CLOVIS
The First Americans?
Does The Evident Mastery Of All Knapping Resources Not Imply An Earlier Cultural Presence Than Clovis?

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Over 13,000 years ago ... those ancient peoples in North America at the end of the Ice Age were already using almost every source of good knapping stone which we know about today.

How could the “Clovis” culture possibly be the first people on this continent?

Traveling, hunting and exploring all of this vast land on foot ... discovering and making extensive use of virtually every known stone resource in every corner of the continent ... all in a period of just 300 or 400 years?

How was it possible for a small, pioneering population to discover everything, everywhere, with no local inhabitants to guide their travels and discoveries, even as they spread their unique flint knapping technology from coast to coast in as few as 10 or 15 generations?

It just does not make practical sense to claim that no one else was here exploring before the “Clovis” culture arrived. That any single pioneering group almost immediately would be able to and actually would discover all of the existing lithic resources stretches credulity to the breaking point.

That’s the heart and core of my theory and I’m sticking to it.

Here’s a tantalizing hint: “Haskett” points, of which this is the best known example, found in eastern Oregon, have been proven to be older than Clovis points found in the region. This 8” dacite Haskett was found by Ernie Cowles in the 1930’s on the “OO” ranch. Photograph by Randall McNeice.

Here’s another tantalizing hint: an un-classified Paleo Indian blade type, of which this is the finest example, is made in a different style from the Haskett points. With its extraordinary pressure flaking finish and re-sharpening work, it is quite different from western style Clovis points found in the region. Most western style Clovis points are made with percussion and trimmed and sharpened with a relatively small amount of pressure flaking. This 7-1/2” obsidian blade was found by Ernie Cowles in the 1930’s on the “OO” ranch. Photograph by Randall McNeice.

“Alder Complex” points also date to the Paleo Indian period in the Rocky Mountains and west to the Great Basin and Northwest. This example was found in eastern Oregon in the early 1950’s by Vernon Toolan, in the Catlow Valley.

“Looking for ...” stone “... in all the right places ...”

Exploring the southern view from high up on Glass Buttes in eastern Oregon’s Lake County in 2005 A.D. Right: Large Clovis knives from a cache (agate) and a surface find (obsidian) near Wenatchee, Washington. Photographs by the author of casts (from www.LithicCastingLab.com).
I went to the desert on a horse with no name ...

Here’s another way to think about the effectiveness of the ancient geologic survey of North America that is evidenced by the wide variety of stone used by the “Clovis” culture: It has taken the U.S. Geological Survey 200 years to survey, discover, catalog and inform us of the various rock and mineral resources available across the continent.

With modern transportation some few of us today are actually able to travel to and see and sometimes use the same resources that the “Clovis” culture’s intrepid explorers discovered, on foot, over 13,000 years ago, in just a few generations.

Science tells us that their time period lasted only 300 to 500 years or so.

It boggles the mind to consider that they found almost every resource in all the remote corners of this land by themselves, while pursuing big and small game to feed their family groups ... and that there was supposedly no one else already here, discovering and spreading knowledge about the land’s resources as these things were found.

There is yet much to be learned about the earliest inhabitants of this continent, who they were, where they came from and when they got here ... everywhere.

Obsidian Clovis spear point from eastern Oregon, found in the 1930’s between Fort Rock Cave and the town of Fort Rock, Oregon. Photo by Randall McNeice.

The author, F. Scott Crawford, examines a large chunk of Bullseye Jasper from near the old mining town of Goldfield, in Esmeralda County, western Nevada, in May, 2009 A.D.

“Elko Corner Notched” Knifetip, Archaic Period, found by Clifford Carney in White Pine County, northern Nevada, in 2000 A.D.

On this month’s cover:
Several “Clovis” points of different sizes and styles, from all regions of North America. Photo by the author, of casts which were made from the original artifacts by the Lithic Casting Lab.
"the eyes of Texas are upon you, all the live long day ..."

Clovis points found in Williamson and Bell Counties in central Texas. These were recovered during archaeological excavations by the University of Texas at Austin, at the Gault Site in the 1990’s.

Broken nodules of Edwards Plateau flint are visible in dug out cracks in the limestone wall of a creek valley at the Gault Site north of Austin in Williamson County, Texas. Flint has been quarried at this site by every culture which has lived in Texas, up to and even after the time of the first Spanish settlements.

A spall of Edwards Plateau flint lies exposed to the elements at the Gault Site north of Austin in Williamson County, Texas. Gault was continuously occupied, ever since the time that a major Clovis camp and tool making site was based here for several centuries.
“Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam ...”

This is a cast (by Lithic Casting Lab) of the largest Clovis knife or lance point in the “Fenn Cache” ... a group of 56 Clovis points, preforms and other tools found by Forrest Fenn somewhere in the region where Utah, Wyoming and Idaho meet. Photos by the author.

This blade is made from agate from Utah. Though not entirely finished, it is a beautiful example of the knapper’s percussion work, discipline and craftsmanship. It measures 8-1/4” long by 2-1/8” wide.

