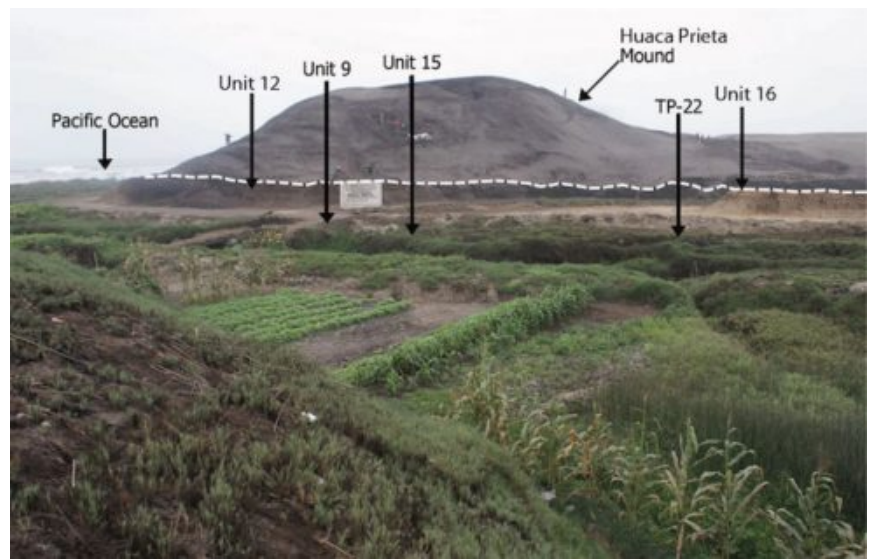




# Peru's northern coast was a hospitable rest stop for early Americans

New excavations by a Vanderbilt-led archaeology team at two exceptionally well-preserved Ice Age sites on the northern coast of Peru provide a rich record of the lives of some of the earliest humans to



populate the Western Hemisphere, and suggest a more leisurely pace of migration down some stretches of the Pacific coast of South America than originally believed.

The finds include stone tools, remains of plants and marine animals including fish and sea lions, and bits of woven rushes, and put together they indicate that Late-Ice Age and Early-Holocene humans, though typically very mobile at that time, were well established in the area for several thousand years.

“It may be that we’ve captured, archeologically, an instance where people just did not move quickly down the coastline but rather settled in for a good long while,” said lead author Tom Dillehay, Rebecca Webb Wilson University Distinguished Professor of Anthropology.

This research is supported by the National Science Foundation, the National Geographic Society and Vanderbilt University and is reported in a paper titled “Simple technologies and diverse food strategies of the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene at Huaca Prieta, Coastal Peru,” published May 24, 2017, in Science Advances.

The excavated sites are sealed and covered by two ritual mounds called Huaca Prieta and Paredones and are located on the Sangamon Terrace, a raised flat, natural platform of land about 1.5 miles long and 15 kilometers west of the Andes.



The mounds are about 7,500 years old, but Dillehay’s team found that an earlier wave of humans had made the terrace their home long before the mound-builders did, arriving at least 15,000 years ago and occupying the area until about 9,000 years ago. This fits with the timeline of other sites being discovered along the Pacific coast of both North- and South-America, reinforcing the theory that one of the ways humans migrated into the Americas was to follow the coast.

Today the Sangamon Terrace sits right on the shoreline, but during the Ice Age, before the glaciers melted, the sea level was much lower and the shore further away—about 15 kilometers to the west.

Second author Steven Goodbred, professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences, used NOAA water depth data and historic sea level data to reconstruct the ancient shoreline.

“We wanted to see how far Huaca Prieta was from the shore 10,000 to 15,000 years ago to see if it made sense for these people to be using marine resources,” he said. “And it did.”



