

North America’s oldest human artifacts found in Idaho

By ERIN ROSS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

CORVALLIS — Ancient human artifacts found in a remote corner of northwestern Idaho could deliver a major blow to a long-held theory that North America’s first humans arrived by crossing a land bridge connected to Asia before moving south through the center of the continent.

The artifacts have been dated to as far back as 16,500 years ago, making them the oldest radiocarbon dated evidence of humans in North America, according to research published Thursday in the journal Science.

The artifacts are part of a trove discovered where Cooper’s Ferry, Idaho, now stands. They are a thousand years older than what has previously been considered North America’s most ancient known human remains. Together with dozens of other archaeological sites stretched across the continent, it helps decipher the story of when, and how, humans first arrived.

“The traditional model is that people came into the New World from northeast Asia and walked across the Bering land bridge, before coming down the middle of the continent in an ice-

free corridor,” said Loren Davis, an archaeologist at Oregon State University and the lead author on the study. Those people supposedly brought the technology to make Clovis-type blades and spear points with them, and then spread their shared culture across the continent. That’s the model currently taught in most history books.

The site at Cooper’s Ferry in Western Idaho doesn’t fit with this model. For one, the ice-free corridor probably didn’t exist when humans first arrived at Cooper’s Ferry — scientists think it didn’t open up until about 15,000 years ago, which means these early people had to find a different route south. Other early sites challenged this theory, but none were this old, and the oldest were dated with a method considered less precise than radio-carbon dating.

“This is another domino in the collapse of the Clovis-first idea and the idea that people walked down an ice-free corridor some 13,500 years ago,” says Todd Braje, an archaeologist at San Diego State University, who was not involved in the study.

“What’s really interesting about Cooper’s Ferry is that it takes things a lit-



Oregon State University Photo/Loren Davis
Archaeologists work to excavate ancient human artifacts at Cooper’s Ferry in Western Idaho.

tle further,” Braje says, “It offers some potential avenues for figuring out these big questions.”

Braje supports an alternative theory to the ice-free corridor: one where instead of traveling to the New World by land, ancient Americans came by sea. They traveled from Asia to North America by island-hopping and hugged the shore, following a coastal “kelp highway” full of sheltered bays and rich with food. The idea was once controversial, but in recent years it’s gained support.

Just like the ice-free cor-

ridor model is supported by a shared technology and shared culture found across a region, the kelp highway hypothesis also has a uniting technology: stemmed points. These are blades, spear points, knives, and cutting tools all manufactured the same way, and are one of the oldest types of projectiles in the world. While stemmed points are plentiful along the coast of Asia, there were very few found at the older sites in North America, and crucially, even fewer found along the coast.

Of course, if Braje’s kelp

highway theory was true, there would be very few archaeological sites along the West Coast of North America: sea levels have risen dramatically since the Ice Age, so any human settlements would have flooded long ago.

That’s where Cooper’s Ferry comes in.

OSU’s Davis first began excavating the site in the 1990s. His team uncovered stemmed points and dated them to over 13,000 years ago. At the time, there were no other examples of that technology from that time in history in North Amer-

ica, “we sort of sat in limbo for a time as people argued about what it might mean,” Davis said.

They resumed excavation in 2009. And in 2017, Davis and his team once again started finding stemmed points. “The radiocarbon dates we were getting started to tell the same story. And then, it started to show they were even older than we realized. That was super surprising.”

The stemmed points were extremely similar to a type found in Hokkaido, Japan, also dated to around 16,000 years old.

Combined, Davis said this supports the hypothesis that the first Americans didn’t arrive by land, but by boats.

Although the site at Cooper’s Ferry is inland and far from the coast, it sits at the conjunction of two major rivers that serve as tributaries to the Columbia. “If you’re traveling south along the West Coast, the Columbia River is pretty much the first left you can take,” Davis said.

It would be easy enough to then follow the river, rich with fish, to the confluence of two of its tributaries, the Snake and Salmon rivers, and the spot along their banks where Cooper’s Ferry now stands.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY

Very warm with some sun

SUNDAY

Partly sunny

MONDAY

Mostly sunny and nice

TUESDAY

Sunny

WEDNESDAY

Sunshine and patchy clouds

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
91°	62°	86°	59°	85°	55°	90°	59°	91°	57°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
95°	66°	90°	61°	88°	55°	93°	58°	96°	61°

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OREGON FORECAST
Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	88°	62°
Normals	84°	54°
Records	103° (1967)	37° (1924)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"
Month to date	0.13"
Normal month to date	0.41"
Year to date	9.74"
Last year to date	6.52"
Normal year to date	8.36"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	90°	69°
Normals	84°	54°
Records	102° (2007)	39° (1965)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	0.05"
Normal month to date	0.19"
Year to date	4.61"
Last year to date	5.15"
Normal year to date	6.11"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Sun.
Boardman	WSW 6-12	WSW 7-14
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	W 7-14

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	6:15 a.m.
Sunset tonight	7:36 p.m.
Moonrise today	7:38 a.m.
Moonset today	8:46 p.m.

First

Full

Last

New

Sep 5

Sep 13

Sep 21

Sep 28

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 114° in Thermal, Calif. Low 31° in Yellowstone N.P., Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s

-0s

0s

10s

20s

30s

40s

50s

60s

70s

80s

90s

100s

110s

showers

t-storms

rain

flurries

snow

ice

cold front

warm front

stationary front

high

low

BRIEFLY

Probation for mother of toddler who shot himself

BAKER CITY — The mother of a 2-year-old Baker City boy who died in November 2018 after shooting himself in the head with a handgun he got control of has been placed on three years' formal probation.

Diana Goodman, 33, of Baker City will avoid an 18-month prison term and possibly be able to raise her surviving son who is about a year old, if she's successful on probation, District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff said Thursday.

Liam Mankins died when a loaded .380-caliber semi-automatic pistol he was playing with discharged at his father's home on Nov. 4, 2018.

Shirtcliff said Liam was playing with the gun on the floor of his father's bedroom while his father slept when he accidentally fired the gun.

Peter Mankins, 33, pleaded guilty on Aug. 9 in Baker County Circuit Court to one count of criminally negligent homicide, a Class B felony, in connection with his son's death. He also pleaded guilty to one count each of possession of methamphetamine and recklessly endangering another person, both Class A misdemeanors.

BLM women's fire camp still taking applicants to Sept. 13

VALE — The deadline to apply for the 2019 Women in Wildland Fire Boot Camp has been extended to Friday, Sept. 13.

Participants are compensated for training camp as well as some travel expenses. Training materials, personal protective equipment and meals will also be provided.

Last year, the Vale District of the BLM sponsored the first wildland fire training in the Pacific Northwest geared toward women.

Wildland firefighters play an important role in controlling and suppressing wildfires that threaten communities and natural resources, but they also use fire to strategically manage public lands.

While the federal government employs about 15,000 firefighters annually, women hold only 12% of those jobs.

The boot camp consists of classroom instruction and field exercises that cover firefighting techniques, tools and equipment.

Once completed, participants will have met several entry-level requirements for seasonal employment with federal agencies and private contractors.

Applications for the boot camp, which will be held near Juntura over two consecutive weekends, Oct. 11-13 and Oct. 18-20, will be accepted through Sept. 13. By Sept. 20, selections will be made.

To apply, call 541-473-6297 or email candrews@blm.gov.

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