



Human Stories Unearthed

Abundant resources here and nearby provided for the people at Russell Cave. What nature did not provide, they either created or acquired through a gradually expanding trade network. As years passed, those who lived or hunted

here left thousands of items linked to their everyday lives. In the mid-1900s archeologists uncovered a remarkable collection of art, technology, and debris representing over 10,000 years of human use in a single place.

This archeological record reveals evidence of the early Americans' innovations, lifestyles, and social dynamics. Their creation and migration stories reveal how they came to live here and how this area helped form their cultural

identity. Today, Russell Cave National Monument helps bring to light the many cultural developments of these phenomenal human journeys.

Plan Your Visit

Located 8 miles west of Bridgeport, AL, and 5 miles from US 72, the park is open daily year-round from 8 am to 4:30 pm central time except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The visitor center has a museum, gift shop, restrooms, Junior Ranger Program, and videos. A short path on the **Cave Trail** (boardwalk) leads to the cave shelter and outdoor exhibits. Trails are open during park hours. The park has a drink machine but no food service. Picnic tables are first-come, first-served. Wheelchairs are available upon request.

Safety and Regulations

You can view the cave only from the boardwalk. For safety reasons the front of the cave shelter is the only accessible part of the cave system. • Pets are welcome on the boardwalk and trails but not in the visitor center. Pets must be controlled on a leash. Bring water for your pet, and clean up pet waste. • Strollers are welcome on the boardwalk

but are not recommended on hiking trails. • Stay on marked trails. Always be aware of your surroundings. Avoid poison ivy and venomous snakes. • All park features are protected by law; do not disturb park resources. Leave artifacts where you find them; report their location to park staff. • Camping, cooking, and fires are prohibited in the park. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

White-nose syndrome, a disease affecting and killing bats, was confirmed here in 2012. Stay on the boardwalk to avoid spreading this disease to other areas. If you see a bat lying on the ground or acting strangely, do not touch it. Contact park staff immediately.

Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Emergencies call 911

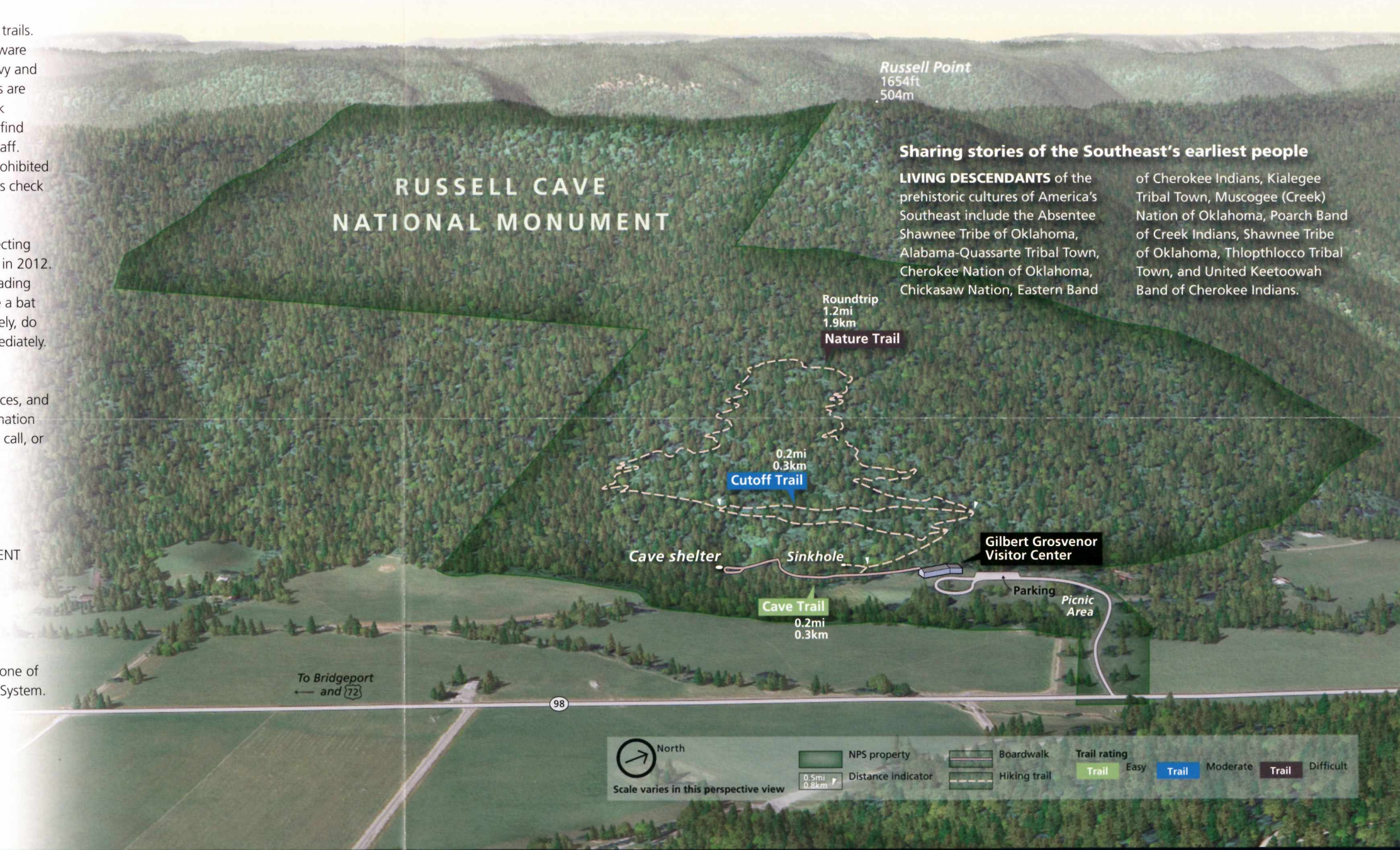
More Information

RUSSELL CAVE NATIONAL MONUMENT
3729 County Rd. 98
Bridgeport, AL 35740
256-495-2672
www.nps.gov/ruca

Russell Cave National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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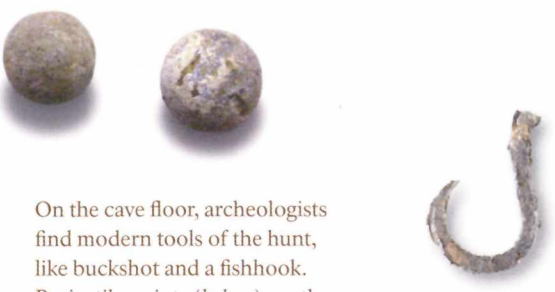


LIFE BETWEEN THE LAYERS

Objects, their depth, and their placement give clues about the people who used Russell Cave. Layer by layer, archeologists unearthed over 100,000 artifacts

from four distinct cultural periods covering 10,000 years. Below are examples of what they found and how these everyday items reveal human stories.

TOOLS OF THE HUNT



On the cave floor, archeologists find modern tools of the hunt, like buckshot and a fishhook. Projectile points (*below*) are the ancient tools that first drew archeologists to excavate Russell Cave.

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Projectile points for spears, darts, arrows, and knives are shaped out of bone, stone, and other material. A point's style, source, and depth can reveal who used the cave and when.



Smaller points (*layer above*) suggest the Mississippians used bows and arrows while people of the Archaic period hunted with larger points for the atlatl spears (*layer below*). Woodland hunters use both.



Digging more deeply takes archeologists further back in history. Russell Cave's points exhibit how humans chipped weapons over thousands of years.



Found at the deepest level excavated, these oldest and biggest stone points date back to the Paleo-Indians.



HUMAN CULTURES

MODERN PRESENT–NEARLY 500 YEARS AGO

Knowledge Seekers

Archeology is one way modern people may study the past to learn about our world and discover a variety of human stories.



Before digging, **ARCHEOLOGISTS** (*left*) prepare a grid that will help them search squares of earth for evidence of past human presence.

NPS / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Archeologist **BETTYE J. BROYLES** (*right*) published a detailed work on the excavations, which was key to understanding Russell Cave's history.

EASTERN STATES ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEDERATION



MISSISSIPPIAN 500–1,000 YEARS AGO

Growing Communities

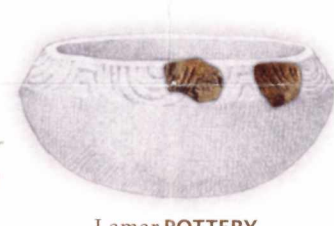
The Mississippians live in locations based on shared political, agricultural, and spiritual belief systems. Corn is essential for food, cultural exchange, celebration, and spiritual events.

This **STONE HOE** from Russell Cave is a non-local trade item used for cultivation.



The **THREE SISTERS**—corn, beans, and squash—are still grown, eaten, and used ceremonially together.

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Lamar POTTERY

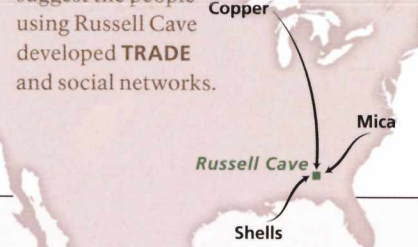
BONE needle



SHELL ornament



Materials from hundreds of miles away suggest the people using Russell Cave developed **TRADE** and social networks.



