

Summary: The First Americans

People Arrive in the Americas

During the Ice Age much of the world's water was frozen in glaciers. The ocean floor between Alaska and Asia was a grassy land bridge that scientists called Beringia. Many scientists think people followed migrating animal herds across it. Migration stopped about 10,000 years ago when the glaciers melted and the seas rose. People who had crossed from Asia, called Paleo-Indians, spread out over North and South America. They are the ancestors of modern American Indians.

Civilizations Develop

Early Paleo-Indians hunted big animals. About 11,000 years ago the big animals began to die out. People learned new ways to get food. They hunted smaller animals.

About 9,000 years ago some Paleo-Indians began to use agriculture. Scientists think people in present-day Mexico grew the first crops of corn, beans, and squash. People's lives changed as they stopped migrating to grow crops. More people survived because of the supply of food.

Paleo-Indians farmed and built villages and cities. The Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippians were Mound Builders. They built giant earth mounds and large villages in the Ohio River Valley, the lower Mississippi Valley, over most of the Southeast, and as far north as Wisconsin. Their ancient civilization lasted for about 2,500 years.

The Olmec lived in present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica until about 800 years ago. They built the first cities in the Americas. Scientists also believe the Olmec built the first aqueducts, pipes, and bridges used to transport water from a distant source to a city.

The Maya lived in what is now Mexico and Central America about 4,000 years ago. They developed a form of writing to record their history and created an accurate calendar. Some Maya still live in Mexico and Guatemala today.

The Aztec civilization controlled Central Mexico around 1300 and was strong for 200 years. American Indian groups developed civilizations in almost every region of North America.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

migration *noun*, a movement from one region to another

agriculture *noun*, farming or growing plants

civilization *noun*, a group of people living together who have systems of government, religion, and culture

ancient *adjective*, long ago

After You Read

REVIEW According to scientists, how did people first come to North

America? Circle the two sentences that tell how scientists think people came to North America.

REVIEW Where did the mound building civilizations live? Draw a box around the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW Where did the Olmec live? Highlight the sentence that tells where they lived.