Other implements in the Fenn Cache were made from agate from central Utah, obsidian from southeastern Idaho, smoky quartz crystal, various colors of Green River Formation cherts from southwestern Wyoming and red jasper from northern Wyoming.

According to George Frison and Bruce Bradley, in their book “THE FENN CACHE CLOVIS WEAPONS AND TOOLS”, “The material is so good that prehistoric peoples may have gone to some effort to get it... One complication is that it occurs at such a high altitude that, for much of the year, it is inaccessible because of snow. That may have been even more of a problem at the end of the Ice Age, when Clovis people were in the area, because it is likely that some years it wasn’t possible to get to it at all.”

“If ... mostly hunting large game animals, such as bison and mammoths, what were they doing high in the snow-covered Big Horn Mountains? How did they find all of the rare, out-of-the-way stone sources?”

A herd of American bison or buffalo, only partially “fenced in” along the highway south of Grand Teton National Park in northwestern Wyoming’s Rocky Mountains. Photographed by the author’s stepdaughter, Li Ting Kong, in May 2009.

This cast (by Lithic Casting Lab) shows what many archaeologists and flint knappers consider to be the finest known example of the classic “outrê passe” or overshot, edge to edge percussion knapping technique which is a unique signature of this Paleo Indian cultural group. This Clovis knife or lance point was also part of the “Fenn Cache”.

This blade is knapped from red Jasper from the Bighorn Mountains in northern Wyoming. The consistent, diagonal flake scars are a beautiful and outstanding example of a particular knapper’s highly skilled percussion work. It measures 6” long by 1-13/16” wide. According to George Frison and Bruce Brad-
Knife River Flint quarries shape this North Dakota farm.

These pieces of Knife River Flint show the typical “inclusions” (white colored bits of fossilized plant remains) which we see in semi-transparent KRF material. The silicified lignite also retains the layered form of the original coal material, so it tends to break in flat pieces along those layers. You may be able to see the lines along those layers in the side of the top chunk.

The background photograph shows a farmer’s field in North Dakota which is covered by ancient dugout pits where native craftsmen quarried Knife River Flint from buried deposits of silicified lignite coal. At some ancient time these coal beds were covered by volcanic ash, from which, in eons of time, the silica in the ash replaced the lignite in the layers beneath the volcanic ash.

Knife River Flint was prized for its excellent characteristics: sharp tools and relatively easy to work with, requiring no heat treatment, etc. It was traded far and wide in the Great Plains and beyond. Photographed for ACOTW by David McDonald.

This cast shows a late-stage preform of a Folsom point which was cut in half by the second flute removal, which dove through the middle of the blade rather than continuing for the intended length of the flute. The removal of the fluting blades took place by striking a small platform prepared at the base end of the planned projectile point, either by percussion or indirect percussion. The remnants of the prepared platform remain visible. The two pieces were found four years apart at the shoreline of Sakakewa Lake in Montrail County, North Dakota, just west of New Town.

It is made from Knife River Flint, which is silicified lignite. Shown here at actual size, with the two pieces joined together when the cast was produced by Lithic Casting Lab.

This “Scot’sbluff” spear point is made from Knife River Flint. It shows the typical inclusions from the original lignite. Very nicely made, and appears glossy with age patina. Dates to late Paleo/early Archaic period. Tumbled over much of the United States. 3-1/2” long.

This fluted Knife River Flint spear point shows the typical inclusions (white colored bits of fossilized plant material remaining from the original lignite) which we see in the semi-transparent KRF material. Very nicely made, and appears glossy with age patina. Ex C. Shewey.
Drifting across the High Plains of Nebraska in winter.

Here are two different Clovis points from northern Nebraska, found by the Grandfather of a long-time reader of ACOTW. She remembers helping him look for artifacts along the sand bars of the Loup River when she was a child. These are regional agate. Shown actual size.

Several different Paleo Indian period projectile points. The large, stemmed spear point is an agate “Alberta”, a Paleo era predecessor to the “Scottsbluff” style points from the late Paleoearly Archaic period. These were also found by Stephanie Roberts’ Grandfather many years ago in northern Nebraska. These are made of various regional agates and cherts, shown here actual size.

In the overall scheme of Paleo Indian points, the “Alberta” point is a predecessor to the Scottsbluff, Eden, Cody, and other square basal points with slight to strong shoulders. The Alberta point was wider and more massive than the succeeding styles. This point is about 3-1/2” long by 1-1/2” wide.
“... that old man river ... he just keeps rollin’ along ...”

Both sides of a Chert Clovis from Linn County, Iowa, with a Perino Certificate of Authenticity.

Two views of a cast of an “Enterline” style Clovis point from Pike County, Illinois. This refers to the dual guide flakes seen in the top photo. These were made in preparation for the final flute removal. In this case, no performance. Burlington chert, measures 4-1/16” long.

A Clovis point from Bureau County, Illinois. This one was found in a mound built by an Archaic culture ... which means that it was found by someone from that time period and buried again ... only to be discovered once more in modern times.

A Chert Clovis from Butler County in Missouri, known as a “St. Louis” style point, with a Ben Stermer COA.

A Clovis point from Coshocton County, Ohio.

