

Echoes of the First Americans: The Significance of Fell Points in the Peopling of the New World

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Isolated finds of Fell points were first reported in the 19th century in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina, and the Republic of Uruguay, within the southern cone of South America. However, their significance only began to be recognized in the 1930s, when Junius Bird discovered them in stratigraphic contexts associated with extinct fauna at Fell and Pali Aike caves near the Strait of Magellan, in southern Chile. These discoveries, which included the so-called "fishtail" points, provided crucial insights into the lifeways and movements of early American populations.

For nearly five decades, these artifacts remained enigmatic and were often overshadowed by the well-established prominence of PaleoAmerican projectile points from North America. Similar specimens found across distant locations in Central and South America further complicated questions about their origins and dispersal. Over the past four decades, extensive research has illuminated various aspects of the hunter-gatherer groups who manufactured and used these points. Advances in archaeology have enhanced our understanding of their chronology, continental distribution, and potential areas of origin and dispersal, significantly contributing to broader studies of Paleoamerican archaeology.

This presentation synthesizes findings from investigations conducted since the mid-1980s, addressing multiple topics related to these iconic projectile points. The research underscores how Fell points continue to open new avenues for understanding the early human groups in South America. As enduring echoes of the earliest signs of human settlement in the Americas, these artifacts remain central to unraveling the continent's ancient past.