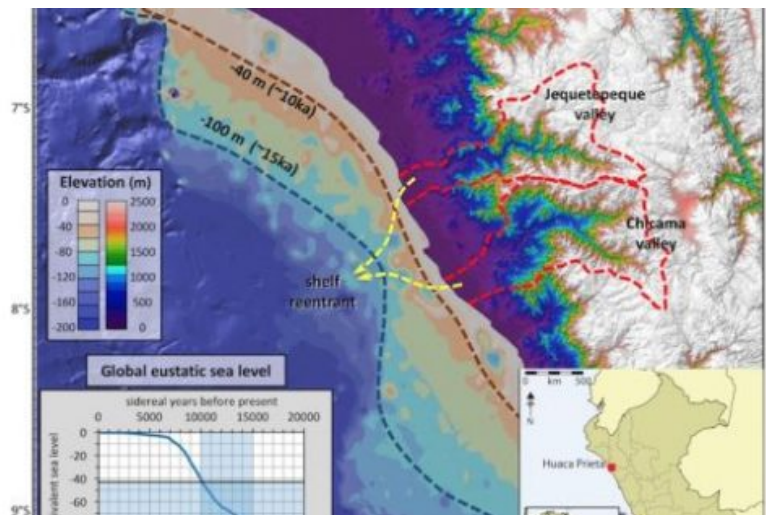
Huaca Prieta was located just at the point where the ancient shoreline was closest to the mountains, which would have been connected by a verdant river valley that led to shallow wetlands and coastal lagoons where people could hunt and fish.

Thanks to the region's arid climate, organic remains were especially well preserved. Dillehay's team discovered that they had a rich, varied diet of marine life from the shoreline and wetlands to the west and wild plants native to the foothills to the east. There were also a few remains of deer and birds from the mountain forests, also to the east, but these appear to have been eaten less frequently.

The marine life included fish, shellfish, sea birds and sea lions. No evidence was found of fishhooks, harpoons or bifacial stone tools, so they were unlikely to have been a seafaring people. Instead, they likely trapped or clubbed marine animals in the wetlands, where they would have washed in with the tide or a storm surge and become stranded.

The plants included avocados, chili peppers and beans, as well as the rushes used to weave the mats found at the site. The presence of food from both environments suggests the people who lived there traveled back and forth in both directions to hunt and gather and bring the food back home to eat.

Once they had collected their ingredients, they would use simple, unifacial stone tools, usually made to order on the spot, to scrape away scales and cut meat and plants.



It was the presence of the distant plants, as well as the presence of a few stone tools made from non-local materials, that tipped Dillehay off to the possibility that the campsites on the Sangamon Terrace endured longer than usual. Coastal migration is generally thought to have happened relatively quickly, Dillehay said, because the next beach is always easy to find and doesn't require a lot of lifestyle adaptation.

But exploring that far into the interior and becoming familiar with such a wide variety of local marine and terrestrial resources wouldn't have made a lot of sense if you weren't planning to stay for very long.

"Our data is indicating that these people pretty intimately knew the different environments of the area, and that takes time, experimentation and knowledge," he said. The north coast of Peru is incredibly rich in marine life, Dillehay said, which may have made it an appealing place to linger.

"What's remarkable is that the lifestyle we describe still exists today," he said. "There are still fisherfolk who work the seashore and wetlands, still using very similar technologies like knocking off a stone flake from a cobble to scrape the scales off fish. So there's a continuity of this very rustic coastal adaptation."

Though far too much time has passed to consider them

descendants of those early inhabitants or even describe them as sharing a culture, Dillehay said, the persistence of these survival strategies over so many millennia offers a unique window into humanity's very distant past.

Editor's note: Based on information provided by Liz Entman at Vanderbilt University's Research News Center. Photos by: Tom Dillehay

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## **Hallan utensilios de 15.000 años de antigüedad en la costa norte de Perú**



Tejido de junco-  
Trozo de tejido de junco de 10.500 años de antigüedad.

Algunos de los primeros pobladores del continente americano se establecieron tranquilamente en el norte de Perú en un período de frecuentes migraciones a lo largo de la costa.

