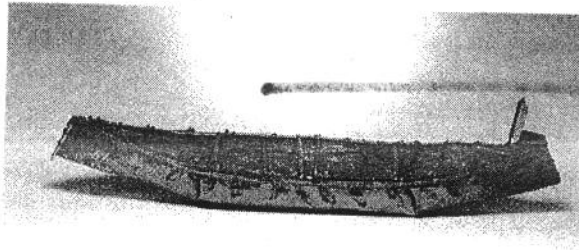


AMERICA BEGINS

Hiawatha had known the depths of despair. For years his people, the group of Indian nations known as the Iroquois, had been beset by a destructive, seemingly endless cycle of violence and revenge. Families, villages, and nations fought one another, and neighboring Indians attacked relentlessly. When Hiawatha tried to restore peace among his own Onondaga people, an evil sorcerer who opposed peace caused the deaths of his seven beloved daughters. Grief-stricken and angry, Hiawatha wandered alone into the forest. After several days he reached the shore of a lake, where he experienced a series of visions. First he saw a flock of wild ducks suddenly fly up from the lake, taking the water with them. Hiawatha walked onto the dry lake bed, gathering and stringing the beautiful purple and white shells that lay there. He saw the shells, called wampum, as symbolic "words" of condolence that, when properly presented, would soothe grief, no matter how intense. Then he met a holy man named Deganawidah ("the Peacemaker"), who presented him the beads and spoke the appropriate words, one to dry his weeping eyes, another to open his ears to the words of peace and reason, a third to clear his throat so that he himself could once again speak peacefully and reasonably. Deganawidah and Hiawatha then took the wampum to the five Iroquois nations. To each they introduced the ritual of condolence as a new message of peace. The Iroquois subsequently submerged their differences

and created a council of chiefs and a confederacy, based on the condolence ritual. Thus was born the powerful League of the Iroquois.

Although it is an oral tradition couched in the language of supernatural religion, the story of Hiawatha and Deganawidah depicts a concrete event in American history. Archaeological evidence at Iroquois sites corroborates the sequence of bloody warfare



followed by peace and dates the league's origins at some time between the late fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century. As with all of American history before the arrival of Europeans and their system of writing, archaeological evidence and oral traditions, examined critically, are our principal sources of knowledge about the past. In this case the story refers to an event of importance not only for pre-Columbian history but for the period of European contact with Native Americans as well. For the Iroquois Confederacy was a significant diplomatic and military force throughout the colonial period and has inspired and intrigued many non-Indians down to the present, despite the fact that it was established prior to, and entirely independently of, the Europeans' arrival.

The founding of the League of the Iroquois marked just one moment in a long history that began more than ten thousand years before Christopher Columbus's first voyage. Over that time an indigenous American history unfolded, utterly separate from that of the Eastern Hemisphere.

Some native peoples eked out their existences in precarious environments, whereas others enjoyed affluence and prosperity; some lived in small bands, whereas others lived in large cities; some believed that the first humans came from the sky, whereas others maintained that they originated underground. Wherever and however they lived and whatever they believed, native peoples together made North America a human habitat and gave it a history.

Read ↓

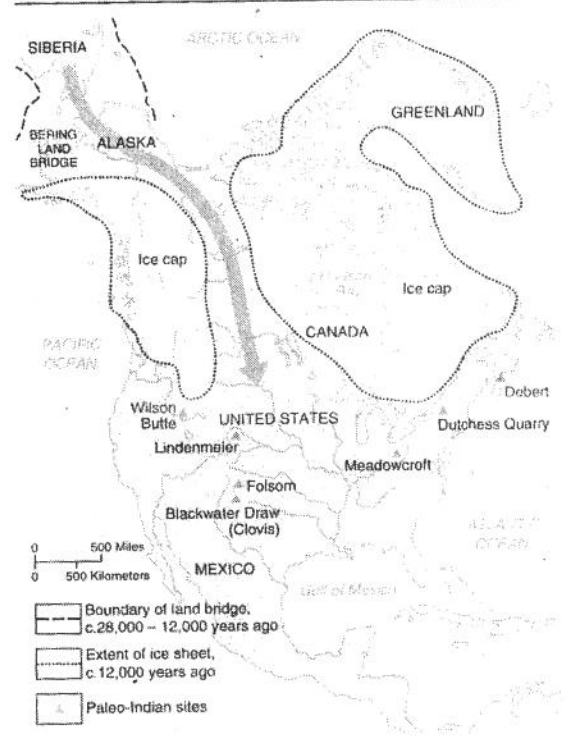
THE FIRST AMERICANS

Like the slow but relentless shaping of the planet itself, the origins of the human species extend back to the mists of prehistoric time. More than 5 million years ago, direct human ancestors evolved in the temperate grasslands of Africa. Between three hundred thousand and one hundred thousand years ago, humans began migrating through much of the Old World. During the last glaciation, which geologists term Wisconsin, hunting bands pursuing large game animals moved from Central Asia into Siberia. Between forty thousand and fifteen thousand years ago, some of these bands began crossing the broad land bridge then connecting Siberia to Alaska. In so doing, they became the first Americans.

