

People Reach the Americas



Modern humans travelled along the coast of Asia during the **Ice Age**. They did not go into the interior until later because of the **ice** in places like the Himalaya mountains. The polar **ice** cap reached as far south as China, which also limited people's ability to travel inland. However, people managed to travel along the coasts and heading north they encountered “Beringia”, the land bridge between Asia and North America. Today this area is mostly **sea** and is known as the Bering Strait, after Vitus Bering, the leader of a Russian expedition there in 1728. There is also a string of islands between Russia and Alaska, called the Aleutian Islands, which were visited by Bering's expedition.

There were large **ice** sheets covering the interior of the Americas during the **Last Ice Age**. **Ice** covered most of Canada, the Upper Midwest of the United States, the US state of New England and parts of the US states of Montana and Washington. There was also an **ice** sheet across the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, as well as the Andes. People probably travelled down the west coast initially.

One of the earliest sites in the Americas is at Monte Verde in Chile in the southern part of South America. Monte Verde is on the banks of the Chinchihuapi Creek, preserved in the bog next to the creek. The site had bones and meat of a mastodon (an **Ice Age** animal similar to a mammoth), the posts of 12 huts, some scraps of clothing, a human footprint (probably a child) and many **fireplaces**. The site was dated to about 15,000 years ago (some charcoal from the lowest levels was dated



Ice Age Mastodon reconstruction. Image by Sergiodlarosa.



at 33,000 years ago, but it is unsure whether there were people at the site then.



The site of Monte Verde on Chinchihuapa Creek. Image by Geología Valdivia.

It is argued that people must have reached Monte Verde by travelling along the coast, because the land route through Canada into North America was blocked by ice until 13,000 years ago.

Other early sites include Pikimachay Cave in Peru, which may be as early as 22,000 years, but is probably at least 12,000 years old. The Clovis site in New Mexico, United States of America (USA), is dated to about 13,000 years ago. The Clovis site is famous for a very distinct type of stone tool called the Clovis Point. The Clovis point was probably a spear point and is found at many early North American sites.



Clovis Point.

Pedra Furada in Brazil has very early dates on charcoal (32 to 60,000 years), but again it is uncertain if there were people there at that time. The level at the site with stone tools is dated to 12,000 years ago. The Topper site in South Carolina, USA, may be 16 to 20,000 years old. Meadowcroft Rockshelter in Pennsylvania, USA, may date to 14,000 years ago. Sites at Buttermilk Creek in Texas, USA, may date to 15,000 years ago. The Buttermilk Creek sites are dated by Optically Stimulated Luminescence, a newer and sometimes controversial technique of dating archaeological material.

Many of the dates of sites in the Americas are hotly debated by researchers. Further research will make the dating clearer.