Utensilios de piedra, restos de plantas y de animales marinos

como el pescado o los leones marinos y trozos de tejido de junco que se han conservado durante miles de años gracias al clima árido de la costa norte de Perú. Las últimas excavaciones realizadas por un equipo arqueológico de la Universidad Vanderbilt (Estados Unidos) en Huaca Prieta y en Paredones, en la Terraza Sangamon, revelan las costumbres de algunos de los primeros humanos que poblaron el continente americano. Los hallazgos, de al menos 15.000 años de antigüedad, indican que los primeros pobladores de finales de la Edad de Hielo y comienzos del Holoceno se establecieron tranquilamente en la zona durante miles de años, a pesar de vivir en un período de frecuentes migraciones.

El equipo arqueológico de Tom Dillehay ha descubierto “un ejemplo de un grupo de gente que no se limitó a moverse rápidamente a lo largo de la costa, sino que se asentó durante un buen tiempo”. Y su dieta era rica y variada: pescado, marisco, aves marinas, leones marinos, aguacates, chiles, frijoles... “. La información que hemos recogido indica que estas personas conocían profundamente los diferentes entornos de la zona y eso lleva tiempo, experimentación y conocimiento”, dice Dillehay. “Lo sorprendente es que ese estilo de vida aún existe hoy en día. Todavía hay pescadores que trabajan en la orilla y en los humedales y que utilizan tecnologías muy similares como por ejemplo tallar un guijarro para raspar las escamas del pescado”, añade el arqueólogo y antropólogo norteamericano.



Tejido de

junco-Trozo  
de tejido de  
junco de  
10.500 años  
de  
antigüedad.



Utensilios de  
piedra-  
Utensilios de  
piedra de  
algunos de los  
primeros  
pobladores del  
continente  
americano.



Huaca Prieta-Montículo del  
sitio arqueológico Huaca  
Prieta, en la costa norte de  
Perú.



Excavación profunda -  
Excavación profunda en el montículo de Huaca Prieta.

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## Hace 6.700 años los peruanos ya comíamos 'pop corn'

Hace 6.700 años los habitantes de la costa de Perú ya comían 'pop corn', 1.000 años antes de lo que se pensaba, según un nuevo estudio que divulgó hoy el Museo Nacional Smithsoniano de Washington.

La investigación ha revelado que **las mazorcas de maíz más antiguas que se han hallado**, que tienen entre 6.700 a 3.000 años, fueron **encontradas en Paredones (Nazca) y Huaca Prieta (La Libertad)**, en la árida costa del Perú.

Las características de las mazorcas, las primeras que se han descubierto en América del Sur, indican que **los habitantes de estos lugares comían maíz de varias maneras**, incluyendo las



palomitas de maíz o 'pop corn' y harina de maíz. Sin embargo, este grano no era todavía una parte importante de su dieta.

El grupo de investigación, dirigido por Tom Dillehay de la Universidad de Vanderbilt y Duccio Bonavia de la Academia Nacional de Historia de Perú, encontró también microfósiles de maíz con granos de almidón y fitolitos.

### **ANTIGUO ALIMENTO**

**"El maíz fue cultivado por primera vez en México hace cerca de 9.000 años** a partir de una hierba salvaje llamada teosinte," explica Dolores Piperno, del Museo Smithsonian de Ciencias Naturales y coautora del estudio.

"Nuestros resultados muestran que sólo unos pocos miles de años más tarde llegó el maíz a América del Sur, donde comenzó su evolución en las diferentes variedades que son comunes en la región andina", añadió.

Los indicios encontrados apuntan a que en muchas áreas el maíz llegó antes incluso de que se comenzaran a fabricar recipientes de cerámica.

Comprender las transformaciones de las características de las mazorcas y los granos de los cientos de tipos de maíz que se conocen hoy en día, así como dónde y cuándo se desarrollaron, es todo un reto debido a que **sus restos no están bien preservados en los bosques húmedos tropicales** entre América Central y del Sur, incluyendo a Panamá, las rutas principales por donde se expandió.

"Hay pocos datos disponibles de otros lugares en este período de tiempo, la riqueza de la información morfológica de las mazorcas de maíz y otros restos en esta fecha temprana es muy importante para la comprensión de cómo el maíz se convirtió en el cultivo que hoy conocemos", agregó Piperno.

Fuente: EFE