

Arctic Trek Questioned

By Mike Born

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Bristol, R.I.

A Brown University anthropologist has challenged the popular scientific theory of mass migration from Siberia to North America in ancient times.

Dr. J. Louis Giddings, professor of anthropology and director of the university's Haffenreffer Museum of the American Indian at Bristol, R.I., has found evidence he feels will force a new interpretation concerning the first inhabitants of North America.

"Archaeologists and anthropologists have spoken for centuries of a constant migration of people from Asia to this continent as if they had packs on their backs and knew where they were going," Dr. Giddings said at a recent press conference here.

Long-Time Drift

"On the basis of the last four summers I have spent in northwestern Alaska, where in ancient times a land bridge linked Asia with North America, I feel there was never a steady stream of people moving from the Arctic to the south," he added.

The early inhabitants of upper northwestern Alaska found the climate as livable and food supply as available as it is today, pointed out Dr. Giddings, who is an expert on early Arctic life. Therefore, there was really no reason for these people, who were accustomed to Arctic conditions, to push south.

"I feel what happened was the drifting of people southward over a great span of time, but not a major, organized migration as had been thought in the past," he said. "Actually these people were quite mobile and could have moved back and forth with little difficulty."

Dr. Giddings has taken students from Brown and other universities, his family, and well-known archaeologists with him on his Arctic expeditions.

On the trip this past summer,

Dr. Helge Larsen, an archaeologist and curator of Pacific collections in the Danish National Museum, and Hans-Georg Bandi, director of the Bern, Switzerland, Historical Museum, helped him in uncovering some of the riddles of the ages.

Dr. Giddings has accumulated some 15,000 artifacts during the past four summers and is processing them for exhibition at the museum here.

Traced to 4000 B.C.

"The ancient artifacts we have found are helping archaeologists in filling in the 4,000-year time gaps in Eskimo history," he said.

Among some of the most interesting artifacts found this summer was a great number of diagonally flaked or chipped spear and arrow points.

Dr. Giddings feels the intricate stonework represented could date to 4000 B.C. and was as fine as or better than that of contemporary stonework elsewhere in the world.

Another conclusion he makes

on the basis of this find is that the similarities between the stonework of these people and that elsewhere on the continent were the result of the passing on of techniques from people to people rather than a large-scale migration.

In telling of the find, Dr. Giddings said, "One afternoon I returned to camp just as our two Eskimo helpers were arriving from diggings for artifacts. I asked them if they had found anything and they said 'Maybe.' And then, one arrow point at a time, they began unloading their pockets with a completely straight-faced expression.

Major Discovery

"Finally, after they played their little act for all it was worth, they took the remaining spear and arrow points from their pockets while the rest of us stared in amazement," he added. "It was one of the largest finds ever discovered in one area in North America."

Dr. Giddings explained there are a great many old beaches found in definable series in this area of Alaska, beaches which were the habitats of the early Arctic people.

"As the sea receded, a beach ridge was exposed and it is here we find important specimens and artifacts to establish actual dates of the different cultures," he said. "This is called beach ridge dating and serves as a way of projecting into the early life of man on this continent."

The artifacts found by Dr. Giddings's expeditions have come from the digging up of ancient house sites, burials, and caches or storage pits.

Present-Day Finding

Dr. Giddings has found that some of the answers or possible leads to answers concerning early Arctic people have come from studying the present-day Eskimo. Noting the mobility of today's Eskimo, Dr. Giddings feels that this pattern must have been set by early ancestors.

"One important thing I think we are learning," we can't compare the cultures of the early people in North America until we have more answers."

Excavation Lures Reindeer

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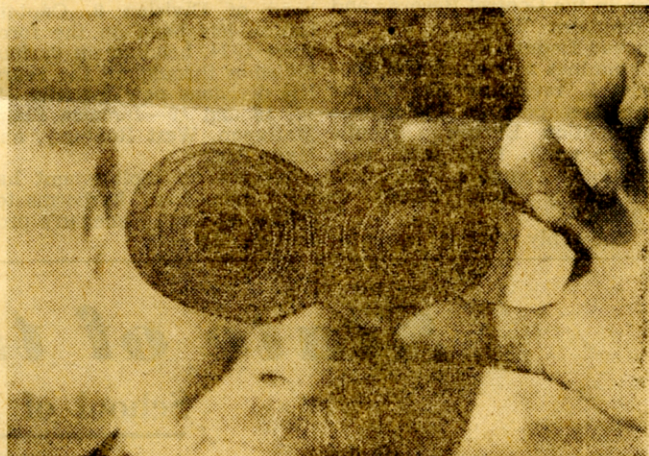
Bristol, R.I.

Nature can sometimes get in the way of scientific investigations.

Dr. Louis J. Giddings's expedition found this to be true last summer while hard at work digging up remains of ancient cultures on the beaches of northwestern Alaska.

"We were so excited uncovering artifacts that we didn't notice we had visitors," Dr. Giddings related. "I looked up from the pit and was surprised to find that our group had been completely surrounded by a herd of reindeer, who wandered up to see what on earth we were doing."

"Finally two Eskimos, in charge of the herd, chased the friendly inquirers away."



Ancient Sunglasses

Early inhabitants of northwestern Alaska carved these ivory goggles some 2,000 years ago to cut down snow glare.