

Archaeological Evidence from the Debra L. Friedkin and Manis Sites and the Initial Late Pleistocene Peopling of North America

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Genomic data from modern and prehistoric individuals provides an outline of the ancestry of the first Indigenous people to enter the Americas and a time estimate for their arrival south of the Laurentide and Cordilleran Ice Sheets (17,500-14,600 yr B.P.). Rigorous investigation of archaeological sites employing state-of-the art methods and the long-held criteria of the presence of unequivocal artifacts in a secure geological context that is accurately dated has led to the rejection of some evidence of the First Americans, the reevaluation of long-held beliefs about the First Americans, and the acceptance of a growing number of early sites. Clovis is accurately dated between 13,050 and 12,750 yr B.P. Sites already discussed in this session—Gault, Cooper’s Ferry, Page-Ladson, and Paisley Caves—provide unambiguous evidence of a human presence across North America by at least 16,000 to 14,000 yr B.P. To that list, I add the 15,500 yr B.P. Debra L. Friedkin site, Texas, and the 13,900 yr B.P. Manis site, Washington. Combined these sites show an unequivocal human presence in North America by 16,000 yr B.P. The evidence from these sites agrees with the genomic estimate that humans were south of the Ice Sheets covering Canada sometime between 17,500 and 14,600 yr B.P. While it is possible that people were in the Americas before this time, the archaeological evidence presented so far is weak and in conflict with the genomic data. The key to unravelling the story of the First Americans is dependent upon high-quality genetic data, archaeological evidence, geological context, and accurate and precise dating.