

Tracking the First Americans across the White Sands

**Free Online Presentation
by Archaeologist
Vance T. Holliday, PhD**

Thursday

December 15, 2022

7 to 8:30 p.m.

Mountain Standard Time

(See next page)

Online via Zoom

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General view of the White Sands site and team members

The question of when people first arrived in the Americas, based on scientific evidence, has been argued for decades and even centuries. For many years the conventional answer was about 13,000 years ago with the appearance of people who made distinctive artifacts called Clovis points (named for a famous archaeological site near Clovis, New Mexico). Other sites have been proposed as being older than Clovis. A few early occupations ~14,000 to ~16,000 years old were about the oldest well-documented sites that were accepted by most (but not all) archaeologists.

The White Sands locality changed that for many archaeologists. This site provides convincing evidence that humans were in what is now southern New Mexico between 23,000 and 21,000 years ago. That is the oldest obvious case we have. Human activity in the form of footprints is quite clear and numerous, and the dating is solid. At other sites considered older than Clovis, there often is debate over the age or presence of humans, which is usually based on interpretations of broken rocks or bones as tools.

The time range for the tracks at White Sands is significant because it puts people in the Americas during the last Ice Age, which means they were likely here sooner, before the last Ice Age covered essentially all of Canada from coast to coast (maybe >25,000 years ago). Getting to the Americas from Asia would be easiest as an Ice Age started or ended because sea level would have been lower and ice wouldn't have fully covered Canada.

Another noteworthy aspect of the White Sands locality is that the presence of humans is based on the tracks. Very few archaeologists anywhere in the world deal with human tracks, and fewer still deal with tracks as such a critical aspect for arguing that the locality is archaeological.

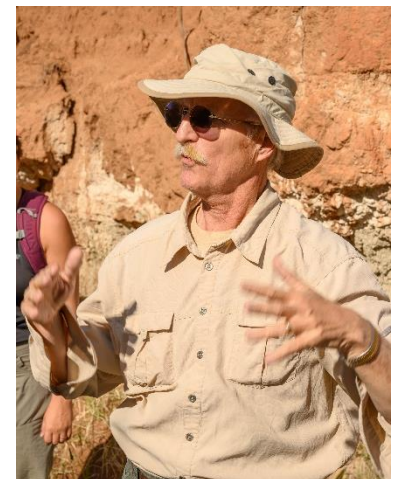
This month's guest presenter Vance T. Holliday received a BA in anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin (1972), an MA in museum science (with a minor in soil science) at Texas Tech University (1977), and a PhD in geological sciences at the University of Colorado, Boulder (1982). He was on the Geography Department faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1986-2002) and on both the Anthropology and Geosciences departments at the University of Arizona before retiring this year.



White Sands locality mammoth tracks

Dr. Holliday's research career began on the Great Plains of the US, focused on reconstructing and interpreting the landscapes and environments in which the earliest occupants of North America lived, and how those conditions evolved during the Paleoindian period. After arriving at the UA he became Director of the Argonaut Archaeological Research Fund, which is devoted to research on the archaeology and geoarchaeology of the Paleoindian period in the southwestern US and northwestern Mexico. In addition, he has been part of an international project focused on the Upper Paleolithic archaeology and paleoenvironments of southwestern Russia and central Ukraine.

For more information contact Old Pueblo Archaeology Center at info@oldpueblo.org or 520-798-1201.



Vance Holliday was coleader for Old Pueblo Archaeology Center's 2019 tour to Murray Springs and other Paleoindian sites in Arizona's San Pedro Valley (This photo by Ron Stewart; all others courtesy of Dr. Holliday)

Flyer version of August 2, 2022

