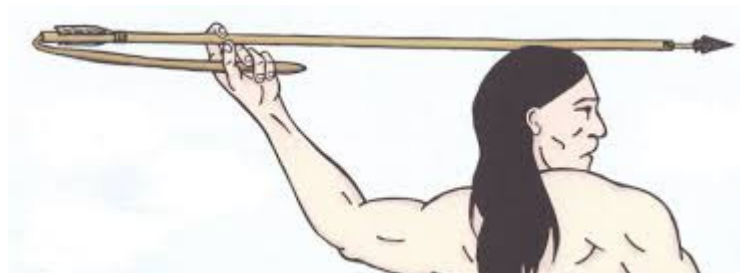
During the Clovis period other Paleoindian complexes evolved including the Folsom, Lanceolate Plano, and Great Basin cultures. Clovis predated these later cultures by at least 1,000 years. All were hunter/gatherer societies which required considerable mobility to acquire game and sufficient plant foods. By the end of the Clovis period mammoth and other Pleistocene megafauna were extinct in North America. As the Wisconsinian ice sheet receded, the climate became drier and warmer and resultant changes in vegetation occurred. The hunter/gatherer lifestyle also changed as cultures began to gradually incorporate agriculture as a means of securing food. This signaled the end of the Paleoindian period and the beginning of the Archaic period. By around 2000 BC, the plants in Southern Arizona we see today were firmly established. Agriculture, mainly the cultivation of corn, beans and squash, slowly replaced a portion of the hunter/gatherer lifestyle. Around 500 BC the bow and arrow, and pottery came

into existence in the Southwest bringing profound changes to the lifestyles of Southwest Native Americans.

Clovis and other Paleoindian artifacts have been recovered from almost all the areas the Green Valley Hiking Club utilizes. The San Pedro river drainage has yielded most of these finds. Evidence shows that these Paleoindian cultures freely crossed the Santa Rita Mountains into the Santa Cruz river system using natural low points such as the Box Canyon drainage. Surface finds of Paleoindian artifacts are very rare, most coming from areas of severe erosion where wind and water has removed 10,000 years of accumulated deposits.



Seven Styles of Paleoindian Points



Atlatl Thrower

Prepared by Joe Frazier, October 2018

Sources: Justice, Noel D. 2002 "Stone Age Spear and Arrow Points of the Southwestern United States." Indiana University Press. Bloomington, Indiana. Cordell, Linda S. 1984. "Archaeology of the Southwest." Academic Press, San Diego, California.