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NEVER LEAVE VIET NAM?

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TRUE

'Tis strange, but true; for truth is always strange—stranger than fiction.
BYRON

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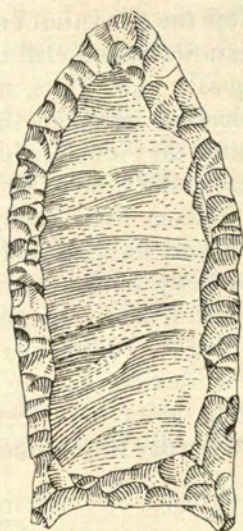
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THE ADVENTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

A LONG SEARCH FOR THE FIRST AMERICANS

Some years ago, a few pieces of flint proved that man has lived on this continent for more than 100 centuries. Then anthropologists continued digging and sifting for clues to even older cultures. The quest never ceases, nor does the excitement of discovery

BY TONY HILLERMAN

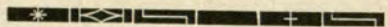
■ A tall, lanky, sunburned man walked slowly across a barren ridge 18 miles outside Albuquerque, New Mexico. Much of the surrounding land had been bulldozed and graded for the construction of a real-estate development, but now the area was deserted except for the solitary figure. He paused at the wind erosion blowouts, examining the exposed stones. He spent hours along the banks of the shallow arroyos where gravel had been laid bare. He squatted at anthills, scrutinizing the tiny chips of flint the red fire ants bring to the surface from their tunnels. Some of these chips he sifted into an envelope before he left.

When he reappeared on the ridge several days later in a pickup truck, he brought with him food and water, a wheelbarrow, a shovel and a wooden sifter-frame bottomed with a quarter-inch mesh of wire. Not far from the hills of the fire ants he began to dig, sampling a spot and then moving on. He dug carefully, lifting the loose topsoil from a compact layer of reddish earth beneath it, sifting it through the screen with a trowel, studying the stony residue, and making an occasional note in the pad he carried.

On the second day he found exactly what he had hoped to find. His shovel blade turned up a flattened leaf of flint. The tip was broken, but enough remained to show it had been shaped by a human hand, carefully sharpened and artfully grooved. It had been, in fact, a weapon—one specifically designed to kill a species of massive bison which had ceased to exist almost a hundred centuries before America was “discovered.”

To Jerry Dawson, the man with the shovel, the broken weapon was confirmation of what the flint chips had hinted. Dawson is a 39-year-old graduate assistant in the department of anthropology of the University of New Mexico and an “Early Man” specialist. While his field is anthropology, the study of man and his cultures, Dawson’s work on this barren ridge is archaeology, the branch of anthropology that is concerned with digging up