Most Native Americans are descended from these earliest migrants. A few, however, trace their lineage to later arrivals. About nine thousand years ago, Athapaskan-speaking peoples crossed the land bridge and spread over much of northern and western Canada and southern and central Alaska. Some of them later migrated southward to form the Apaches and Navajos in the Southwest, as well as smaller groups elsewhere. Eskimos and Aleuts began crossing the Bering Sea—which had submerged the land bridge—from Siberia between five thousand and four thousand years ago, and the Hawaiian Islands remained uninhabited until after A.D. 300.

The Peopling of North America

About 10,000 B.C. the Ice Age was nearing its end. Melting glaciers had opened up an ice-free corridor leading from Alaska to the northern Plains. Bands of hunters moved through this corridor, and others probably trav-



The First Americans

The arrow shows the "ice corridor" through which most ancestors of Native Americans passed before dispersing throughout the Western Hemisphere.

SOURCE: Dean R. Snow, *The Archaeology of North America* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989).

eled south along the Pacific coast by boat. As they emerged from the glacier-covered north, they discovered a hunter's paradise. Giant mammoths, mastodons, horses, camels, bison, caribou, and moose, as well as smaller species, roamed the continent innocent of the ways of human predators. So bountiful and accommodating was this new environment that the Paleo-Indians, as archaeologists call these hunters, fanned out and proliferated with astonishing speed. By 9000 B.C. descendants of the first Americans had dispersed throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Most Paleo-Indians dwelled in bands of about fifteen to fifty people. The men hunted; the women prepared the food and cared for the children. Members of a band lived together during the spring and summer and split into smaller groups of one or two families for the fall and winter. Although they moved constantly, they generally remained within informally defined

process of ecological change associated with the end of the Ice Age.

STOP



A Folsom Point

The Folsom point is the most common of the Paleo-Indian fluted spear points. This point is shown just as it was found, imbedded between two ribs of the extinct *Bison taylori*.

boundaries. An exception occurred when they traveled to favored quarries to obtain jasper or flint for making tools and spear points. At such sites they encountered other bands, with whom they traded, intermarried, and participated in religious ceremonies.

Even before leaving Alaska the Paleo-Indians had developed distinctly American ways. Their most characteristic innovation was their "fluted" points, so-called for their shape, which permitted fitting them on spears. Although fluted points have been found throughout the Western Hemisphere, none has been uncovered in Siberia. Around 9000 B.C. many of the big-game species such as the mammoths and mastodons became extinct. The effectiveness of the Paleo-Indian hunters may have contributed to this demise, but the animals were also doomed by the warming climate, which brought ecological changes that undermined the food chain on which they depended. In other words, the replacement of the big-game mammals by humans marked part of a larger

Archaic Societies

The warming of the earth's atmosphere continued until about 4000 B.C., with far-reaching effects on the North American continent. Sea levels rose, flooding shallow offshore areas, and glacial runoff in the interior filled the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River basin, and other waterways. As the glaciers receded northward, so did the arctic and subarctic environments that had previously extended far into what are now the "lower 48" states of the United States. Treeless plains and evergreen forests gave way to deciduous forests in the East, grassland prairies on the Plains, and desert in much of the West. An immense range of flora and fauna, both on land and in the waters, came to characterize the American landscape. We are familiar with many of these same plants and animals today.

Just as the Paleo-Indians had flourished in settings south of the glaciers, so their descendants now prospered in the abundance and diversity of their new environments. Instead of focusing most of their food gathering energy on big game, these Archaic peoples, as archaeologists term native North Americans from c. 8000 B.C. to 1500 B.C., lived off wide varieties of smaller mammals, fish, and wild plants. As they used the resources of their environments more efficiently, their communities required less land area and could

Archaic Hunting Aid

This duck decoy was made 2,000 to 3,000 years ago by a hunter living at Lovelock Cave in the Humboldt Basin of west-central Nevada.

