

# SPEARHEADING HISTORY

A&M anthropologists in search of America's earliest settlers

By STUART HUTSON

The Battalion

As Michael Waters gently thumbs a piece of flint that may appear to be no more than a simple arrow head to the average observer, his eyes take on a deep gaze, revealing that a few simple lines cut in stone tell a greater story than a thousand lines of text.

For Waters and his colleague Harry Shafer, both professors of anthropology at Texas A&M, this story is of the first human settlements in America, and it is written in a collection of artifacts from the heart of Texas.

Waters and Shafer, along with researchers from the University of Texas-Austin and several other institutions, are halfway through a three-year-long excavation of Gault Site, a 30-acre area in Bell County, Texas. The area's limestone hills and bubbling creeks made an ideal site 11,500 years ago for the early inhabitants of the New World to stop, take a breather and make a few tools.

"This is possibly the largest concentration of artifacts from this group ever found," Shafer said. "Normally, small kill sites are found that reveal one or two artifacts, often on the ground's surface, maybe resulting from one of these guys throwing a spear at a mammoth, missing and then running away ...

yeah, like he's going back for his spear.

"These people seemed to think that this was an ideal staging ground, where they could rest, have babies, make tools and socialize. And, evidently they thought it was a really, really ideal setting, because they kept returning for thousands of years. Today, it is one of our greatest opportunities to rediscover some things about these ancient people."

The people are named the Clovis hunters, after a site in New Mexico where artifacts from their culture

## What did they look like?

The only complete skeletal remains found of Clovis hunters were of two small children, so no direct evidence is present as to what these early residents of North America looked like. However, Waters and Shafer said that if modern people were to see a Clovis hunter walking down the street today, they probably would not recognize them.

"They probably just had smaller and skinnier skulls with more rugged features — like those of a NFL linebacker," Shafer said.

The skull to the right is a replica of a skull of a woman who lived at the end of the Folsom period that immediately followed the Clovis period. The woman's face below is a researcher's interpretation of how the Folsom woman's face may have looked.

were first found. Waters said the group lived between 11,500 and 10,900 years ago in North America, surviving largely by hunting herds of mammoths and bison.

"This is a truly unique culture," Shafer said. "The elements of the culture are shared by members all across the country, and they were masters of craftsmanship, especially when it came to making spear points, because they were such an intricate part of their lives."

## COME HERE OFTEN?

"The Clovis hunters were pulled across the land by the herds of animals which they were hunting," Shafer said. "So they probably spent much of their lives traveling in order to follow the seasonal migrations of the mammoths or bison."

He said this nomadic lifestyle resulted in an extremely rugged and dangerous routine for the Clovis, who needed places to rest and recuperate.

"This site is really just a staging point B for a trip to point A, which in this case was hundreds of miles away into what is now Kansas," Shafer said. "This area had vast supplies of what they needed, and most of all, flint for the tools they would use for the trip. ... We know that they stuck with the same tools because we have found worn spear tips that originated in Kansas."

Waters said the Texas site was visited regularly for 9,000 years, offering invaluable clues to the evolution of the area's cultures.

"It helps us put things in more of a timeline perspective where we can say that this particular tool and the people that used it came after this other one," he said. "It also helps us understand how technologies (how the cultures made tools) changed and when they changed."

"Spear points made in the fashion of the Clovis hunters are here, but so are those of the Folsom (the next cultural category of people, ranging from 10,300 to 10,800 years ago) as well as those of others that followed."

## SO, WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

Being able to sequence the technological changes (especially those involving making spear tips) may help to form a more decisive picture of how the original human inhabitants of North America first conquered the land, Waters said.

There are several theories of early inhabitation of North America. Waters said a common theory is that people with the culture of the Clovis migrated across a temporary ice bridge that formed across the Bering Strait (the gap between Alaska and Asia). These people then migrated down through North America, traveling between two gigantic sheets of ice that covered much of the continent.

Other theories, however, depict a culture of hunters predating the Clovis, who migrated to North America through means other than across the Bering Strait, such as by boat. This culture then evolved into the Clovis hunters.

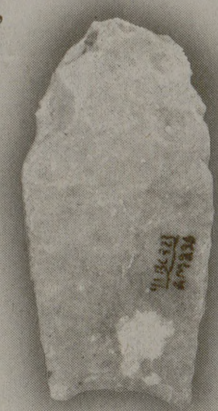
Waters and Shafer said find-

ings at the Gault site may provide evidence for the first theory.

"The excavation of this old site didn't find any spear points that would indicate a culture before the Clovis," Waters said. "But what we may find is that the technology we find as predominant in this area is the same as is found in Alaska near the Bering Strait. This, then, could mean that the culture was carried across from the Old World."



ARCHAIC



FOLSOM



CLOVIS

## SHARPENING THEIR SKILLS

Shafer said the Clovis methods of making spear heads not only make the culture stand out, but may also link them to the Old World.

"You can tell that the later spear points were made in a much more cavalier way," he said. "The later cultures were more stationary around areas where they could just pick up another piece of flint and make a knife or spear head if one broke, but the Clovis had to design their tools to be durable and high-quality. ... They were real craftsmen who would start with a piece of flint the size of a brick and, in a few minutes, chisel it down to an artfully crafted, durable spear head."

"The later cultures would just take shards from the flint and then just shape those into spearheads. The Clovis method is a school of technology that was probably taught to children — I think this because we have found spearheads with really basic mistakes — and had a 2,000-year-old history back in the Old World."

Shafer said part of the skill put into making the spearheads may also come from a respect for the beasts the Clovis hunted.

"These people lived in a world where everything was mystical and magical," he said. "They could have put a crude point on a simple rock and I assure you that it would have been just as deadly, but these people chose the best, most decorative materials and took care in the design."

"I would think, though, that it wouldn't be



any less or any more significant than a farmer who goes to church praying for rain. These people were dependent upon nature, and were therefore in tune with it in a way that we lost thousands of years ago. This may have been a way of mapping themselves in with the natural clockwork."

EDGE SHARPENED with quartzite limestone, or bone

DULLED EDGES for use as knife and attaching to spear with leather straps

THICK CENTER for extra strength

FLUTED INDENTATION for insertion into end of spear

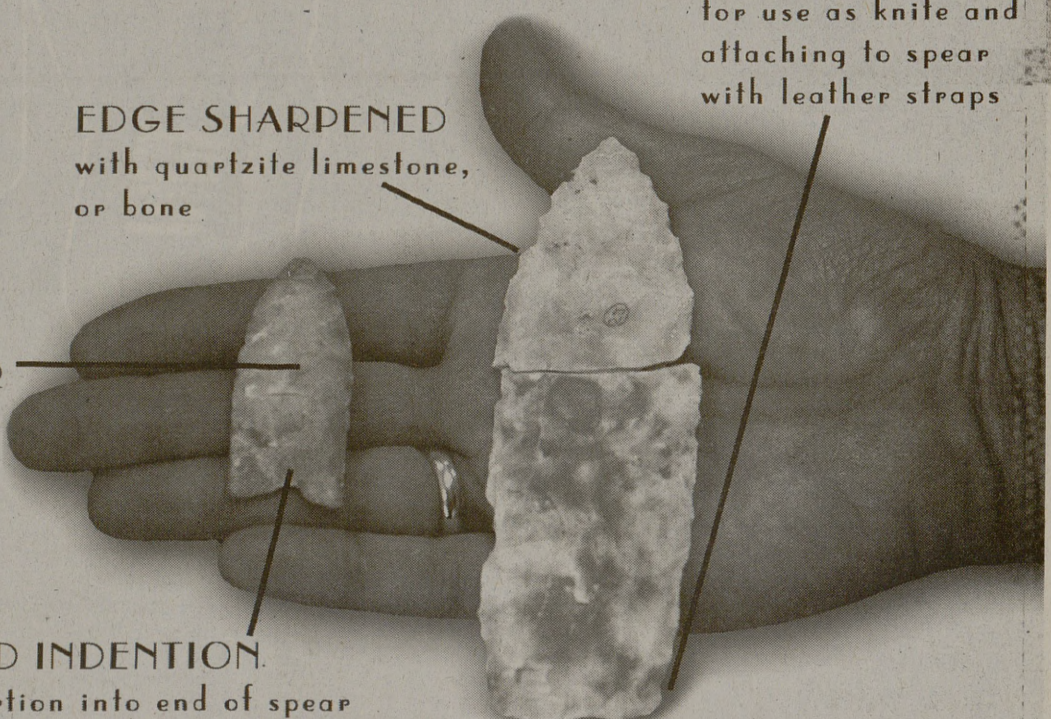


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