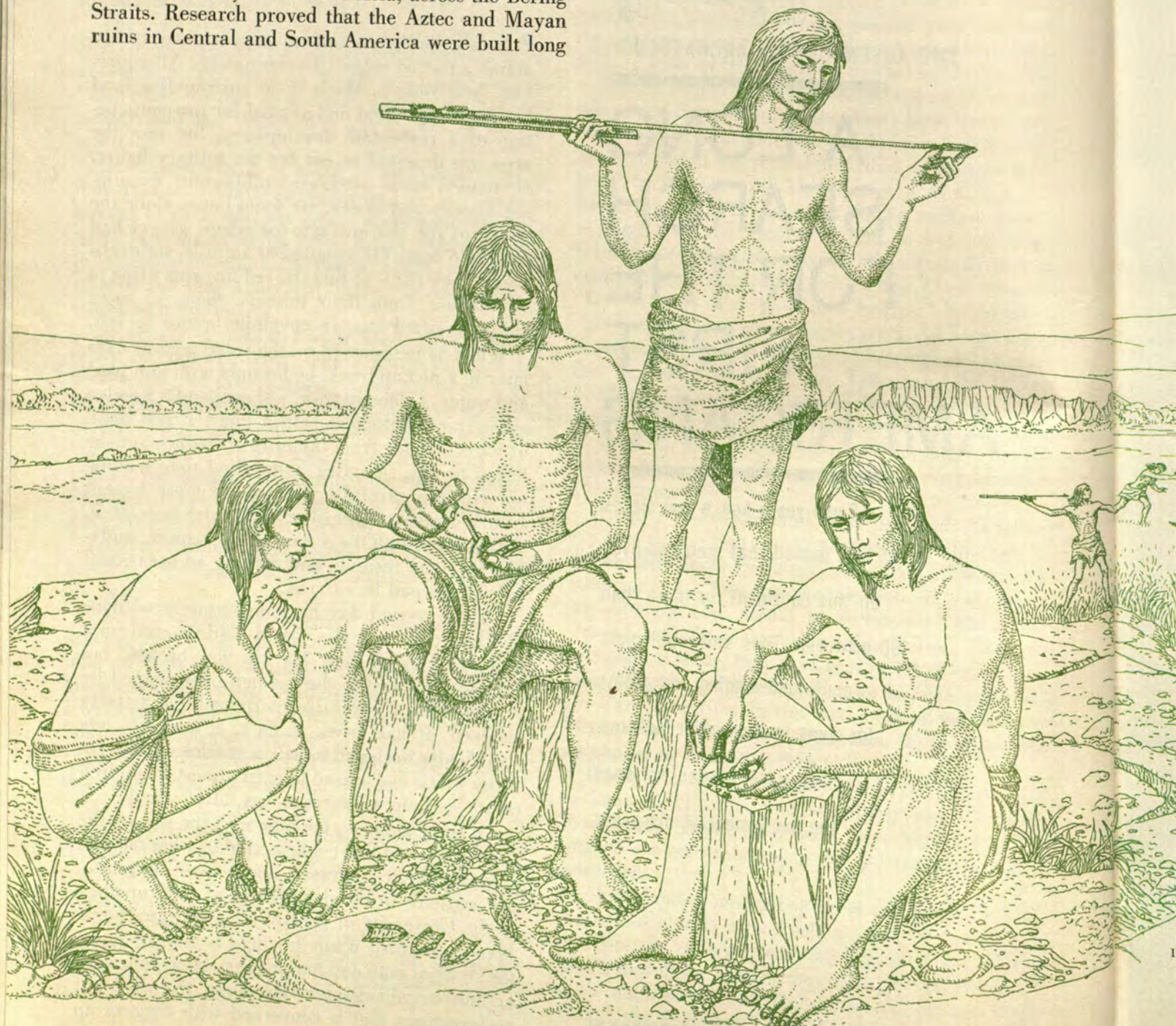
and studying the remains of past cultures. Dawson had now found the trail of a mysterious Stone-Age hunter who had stalked the Taylor's Bison during the Ice Age, when the retreating glaciers still chilled the American West. His shovel had cut through 10,000 years of time and uncovered a hunting camp of Folsom Man.



Until 1927, it was virtually a dogma of science that man was a newcomer to the Americas. He could not have evolved here, since the western hemisphere had no apelike higher primates. And he could not have immigrated too long ago—it seemed—because the great Continental Ice Sheet was thought to have blocked the only route from Asia, across the Bering Straits. Research proved that the Aztec and Mayan ruins in Central and South America were built long

after the Christian era and that the great Pueblo Indian towns and cliff dwellings of the Southwest were equally new. Thus, with a few maverick exceptions, scientists accepted the theory that man had not invaded the New World until perhaps a thousand years before the time of Christ.

Folsom Man demolished this theory through his odd and wasteful habit of leaving his lance head in the body of his victims. A crew from the Denver Museum was salvaging skeletons of Taylor's Bison, extinct for 10,000 years, from an arroyo near Folsom, New Mexico. Among the bones of these Ice-Age animals, under nine feet of earth, they found delicate and deadly little stone points obviously made by man.



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There was also evidence that the bison had been skinned and butchered. The impossible was true, and the hunt was on.

Anthropologists now know that Folsom Man was one of several Stone-Age hunting people in America. It is certain now that when the great ice caps accumulated on the northern hemisphere, the shrinking ocean level exposed an ice-free land bridge across the Bering Straits. Pleistocene animals, the mastadon, mammoth, musk-ox, and dozens of other breeds, grazed across from Siberia. Man followed, probably about 30,000 years ago, settling in western Alaska which was free of glaciers, then finding his way southward when a glacier-free corridor opened up in western Canada.

In the 1930's extensive evidence was uncovered near Clovis, New Mexico, that humans using another cruder and heavier type of stone weapons there had ambushed and killed at least four Woolly Mammoths—an animal larger than the Asian elephant. Dating at this kill site and at others found later indicated that Clovis Man was on the hunt just before Folsom Man, as early as 13,000 years ago and perhaps as late as 10,000. The horizon for Early Man in America was pushed farther back in 1941, when Dr. Frank

Hibben, currently a professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico and director of the Folsom Man project, explored a cave in the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico. Under the hard ocher floor of the cave he found fossil bones and 38 crude stone points similar to weapons used by a Stone-Age culture of Central Europe. The "Sandia Man" was dated 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, because it was believed the ocher cave floor had been formed in a period of torrential rains between two glacial advances. Hibben and others now feel this dating may have been too early, but obviously Sandia Man was one of the oldest among the primitive groups that could, collectively, be called "the first Americans."

From the other end of the scale, the gap between the Indian cultures and Folsom Man is also being closed. The history of American man can now be traced backward through four stages of Pueblo building civilizations, to the Cliff Dwellers, and beyond them to the Basket Makers. These pit dwellers first mastered the rudiments of agriculture and allowed men to end their wanderings after game and began what we call civilization.

But before this incipient civilization, which originated less than 2,000 years ago, there were thousands of years when the continent was occupied only by tiny bands of nomads. Some, in a grouping science calls the "Cochise culture," augmented their diet by gathering and grinding seeds. Some lived only by the hunt. But, although some of these can be traced backwards in time within a thousand years of the Folsom hunters, their weapons and stone-working techniques were utterly different.



Our continent had been cooler and wetter when the Folsom hunter untied the thong on the haft of his lance and discarded the broken point that would be found by Jerry Dawson thousands of years later. The hunter was wrapped in animal skins, because the chilly rain clouds still moved across the plains from the melting glaciers to the north. The broken point may have meant that the man—and his women—slept hungry that night. It tells us that the hunter's lance had missed his target and struck the stony ground. He could not miss often [Continued on page 68]

IN THE DRY DUST OF
THE SOUTHWEST, A YOUNG
ARCHAEOLOGIST IS ON
THE TRAIL OF A MYSTERIOUS
STONE-AGE HUNTER
CALLED FOLSOM MAN



ILLUSTRATED BY ERIC MOSE

A LONG SEARCH FOR THE FIRST AMERICANS

[Continued from page 57]

and live. Hunger would make him too weak for the marathon runs to head off the grazing herds and too weak to avoid the six-foot horn span of the massive bison when it charged. When he was weak, he would be prey for other hunters; the Age of Glaciers had made North America a veritable zoo of strange and exotic animals and Folsom Man was only one of many meat-eating predators. The age science calls "Pleistocene" produced in the American West three species of jaguar, the lion-sized saber-toothed cat, huge bears and bone-eating dogs. Worst of all, there were the Dire Wolves, oversized killers which modern science has labeled, with descriptive simplicity, "The Terrible Wolf." We know that sometimes Folsom Man killed these great wolves. Sometimes, undoubtedly, they killed him.

If the broken point meant that the Ice-Age bison were becoming scarce and elusive on this sloping ridge, it would also mean Folsom Man would soon be leaving—continuing the wanderings which took him up and down the empty continent from Alberta, Canada, to Northern Mexico and, some clues indicate, as far east as Virginia and Georgia.