WOODLAND 1,000–3,200 YEARS AGO

Early Farmers

Religion, politics, expanding trade, and agriculture emerge during this time of social and technological change. People live in larger villages, and food resources may be more stable.



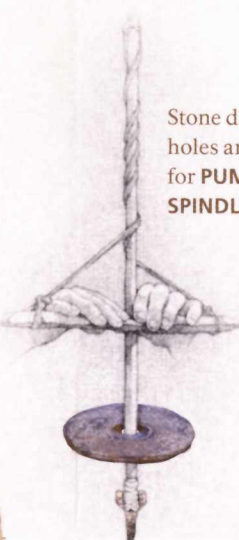
WOODEN paddle with a carved design (*above*); Swift Creek pottery sherds (*right*)



People would **REPURPOSE** broken projectile points, like this one made into a drill bit.



Stone discs with centered holes are used as weights for **PUMP DRILLS** and **SPINDLE WHORLS**.



At Russell Cave archeologists find charred remnants of a basket filled with *Chenopodium* (lamb's quarters) seeds—one of the first wild **PLANTS** humans cultivate in North America.

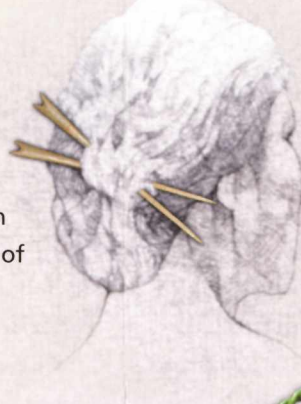
WIKIMEDIA



ARCHAIC 3,200–11,450 YEARS AGO

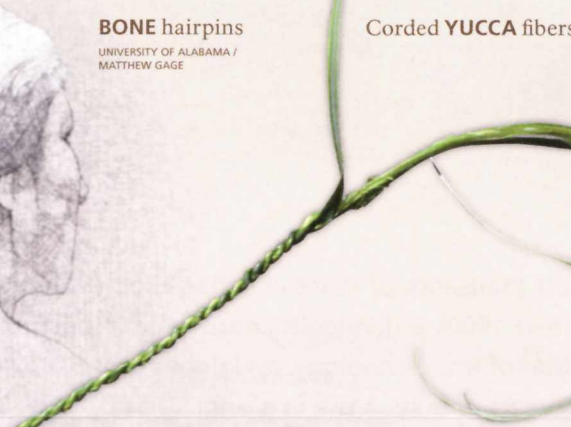
Tool Shapers

Warming weather and over-hunting contribute to the extinction of the largest Ice Age animals. People use more reliable sources of plants, nuts, and seeds for food; hides for clothing, shelter, and containers; bones for tools, game pieces, and adornments; and domesticated dogs for hunting.



BONE hairpins
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA / MATTHEW GAGE

Corded YUCCA fibers



An **ATLATL** is used to throw projectiles like spears or darts at a longer range and a higher velocity.



Atlatl COUNTERWEIGHT

BONE awl



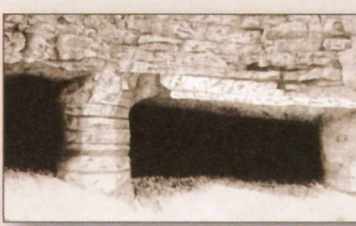
PALEO 10,000–14,500 YEARS AGO

First Inhabitants

Paleo-Indians settle in the area. They hunt peccary and porcupine; fish in nearby rivers; and forage for berries, nuts, and edible roots.



This poplar bark **BASKET** recreates a technique Paleo-Indians might have used.



Russell Cave's original roof may have looked like this before the collapse.

NPS / LARRY BEANE



Russell Cave's collapsed roof raised the floor, making the cave cool, dry, and habitable.

