

## **Spear Tip Sheds Light on Ancient People**

**By Daniel Newhauser, Green Valley News**

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A rare architectural relic discovered in Sahuarita and on its way to the Arizona State Museum in Tucson could help illuminate the way early humans lived in this part of the state.

A Clovis point spearhead, named for the city in New Mexico where the first of its kind was unearthed in the 1930s, was recovered near Sahuarita this month.

The artifact itself isn't so exceptional — they're found all over North America. What's significant is where it was found, said Arthur Vokes, who has curated the museum's architectural repository for nearly 30 years.

"I know of one other from the Tucson basin that was recovered back in the early 1980s," he said. "It's a very rare occurrence."

The white rock spearhead, roughly two inches long and an inch wide and missing its tip, likely dates back 11,000 to 13,000 years when the earliest well-established human inhabitants of North America fastened objects like it to the end of wood poles and hurled them at mammoths, bears and other large prey.

These Clovis people, as they're now called, are the predecessors of the ancestors of Native Americans. They hunted and gathered all over the continent and in the Southwest, they primarily inhabited New Mexico and the San Pedro basin, which runs north from Sonora, Mexico, along the San Pedro River in Southeastern Arizona. As a result, the bulk of the state's Clovis points are found at mammoth kill-sites near Naco and Sierra Vista.

But a find in the Tucson basin, which roughly covers the area between the Santa Rita Mountains and north Tucson, could indicate a broader inhabitancy, Vokes said.

"Human beings have been in this region for about 11,000 years or so," he said. "It does reflect the age of regular occupation here."

And by examining the type of rock the point is made out of, Vokes said he could learn about ancient trade and hunting routes.

The spearhead was discovered during a routine archaeological survey on Arizona State Trust land by an environmental consulting company, said Steve Ross, an archaeologist with the State Land Department.

It's distinguishable from more contemporary arrowheads because it's larger and matches a style of tool construction used by ancient people halfway around the world.

"Through research they've traced this type of point-making back to the Asia area," Ross said. "So as they migrated over the land bridge (between modern-day Russia and Alaska,) they brought this type of point-making with them."

Spearheads like it were eventually phased out, Ross said, perhaps due to extinction

of large animals or even the annihilation of the Clovis people by an environmental event, like a comet.

Some unique features of Clovis points are a straight base with a concavity and a groove running up the bottom, most likely used to help secure it to a wooden shaft, said Vance Holliday, a professor of anthropology and geosciences at the University of Arizona.

He said the Clovis people used a technique called flint knapping to make these artifacts.

"It takes quite a bit of skill," he said. "Hitting it with another rock, you can shape it into a spear point."

It was found on the surface, not "in-place" — the archaeological term for in the ground — but if more spearheads start turning up "in place" in this area, it could be meaningful, Holliday said.

"There's only a dozen, dozen and a half, sites that we have found and studied where we find Clovis artifacts in place," he said. "So finding another one could be a very, very big deal."

Still, finding one on the surface is nothing to scoff at, he said. It had to endure thousands of years of the elements and, more recently, humans building on the land or simply finding and pocketing the object.

"One of the most important things about any archeological site is that it has to be preserved," he said.

Vokes said when the Clovis point arrives at the Arizona State Museum, it will be studied and may even go on public display.

#### THE CLOVIS PEOPLE

- Lived 11,000 to 13,000 years ago
- First well-established human inhabitants of North America
- Descended from Asian peoples who migrated across the Bering land bridge
- Hunter-and-gatherer society
- Adapted successfully to a variety of North American environments

*Source: "The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization," By Brian M. Fagan, professor of anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara*