

NEWSLETTER

Representing Nassau & Suffolk Counties

Pre-Clovis in the Americas

By Alison Stenger, PhD

Only centuries ago, people were considered heretics if they suggested that the earth was not flat. Less than one century ago, laughter or ridicule were typical responses to the proposal that catastrophic floods caused a series of scars on Northwest landscapes. So it is not wholly surprising that there are still people who resist the idea that the New World was populated by humans before the "Clovis culture" appeared.¹ Similarly, letting go of the notion that Clovis people were exclusively a population of big game hunters is equally difficult for some.

The facts tell three important stories. The Missoula floods, like major flooding events elsewhere, left dramatic and long lasting evidence of their passage.² The largest Clovis age sites have now demonstrated that they are often not big game subsistence sites.³ And, that sites older than Clovis have been firmly identified in both North and South America (*Figure 1*). The cultural and temporal marker that is Clovis no longer defines the first Americans.

While evidence of pre-Clovis Americans is solid, pre-Clovis cultures are still difficult to describe. What we do know is that these early people occupied many distinct environments. They employed differing subsistence patterns that reflect dissimilar life ways, and their technologies are often quantifiably different from Clovis. This is a lot to absorb, but the data are compelling.

Pre-Clovis Americans left proof of their presence in many different settings, from rock shelters to coastal plains. In utilizing areas from high elevation to sea level, these early people demonstrated diverse strategies for survival. One only has to look at sites such as Meadowcroft Rock Shelter, Paisley Cave, the Channel Islands, Mammoth Park, Monte Verde, and Oyster Cove to gain an understanding of how diversified these people and their sites actually were. Nearly every imaginable ecosystem was utilized. With this many sites and ecosystems represented, it seems that the earliest Americans were not the result of a single entry, nor a single cultural group.

This leads us to questions in which answers are only now emerging. What defines pre-Clovis other than age? Are there house types, features, or artifact types that are distinct from Clovis, or from more recent cultures? What other ancient cultural indicators or technologies exist that are unique to those very early people? And, conversely, do some artifact or house types continue into more recent

times? And, finally, who potentially were the first people to occupy the Americas?

There are definitely features within archaeological sites that appear to be unique to pre-Clovis populations. One example is a paper-thin circular stain that appears in house floors in Southern Oregon and South Carolina. We do not know what these features represent, but they are unique to early sites. Some cultural materials, or artifact types, are also representative of pre-Clovis people. Low shouldered, tapering lithic bifaces, including laurel leaf forms, are the most common examples (*Figure 2*). Many of these have distinctive manufacturing marks, or flake scar patterns. There are heavily worked stone and wooden tools, which like the circular stains, represent unknown purposes. The list goes on to include woven material of many types, and technologies. Did the production of these tools stop when the population who made use of them ceased to exist?



Figure 1. Location of some pre-Clovis sites, with the original Clovis site also shown. Paisley Cave and Mammoth Park in Oregon and On Your Knees Cave in Alaska are not shown here.

Interestingly, a style of artifact known as the Great Basin Stem Point seems to have persisted for a very long time. We do not yet know if this means that the people who made and used this artifact type survived longer than the people who produced the other early types, but the idea has potential merit. The dates for this artifact type have recently been pushed farther back in time, opening the discussion of whether the originator of this style of tool lived at the same time as the pre-Clovis people from some other areas.⁴



Figure 2. Low shouldered, tapering bifaces, including laurel leaf forms, are representative of pre-Clovis lithics.

The next issue, then, is to attempt to identify who the paleoamericans might have been. Where did they come from? Did their descendants continue forward in time, or did their genetic lineage cease to exist, much like the Iceman?⁵ Archaeological sites and artifacts dating twice as old as Clovis are now known on both American continents. Human remains, however, have only been documented for near-Clovis age individuals. Nonetheless, the analysis of the skeletal remains of these early humans suggest that they, too, are from lineages that ceased long ago. The remains of individuals such as Kennewick Man, Wizard's Beach, and Stick Man are morphologically distinct from modern groups.⁶ When other material, such as naturally shed human hair, are studied, the results are the same.⁷ Some physical anthropologists explain this by stating that a separation between ancient and existing populations has so far been maintained.

Another area from which information is gathered is, of course, DNA. However, there are often conflicting results when mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) study results are compared to cranial and other analyses. The cause for this may be in the type of DNA studied. A recent publication of some landmark research has demonstrated significant differences between mtDNA and nuclear DNA findings.⁸ Thus, the data from mtDNA studies may be misleading in some cases, while nuclear studies may support cranial findings.

There is still the issue of arrival, of how early people got to the Americas, and by what route(s). The oldest sites are currently documented in South America, including the southern portion. The next oldest sites are on the East Coast of North America. Thus, an early, northern pedestrian entry seems highly unlikely, especially when some major geologic factors are considered. If the possibility of boat transit is acknowledged, however, then many routes are possible. With the peopling of Australia over 40,000 years ago, it is clear that maritime people were able to successfully traverse large distances. Thus, the arrival by early people into the Americas may well have been by southern routes, or by other maritime avenues.

It is an exciting time to be involved in archaeology, and especially in studies of the peopling of the Americas. The sites, the cultural material, and other physical remains substantiate the claim that people were here prior to Clovis. With that being established, we can now look toward identifying the origins of the very early travelers, and then learning more about the way in which they got to the Americas.

Oregon is lucky to have a number of field archaeologists and researchers interested in pre-Clovis sites and materials. Most are well known to OAS, and have included our members in some of their work. Just a few of these people are: Scott Thomas (Burns area), Dennis Jenkins (Southern Oregon), Tom Connolly (monitoring all of Oregon), Pat O'Grady (mostly southern and S.E. Oregon), Jon Erlandson (all of the West Coast), and Alison Stenger (Willamette and Yamhill Valley). Their work can be followed through internet searches, and often through articles in Screenings. But, don't forget the exciting work coming out of the East coast, where sites over 23,000 years old are being documented. The easiest link to information on these is through the Smithsonian, or by searching for publications by Dennis Stanford. And, of course, don't forget the Archaeology Channel, with Rick Pettigrew as its guardian.

¹ Dates for Clovis sites range from 11,500-10,900 years before present (yBP), using uncorrected radiocarbon dating. See Waters, Michael R. and Thomas Stafford, "Redefining the Age of Clovis: Implications for the Peopling of the Americas", *Science*, 23 February 2007:1122-1126.

² Books such as *Cataclysms on the Columbia* are excellent guides to help people identify flood related features. While these major floods washed away sites in some areas, other sites were protected by silts from these events.

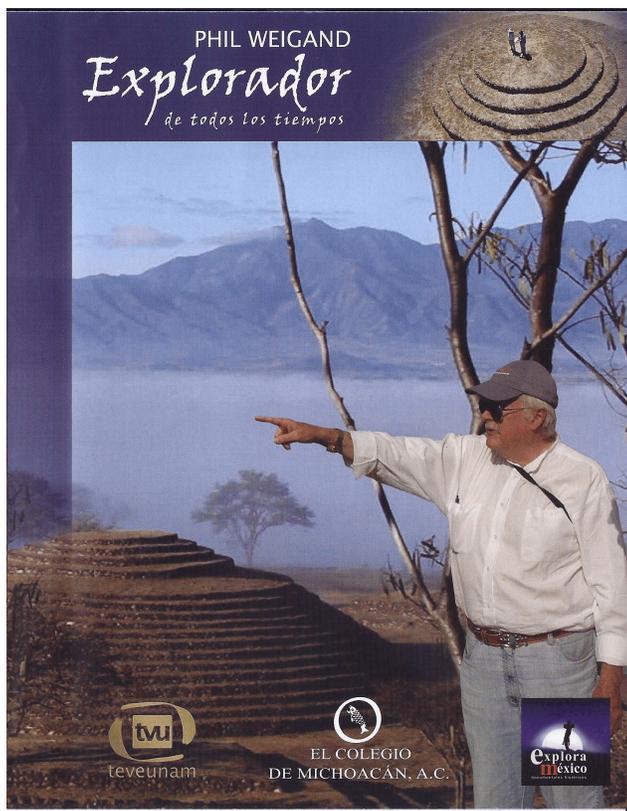
³ The Gault site is just one example of a Clovis age site having extensive use over time, with megafauna significantly underrepresented. Early people there generally lived off of small terrestrial game, fish, and birds, plus vegetable materials.

⁴ There is still much debate among researchers as to the actual time

span represented by this artifact style.

- ⁵ In sequencing mtDNA from Otzi, it was determined that his lineage "...has since gone extinct". *Archaeology*, July/August 2012:16.
- ⁶ *Patterns of Death and the Peopling of the Americas*, AMEC and Fresno State University, Chapter 3, via email from author, James Chatters, 24 January 2012.
- ⁷ Report from Lori Baker, on the analysis of the DNA from the first Woodburn hair. Restated in the report, *Mammoth Park Paleo Project 2011 Woodburn High School*.
- ⁸ Nuclear Genomic Sequences Reveal that Polar Bears Are an Old and Distinct Bear Lineage. Hailer et al, *Science*, 20 April 2012:344-347.

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By John Pinto

June 15, 2012 marked the first public screening of "Phil Weigand, an Explorer for All Times" at Hospicio Cabanas in Guadalajara, Mexico. The historical documentary was created by the team of Pascual Aldana, Daniel Aldana and Alberto Fuentes of Explora Mexico under the auspices of El Colegio de Michoacan and TV UNAM.

The film focuses on the life and discoveries of the late archaeologist Phil Weigand (1937-2011) who, together with his wife Acelia Garcia, spent more than forty years unraveling some of the mysteries of a great and hitherto unknown civilization which flourished in western Mexico 2000 years ago. A fascinating 61 minute video on the life and work of the late Phil Weigand is now available as a DVD, both in Spanish and in English.

I went to the premier showing of the film assuming I already knew quite a bit about the subject, having counted Phil as a friend for many years and having had a great interest in the ruins of Teuchitlan ever since I climbed to the top of the Guachimontones back in 1986, when they were covered with nettles and thorns and surrounded by cornfields.

Well, I was quite wrong. In the very spirit of the great archaeologist himself, the film makers have unearthed fascinating details about the man and his work which kept me and the rest of the audience on the edge of our seats throughout the 61-minute video and resulted in a great cheer..

The opening lines of the film are dramatic: "Even though by the 20th century the geography of our planet was well known, there were still intrepid explorers and men of science who traveled through distant, rugged lands to contribute research that has deepened our understanding of mankind and complex societies. One of these grand researchers was Phil Weigand..."

I then learned that Weigand's interest in archaeology dates back to his high school years when he signed up as a "gofor" at an archaeological excavation in his own state. "It was my own servicio social," he says, "six weeks among the mosquitoes and poison ivy in southern Indiana."

To my surprise I then learned that Phil Weigand, though an outstanding student, never completed high school. "I almost graduated, but I got bored and set out for adventure." Off he went to Mexico, first to Zacatecas and then to Jalisco, where he lived in the town of Chapala. It was, in fact, in Chapala that he was introduced to Acelia Garcia, leading to their marriage in 1958.

Even more fascinating for me was a detailed description of the now famous discovery which led Weigand to the Guachimontones. This took place in 1962 at the hot spring of El Rincon where the Teuchitlan River is born. Say Acelia Weigand in the movie: "The kids were diving near a huge fig tree in a small, natural pool when I saw these shiny pieces of glass under the water. I told them to be careful because there were broken bottles or something down there and they could get cut. However, in those days there were no restaurants or bars around there. So the kids started pulling these shiny things out and they said, "No, auntie, they're not bottles, they're knives!" Well, all of them were long, sharp, prismatic blades of obsidian, and I brought thirteen of them back to our house in Etzatlan. Now, at that time, Felipe was working in Durango, but when he came back, I showed him these blades, but couldn't get him to pay any attention to them for seven years. Seven years it took for me to lead him up to the obsidian workshop from which those blades had washed down to the swimming hole!" And all the rest is history, as they say.

There are many other revelations in the film, including Weigand's exploration of kilometers of prehistoric mines, the discovery of a Persian qanat at least eight kilometers long in Zapopan and the theme of his very last, not yet published book – on Nazi anti-Semitism, of all things.

Only upon reaching home with my own copy of the DVD did I discover that it is both in Spanish and in English, thanks to an excellent translation by Paul C. Kersey of the Colegio de Michoacan. This documentary, as well as an equally outstanding and bilingual DVD on Teuchitlan by the same team, are available from El Colegio Michoacan, info: publica@colmich.edu.mx

Another portion of the film details Phil's support of archaeological research on Long Island as chair of the Anthropology Department., Stony Brook U. He developed the Long Island Archaeology Project within the department, which produced scores of archaeological reports of endangered sites. He was also a founder of the Suffolk County Archaeological Assn. A number of his students have contributed to the archaeology of Long Island, such as Dr. Gaynell Stone, Dr. Linda Barber, Dr. Geraldine Edwards, on L.I., and Dr. Mike Conquino and Dr. Sherene Baugher in up-state New York., etc. Phil's work with Dr.

Garman Harbottle of Brookhaven National Laboratory on the neutron activation analysis of turquoise is world famous, published in *Scientific American*..

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Long Island Historian Vincent Seyfried died April 14 at age 93. His obituary in Newsday focused on his record as the pre-eminent chronicler of the Long Island Railroad. But his work was much more than that.

He transcribed all the early newspapers of Queens, gleaning a wealth of information into its history – one fact of which he proved that it was not a mastodon skeleton found in Baisley Park Pond, as published in a local paper. He wrote and published pictorial histories of most of the neighborhoods of Queens. He collected photographs of the many Dutch architecture houses in Queens at the end of WW II, and marked their locations on a Queens map – very useful for scholars of architecture, material culture, and Dutch history, especially since most of the houses were destroyed in the building boom after the war. Vincent’s papers were donated to Special Collections, Stony Brook University, where they will be serving scholars into the future..

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