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Description

A large bridge of land allows humans to travel from Siberia to North and South America about 12,000 to 17,000 years ago. The Bering Land Bridge was located in today's Bering Strait.

Keywords

Ice Age, Siberia, Woolly Mammoths, Bering Strait, Land Bridge, Settlers, America, Asia, South America, Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, Christ, North America, Prehistoric, Archaic Period, Caterina Pizzigoni, Columbia University, Natural Resources, Indigenous People, Family, Families, Community, Communities, Culture, Livelihood, Migration, Geography

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The Bering Land Bridge and the Earliest Americans

NARRATOR: During the last Ice Age, about 12,000 to 17,000 years ago, humans were forced to follow the food supply of large mammals for their fur, meat, and bones, crucial to survival. As the big mammals, most notably the wooly mammoths, grew increasingly scarce in what is now Siberia, humans ventured further east over a bridge of land that joined Siberia to Alaska. It was called the Bering Land Bridge. Now covered by the water of the Bering Strait, it was once exposed when sea levels, mostly taken up by massive glaciers, were 300 to 400 feet lower than they are today.

Prof. CATERINA PIZZIGONI (Columbia University): These people came down from Asia, across the Bering Strait, at least 14,000 years before Christ. And they started coming down. So, the first area to be populated was Canada, and the U.S. And then they made it all the way down to South America. This is sort of the real proof that we have of the presence of people in the continent.

NARRATOR: The first humans to enter the Americas migrated quickly across ice-free corridors of dry land. Some would skirt the Rocky Mountains on the west, others were drawn to the Great Plains of the Midwest. Other groups continued to move further south, through Mexico and deep into South America. Throughout North America, humans found a rich supply of mammoths, mastodons, and giant beavers. Other mammals indigenous to America such as horses, camels, cheetahs, and deer were abundant. Hunting new animals forced humans to develop new weapons: longer spears and new chiseled stone blades.

But the climate slowly warmed, and the Ice Age came to an end. The warmer temperatures caused certain areas to become arid, and the large mammals lost much of their food supply. By about 9,000 B.C.E., many of the huge beasts became extinct. The loss of the big mammals marked the end of an era. As humans were forced to search for new sources of food and clothing, they began to travel and interact
with other groups of humans. These tribes eventually traded with each other for the survival of their communities. The Archaic Period had begun.