

Cooper's Ferry/Nipéhe: A Keystone Late Pleistocene Site in North America

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The Cooper's Ferry/Nipéhe site in western Idaho provides an exceptionally rich record of American Upper Paleolithic (AUP) lifeways spanning ~16,000–13,000 cal BP and offers one of the most comprehensive records of pre-Clovis occupation in North America. Its well-stratified deposits, cultural features, and radiocarbon-dated projectile points, including the oldest known examples in the Americas, make Cooper's Ferry/Nipéhe a key site for understanding the technological and behavioral adaptations of early North American peoples during the Late Pleistocene. The site also contains a diverse faunal assemblage showing that AUP peoples hunted a wide range of animals, from Late Pleistocene megafauna to smaller prey, highlighting both their adaptive flexibility and broad-based use of available resources. Together, the lithic technology, faunal evidence, and spatial patterning at Cooper's Ferry provide a vivid picture of early hunting lifeways. In this paper, we review the evidence for early hunting at Cooper's Ferry and show how the site's record firmly establishes a pre-Clovis archaeological presence in the Americas. In doing so, we underscore the significance of Cooper's Ferry/Nipéhe as a critical site for understanding the initial peopling of the Americas and the lifeways of its earliest inhabitants.