A Plum Creek Chert Clovis from Pickaway County, Ohio.

A Chert “Quad” from Breckinridge County, Kentucky, with a Bill Jackson Certificate of Authenticity.

A Clovis point from Bureau County, Illinois. This one was found in a mound built by an Archaic culture ... which means that it was found by someone from that time period and buried again ... only to be discovered once more in modern times.

All of these Paleo Indian period projectile points are from the central region of the U.S., along or near the confluence of the Ohio River and the Mississippi River. The background image shows the corners of Missouri, Kentucky and Illinois in the immediate vicinity of this river junction. The region was rich in resources and had a long-time concentration of Paleo Indian inhabitants. The inset photos, except for the “Enterline” style Clovis cast, are from Bruce Pailler.
“Way up north ... north to Alaska, the rush is on ... ”

An Arctic Paleo variety known as "Choris", found in Cape Krusenstern, north of Kotzebue, Alaska. Blue green chert with red jasper color and some dendritic patterns. Photo by William Sidmore.

An Arctic Paleo "Clovis", a surface find on a high bluff overlooking the valley of the American River, on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska. Blue green chert, 3-1/4" long. Photo by William Sidmore.

An Alaskan Arctic shoreline scene along the Seward Peninsula, with piles of drift wood and whale vertebrae. Photo by William Sidmore.
“Way down upon the S’wanee River, far, far away ...”

A base fluted Chert "Clovis" point from Florida, with slight damage to one auricle (ear) at the base.

An agate or perhaps agatized, fossil coral "Suwanee" style spear point from Florida.

Actually, this alligator was photographed by the author along the upper reaches of the St. Johns River between Orlando and Cape Canaveral in Florida, in May 2011.

All of the inset photographs of Florida "Clovis" and "Suwanee" style Paleo Indian spear points are from the Paleo Indian Data Base, University of Kentucky. http://pidba.utk.edu

A very colorful fluted Chert "Clovis" point from Florida.

An agate or flint "Suwanee" style spear point from Florida. The "Suwanee" style has a noticeable "fish tail" form, with the base narrowed, and flaring ears, with basal thinning flakes but usually it is not "fluted".

A "Suwanee" style spear point from Florida, perhaps made from a colorful piece of agatized fossil coral.

A base fluted Chert or Jasper "Clovis" point from Florida.

A base fluted Chert "Clovis" point from Florida, with slight damage to one auricle (ear) at the base.
After the storms of 2011 stirred up the Chesapeake Bay ...

LeCroy dart point from Virginia/North Carolina area on the eastern seaboard (Early Archaic -- 9000 - 5000 B.P.). Quartz crystal. Shown here actual size.

Ohio Lanceolate (Transitional Paleo/Early Archaic -- 10,500 - 8000 B.P.) Rhyolite. Found by Mike Lundmark along the Potomac River in 2010.

Ohio Lanceolate (Transitional Paleo/Early Archaic -- 10,500 - 8000 B.P.) Milky Quartz. Found by Mike Lundmark along the Potomac River in 2010.

Quartz Savannah River point (Late Archaic Period) half buried in an assembly of oyster shells and sand polished quartz chunks. The quartz pieces were an excellent resource around the Chesapeake Bay and on the Potomac River for generation after generation of native peoples. Inset, actual size. Found by Mike Lundmark in August 2011.

LeCroy dart point from Virginia/North Carolina area on the eastern seaboard (Early Archaic -- 9000 - 5000 B.P.). Quartz crystal. Shown here actual size.

Above: A selection of Clovis points from North Carolina. Right: Quartz crystal Clovis points from North Carolina; shown actual size.
"from sea to shining sea ... " with every knapping stone.
“Fluted Points 13,000 B.P.”

“This map encompasses all Clovis and Clovis variants, plus all untyped fluted forms that have not yet been unequivocally assigned to a later type like Folsom, Barnes, Cumberland, etc., in the database.” — Paleo Indian Data Base, University of Kentucky. http://pidba.utk.edu

If there was this wide distribution of the Clovis technology across North America in 13,000 B.P., what did the distribution look like in 15,000 B.P.? What people were here then, who would eventually adopt and spread the apparently successful fluting style projectile point manufacturing process we see so widely in use all across the continent. Pages 22-23 show the wide variety of stone in use... representing almost every lithic resource ever used over the last 13,000 years in North America.

When we consider the distribution of known fluted points in the Clovis tradition, not those of later date such as Folsom, Barnes, Cumberland, Redstone and others fluted with newer, indirect percussion methods, it certainly appears that an extensive and wide ranging population existed at that point in time.

And it definitely looks as if the major population was established in the eastern portion of the continent, from the Mississippi valley east.

The West looks explored and populated in regions where resources were available, water was reliable and game was plentiful.

The so-called “Ice Free Corridor” looks like a zone of exploration and pioneering extension which pushed north as the glaciers retreated.

If anything, this snapshot of Clovis distribution at 13,000 B.P. looks like an expansion from East to West, with resources either widely discovered during the explorations or perhaps pointed out by already knowledgeable indigenous or predecessor populations.