

North America Before Clovis: The View from Gault Site, Texas

Speaker: Dr. Michael Collins, Research Professor Department of Anthropology, Texas State University

Host Department: Museum of Anthropological Archaeology

Date: 02/25/2016

Time: 12:00 pm

Location: Room 2009 Ruthven Museums Building

Description:

Long term and extensive excavations at the deeply stratified Gault site in central Texas have documented an unmatched concentration of Clovis stone artifacts, underlain by a meter-thick component of Older-Than-Clovis (OTC) lithic tools and knapping debris (N=~60,000 specimens), and overlain by a sequence of numerous Late Paleoindian, Archaic, and Late Prehistoric components. Gault is one among some 40 sites in North America with substantive evidence of human activity dating from ca. 13,000 to over 34,000 calendar years before present. These sites are broadly dispersed geographically and represent a wide array of behaviors and adaptations. Geographically, sites, all south of the ice cap margin, occur in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, Great Lakes region, Central and Southern Plains, Northwest, Pacific Coast, and Alaska. Included are sites with evidence for large mammal butchering (some with and some without associated stone tools), large mammal bone working (again, some with and some without stone tools), large mammal kill sites, residential localities, stone flaking sites, and several where site function is not clear. This continent-wide corpus of evidence implies, among other things, that (1) people have been in the western hemisphere for more than 30,000 years, (2) Clovis is nearer the middle of this time span than being at the beginning, (3) human interaction with megafauna has significant time depth that is contrary to the notion that naïve taxa were easily exterminated by newly-arrived Clovis hunters, (4) Clovis is almost certainly the spread of concepts across multiple peoples rather than the spread of a single people across the landscape, and, (5) since sites in the Mid-Atlantic area are among the oldest, peopling of the Americas likely came by way of both the Pacific and the Atlantic.