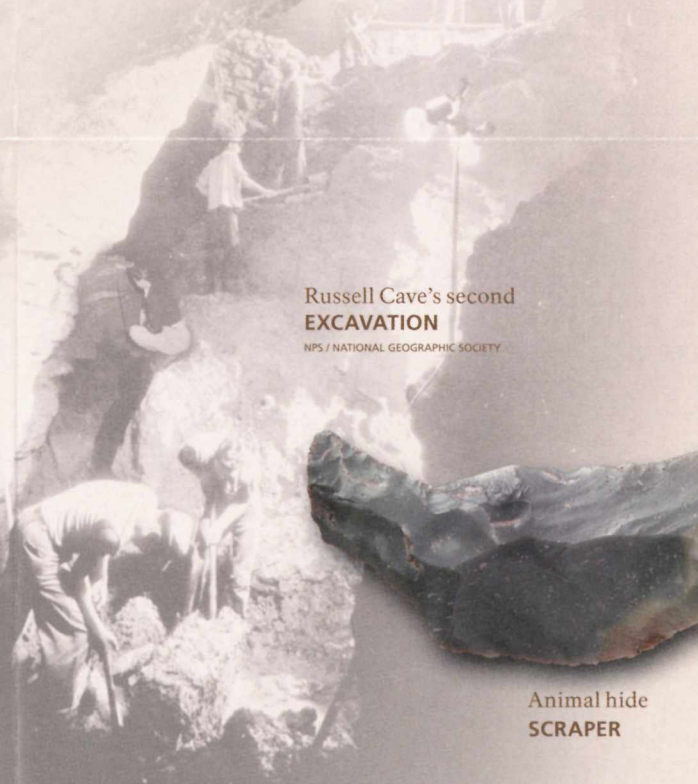


Peccary, or javelina, is a pig-like animal now **EXTINCT** to the Russell Cave area.



PECCARY teeth

Russell Cave's second EXCAVATION
NPS / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY



Animal hide SCRAPER

IN THE CAVE

In the **MODERN ERA** soft drink bottle caps, sardine tins, tent pegs, broken bits of china and glass, and even 1800s-era buckshot litter the cave.

CAVE LAYERS

AT THE SURFACE

Just below the surface, artifacts suggest people of the **MISSISSIPPIAN** period use Russell Cave as a hunting camp. In this layer artifacts, like projectile points and potsherds, are more sparse.

6 INCHES DOWN

Key archeological finds from the **WOODLAND** period provide evidence of new technology, like the manufacture of pottery for cooking and storage of food, the development of the bow and arrow, and increasing agricultural techniques.

4 FEET DOWN

Most of Russell Cave's use occurs during the **ARCHAIC** period. At this depth, archeologists find points to hunt deer, turkey, squirrel, bobcat, bear, and other nearby forest animals. They also find stones used to process food, grind seeds, and crack nuts.

6 FEET DOWN

Archeologists find that people during the **PALEO** period may have used the cave as a shelter or hunting camp. The first occupants may have arrived at least 10,000 years ago.

12 FEET DOWN

Dalton points are found on the fallen rock of Russell Cave's roof collapse.

43 FEET DOWN

Archeologists reach the water table—over four stories below the cave floor.

300 million years ago Russell Cave's sedimentary rock forms in a tropical sea.

WORLD EVENTS

1962
3RD EXCAVATION (NATIONAL PARK SERVICE)

1961
RUSSELL CAVE NATIONAL MONUMENT ESTABLISHED

1956–58
2ND EXCAVATION (CARL MILLER, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

1953
1ST EXCAVATION (TENNESSEE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)

NEARLY 500 YEARS AGO
HERNANDO DE SOTO REACHES AMERICA'S SOUTHEAST

OVER 500 YEARS AGO
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS LANDS IN THE NEW WORLD

OVER 500 YEARS AGO
JOHANNES GUTENBERG INVENTS MOVABLE TYPE PRINTING PRESS

600 YEARS AGO
AZTEC EMPIRE RISES

900 YEARS AGO
TIMBUKTU EXPANDS

1,000 YEARS AGO
VIKINGS REACH NORTH AMERICA

1,300 YEARS AGO
ANCESTRAL PUEBLOAN CULTURE BEGINS

1,400 YEARS AGO
ISLAMIC TERRITORY EXPANDS

1,900 YEARS AGO
ROMAN EMPIRE TERRITORY REACHES ITS LARGEST EXTENT

2,100 YEARS AGO
PAPER INVENTED IN CHINA

2,300 YEARS AGO
HELLENISTIC CULTURE PREVAILS

3,000 YEARS AGO
IRON AGE BEGINS

4,000 YEARS AGO
MAYAN CULTURE BEGINS

4,500 YEARS AGO
STONEHENGE MONOLITHS ERECTED IN ENGLAND

4,600 YEARS AGO
GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA CONSTRUCTED

5,300 YEARS AGO
ÖTZI THE ICEMAN BORN

5,600 YEARS AGO
WRITING INVENTED IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

9,000 YEARS AGO
IN RUSSELL CAVE, CHARCOAL FROM AN EXTINGUISHED FIRE MARKS THE TRANSITION FROM PALEO TO ARCHAIC

9,000–11,000 YEARS AGO
RUSSELL CAVE ROOF COLLAPSES (SEE IMAGES, LEFT)

11,500 YEARS AGO
FERMENTING GRAIN MAY HAVE LED TO THE FIRST BEER

11,700 YEARS AGO
LAST ICE AGE ENDS

15,000 YEARS AGO
EARLY AMERICANS DOMESTICATE DOGS

16,500–30,000 YEARS AGO
HUMANS ARRIVE IN THE AMERICAS