

The Mythical Corridor—Rapidly Shifting Perspectives

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While a heavily glaciated region like the Ice-Free Corridor will always present significant research challenges, much has changed in our understanding of the “Corridor” since 2013. Extensive earth science research has provided refined chronologies for deglaciation, proglacial lake formation and decanting, and large mammal habitability. Cordilleran Ice System-Laurentide Ice System separation was complete by ~13,800 cal yr BP (with rapid ice retreat to the Canadian Shield by ~13,000 cal yr BP); there was a human presence in the southern Corridor by 13,450 cal yr BP; and the entire Corridor was inhabited by large mammals no later than 13,200 cal yr BP. We discuss new understandings of fluted point, stemmed point, and ancillary technologies in the Corridor, the distribution and character of caches, and local versus distant tool stone use based on detailed provenience studies. This work is contextualized with recent genetic data for founding lineages, consideration of societal options for endogamy or exogamy in situations featuring extremely low human population densities, and the deeper human history potentially reflected in widespread Indigenous oral traditions. We conclude with ideas for systematic search strategies for discovering a broader range of early Corridor sites, including the possibility of a pre-LGM entry through the Corridor.