

Audio 2: The Story Begins Here

Becoming Texas Audio Guides

Dhruv H.: It's hard to believe that this stone point was made at least 16,000 years ago by humans! But how did the humans get to the Americas? For more than half a century, the theory was: Stone Age hunters walked across a land bridge between eastern Siberia and western Alaska and made their way down an ice-free inland corridor into North America.

But a new theory has emerged called the Kelp Highway. Archaeologist Jon Erlandson of Oregon State University theorized that as the massive ice sheets covering western North America retreated, the first humans arrived on the continent not only by foot but by boat, traveling down the Pacific shore and subsisting on abundant coastal resources. Nowadays, due to climate change and rising waters, the Kelp Highway is almost gone.

Today, our knowledge of how people came here is expanding, and it is through the study of Native Americans' artifacts including stone points and arrowheads. Arrowheads tell us a lot about early Texas and North American history. For example, arrowheads have sharp edges when they are new, and they have jagged edges when they're old. Believe it or not, those arrowheads were the tips and edges of the Native Americans' arrows, spears, and knives. More than 165,000 artifacts have been found in Texas, and some are more than 14,000 years old. Discoveries of archeological sites show that humans have been in the Americas for more than 15,000 years.

Macy M.: Native Americans had been around for some 14,000 years prior to the first Europeans arriving so they had established ways of farming, hunting, gathering, and trading for the food and goods they needed. Before Europeans arrived, Native Americans' trading included such things as tools like axes, scrapers, and knives, tanned animal hides, horns and other parts of animals that could be used for things like bow and arrows, and vegetables such as corn. Although all tribes were different and unique in their trading patterns.

There were trade routes and trade centers such as the Pecos Trade Center in New Mexico that Texas tribes such as the Apache, Comanche, and Jumano used. The Pecos tribe bartered crops, clothing, and pottery with Apaches and later with Spaniards and Comanches for bison products, flint, and even slaves.

There were trade systems. For example, the Wichita would trade to the Ute then the Ute would trade to the Cayuse, and onward. Many tribes use a relay process like this.

Traders would sometimes use sign language to communicate like humans do to this day! Trade languages were developed with words from different and specific groups. When trading with the European colonists, they traded for horses, copper, steel traps, blankets, knives and more.

Bullock Texas State History Museum

Proceed to the right side of the “European Ambitions” case to learn more.