

The Bottleneck in the Andean/Pacific Corridor of Southwest South America Shaped the Late Pleistocene Occupation of North Central Chile

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The initial peopling of southwestern South America can be understood by recognizing the pivotal role of the Andes—both as a longitudinal corridor and as a barrier—in shaping human mobility, settlement, resource acquisition, and population dispersal during the Late Pleistocene. Extending across highly diverse climatic and ecological zones, this massif imposed multiple environmental challenges and contributes today to heterogeneous archaeological records that require careful evaluation of site contexts and formation processes. Within this broader framework, North Central Chile—the narrowest passage of the Andean/Pacific corridor—emerges as a critical geographic bottleneck that likely concentrated early human activity and preserved the diversity of cultural expressions. Recent advances in early archaeological data, including reliable archaeological records dating to around 13,000 cal BP in several localities, justify a comprehensive reassessment of both shared regional patterns and localized variability. Evidence from this region, encompassing faunal exploitation, residential activities, raw material acquisition, processing loci, and mortuary practices, underscores the complexity of early occupations and benefits from updated geoarchaeological and taphonomic approaches that better situate human dispersal within a time of landscape and environmental transformations.