Shared Knowledge Conference

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Degrees of Change

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Degrees of Change: Transition from Paleoindian to Archaic

The transition between the Paleoindian (13,000-8,000) and Archaic (8,000-1,000) Periods continues to elude North American archaeologists. It is inferred from archaeological evidence that human populations were nomadic hunter-gatherers during both periods. The creation of storage pits, however, provides evidence for some seasonal sedentism during the Archaic Period. This development may have been influenced by climate change at the end of the Ice Age. Stable Isotopic Analysis of faunal remains allows archaeologists to capture a snapshot of past climate in a given area. Water Canyon in Magdalena, New Mexico, has yielded two overlapping bison kill sites. The older kill site dates to the late Paleoindian while the younger site dates to the Early Archaic. Stable Isotopic Analysis can be performed on the bison remains to determine the paleoecology of the area for two different periods. Data derived from Stable Isotopic Analysis may then provide archaeologically based evidence for the effects of climate change as a factor contributing to cultural continuity and change in the American Southwest. The transition from nomadic lifestyles to seasonal sedentism in the region, for example, may have been influenced by environmental agents visible within isotopic signatures.