Who Were the First Americans?

By Michael D. Lemonick and Andrew Dorfman

Time, March 13, 2006

Jim Chatters, a **forensic anthropologist**, had been called in by the **coroner** of Benton County, Washington, to **consult** on some bones found by two college students on the banks of the Columbia River, near the town of Kennewick.

The bones were obviously old, and when the coroner asked for an opinion, Chatters’ **off-the-cuff** guess was that they probably belonged to a settler from the late 1800s.

Then a **CT scan** revealed a stone spear point **embedded** in the skeleton’s **pelvis**, so Chatters sent a bit of finger bone off to the University of California at Riverside for **radio carbon-dating**. When the results came back, it was clear that his estimate was dramatically off the mark. The bones weren’t 100 or even 1,000 years old. They belonged to a man who had walked the banks of the Columbia more than 9,000 years ago.

In short, the remains that came to be known as Kennewick Man were almost twice as old as the celebrated Iceman discovered in 1991 in an Alpine **glacier**, and among the oldest and most complete skeletons ever found in the Americas. Scientists have found only about 50 skeletons of such **antiq­uity**, most of them **fragmentary**. Any new find can thus add **crucial** insight into the ongoing mystery of who first **colonized** the New World—the last corner of the globe to be populated by humans. Kennewick Man could cast some much-needed light on the **murky** questions of when that **epochal** migration took place, where the first Americans originally came from and how they got here.



The existence of Kennewick Man leads to the question: Who really discovered America? The conventional answer to that question dates to the early 1930s, when stone **projectile** points that were nearly identical began to turn up at sites across the American Southwest. They suggested a single cultural tradition that was **christened** Clovis, after an 11,000-year-old-plus site near Clovis, New Mexcio. And because no older sites were known to exist in the Americas, scientists **assumed** that the Clovis people were the first to arrive.

They came, according to the **theory**, no more than 12,000 years B.P. (before the present), walking across the *dry land that connected modern Russia and Alaska* at the end of the last ice age, when sea level was hundreds of feet lower than it is today.



 However in 1997, a **blue-ribbon** panel of researchers took a hard look at evidence presented by Tom Dillehay, then at the University of Kentucky, from a site he had been **excavating** in *Monte Verde, Chile*.

 After years of **skepticism**, the panel finally **affirmed** his claim that the site proved humans had lived there 12,500 years ago. If people were living in southern Chile 12,500 years ago, they must have crossed over from Asia considerably earlier, and that means they couldn’t have used the ice-free inland **corridor**; it didn’t yet exist. Instead, many scientists now believe, the earliest Americans traveled down the Pacific coast—possibly even using boats. Even if the earliest Americans traveled down the coast, that doesn’t mean they couldn’t have come through the **interior** as well.



**Genetics** points to an original homeland for the first Americans. “Skeletal remains are very rare, but the genetic evidence suggests they came from the Lake Baikal region” of Russia, says **anthropologist** Ted Goebel of the University of Nevada at Reno, who has worked **extensively** in that part of south­ern Siberia. Goebel **speculates** that there were two northward migratory pulses, the first between 28,000 and 20,000 years ago and a second, some­ time after 17,000 years ago. “Either one could have led to the peopling of the Americas,” he says.

 Kennewick Man has already added **immeasurably** to anthropologists’ store of knowledge, and the next round of study is already under way. If scientists treat those bones with respect, the mystery of how and when the New World was populated may finally be laid to rest.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Scientist who studies human remains for evidence of a crime |
|  | Doctor who examines dead bodies |
|  | Offer advice |
|  | Figurative language meaning “without preparation” |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Medical test similar to an X-Ray |
|  | Stuck in |
|  | Hip bone |
|  | Method for determining the age of an artifact |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | A large body of ice |
|  | Oldness |
|  | Broken into pieces |
|  | Very important |
|  | Settled |
|  | Unclear |
|  | Important period of history |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | An object that is shot or launched |
|  | Named or given a name |
|  | Accepted as true |
|  | Accepted belief |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Figurative language meaning “prize winning’ or “expert’ |
|  | Digging up or uncovering |
|  | Doubt |
|  | Proved to be true or confirmed |
|  | Passageway |
|  | Inner or inland |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Field of science that studies traits passed down from generation to another |
|  | Scientist who studies the development of humans |
|  | To a great extent or very much |
|  | Thinks or hypothesizes |
|  | Without measure or beyond measure |

Answer the following questions based on the First Americans article:

1. Kennewick is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in Benton County, Washington.

2. A 9,000 year old skeleton came to be known as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Scientists estimated that the skeleton is from a man who was about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ tall.

4. The discovery of Kennewick Man made some scientists wonder if the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ people were really the

First Americans.

5. An archaeological site in Chile called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ also suggests that people came to the

Americas much \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ than was previously thought.

6. To solve the mystery of the first Americans, scientists hope to find more \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

7. What is the main idea of this article?

a. the first Americans most likely came from the Lake Baikal region of Russia

b. Monte Verde in Chile is the oldest human settlement in the Americas

c. new discoveries are causing scientists to reconsider their theories about the first Americans

8. What can you infer from the fact that scientists have found very few skeletons as old as Kennewick Man?

.

9. What examples can you find in this article that suggest that the first Americans came from Russia?

10. Select the most important discovery;

a. Kennewick Man b. Monte Verde c. Clovis d. Lake Baikal

Explain your choice with at least two reasons.