Archaeologists know of his travels from his kill sites, buried now under eons of dust and silt, scattered up and down the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. From these they know how he killed, skinned and butchered his game, how he made his weapons, and something of his

cunning tactics as a hunter. Through dating procedures based on knowledge of geological stratas in the earth and on the rate of radioactive decay of a carbon element in ashes and bone, they were able to give him his approximate place in the immense dimension of time. Beyond this there is only a scattering of evidence and some educated guessing.

We can guess that he was a large man, because the age of ice tended to exaggerate size in the animals it spawned, because Cro-Magnon Man, his contemporary in Europe, was a bulky individual, and because the means he used to survive on a hostile planet demanded great strength. We can also guess he was equipped with the "stomach folds" common among aboriginal hunting tribes which gorge when they make a kill and endure hunger when they don't. We can guess, too, that he was "long headed," with a narrow skull still sometimes found in modern men.

But we can only guess, because not a fragment of his skeleton has ever been found. For some baffling reason, archaeologists who uncover the boneyards of the great animals he killed find not as much as a tooth of the mighty hunter who butchered them. And in this mystery, scientists believe they have a clue to his character.

The man who camped on this hillside probably decided for himself when his life must end—and then deliberately exposed himself to death. When he reached old age (and for him, like today's professional athlete, old age came at 35 or 40) he would leave his hunting band and go out to be killed and eaten by the

wolves. The Masai in Kenya and some primitive Eskimo people still practice this grisly form of suicide when they can no longer contribute to the tribe. Masai bones are not found because the hyenas follow the lions and destroy the skeletons. The bone-eating dogs of the Ice Age would have followed the saber-toothed cats and the Dire Wolves.

We know that Folsom Man used fire to stampede game, and how he made his tools, and how he used them. But for every fact, there are a dozen questions. Why did he spend so much time building beauty into his lance tip, a weapon as expendable as a rifle bullet? Why did he make his lance point in exactly this same difficult, unchanging pattern down through a thousand years of time and 50 human generations? And, above all, why did the day come about 10,000 years ago when broken Folsom Points were no longer being dropped at campsites or being left, unbroken, among the bones of bison? Why did this man vanish from the earth?

When I arrived at the site where Jerry Dawson was hunting answers to questions like these, the ridge had been pegged off into 10-foot squares, their boundaries marked by white string. Near the top of the ridge, most of these squares had been stripped of topsoil, exposing a hard, pockmarked surface. Dawson was down the slope, creating an impressive plume of dust as he shook dirt through a sifter frame.

Dr. Frank Hibben had told me that Dawson was a crack fieldman. He had returned to the university for graduate studies after working as a power plant engineer on the Navajo Indian Reservation and as maintenance engineer at Martin Marietta Corporation plants in New Mexico and Colorado. Dawson had a solid background in archaeology, having worked as salvage archaeologist at the Navajo Dam Project, and as land claims archaeologist for the Acoma, Laguna and Chiricahua Apache Indians. Now he was Hibben's graduate assistant and, since early spring, had been assigned to handle fieldwork on the Folsom Man dig called the "Rio Rancho Site."

As Hibben had predicted, Dawson seemed glad enough to have a visitor. "First," he said, "I'll show you some of the stuff I'm finding. Then we'll take a break and I'll give you the guided tour of the layout." He worked the remaining clods through the screen with his trowel and then carefully raked out an accumulation of buffalo grass and young tumbleweeds. The residue caught on the wire included an assortment of twigs and roots, half a dozen dried antelope droppings, a large, badly confused scorpion, and several hundred small bits of gravel. Dawson poked through this debris with a calloused finger.

"Here's one," he said. He held up a paper-thin chip of white stone, no larger than a fingernail clipping, and, to my layman's eye, in no way remarkable from five hundred other fragments of rock on the screen.

Dawson laughed. "One more piece of Folsom workshop debris. The stuff he chipped off while sharpening a lance



"Well, yes, I did think it a little strange to find an extra \$14,000 in my pay envelope last week. . . ."