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ARCHEOLOGY

WHO OR WHAT EXTERMINATED THE PLEISTOCENE MEGAFUNA?

This question has been debated for decades. The most popular answer blames an influx of humans to North America across the Bering land bridge about 12,000 years ago. P. Martin advanced this "blitzkrieg" hypothesis in 1967. The runner-up theory is a catastrophic change in climate. The North American Pleistocene megafauna---the mammoths, the mastadons, the giant sloths, etc.---succumbed to one or the other. But which?

The May 9, 2003, issue of *Science* reaffirms the human blitzkrieg hypothesis citing new evidence. On the other hand, the May 2003 number of *Natural History* absolves humanity of megafauna overkill and shifts the blame to a resurgence of the Ice Age, also based on new findings. The simultaneity of the two authoritative, contradictory articles may be amusing to the anomalist, but it also illustrates how fuzzy is our picture of the timing of the peopling of North America.

First, the key points made in the *Science* article:

- In the mud layers at four sites in New York, there is a clear-cut progression of: (1) megafaunal collapse as seen in fungal spores; (2) spikes in human produced charcoal; and (3) a later blast of Ice Age weather.
- The progression (1) to (2) is also seen in Madagascar, where (3) did not occur at all.
- Megafaunal extinctions in Australia, New Zealand, Oceania, and elsewhere were also coincident with the arrival of human hunters.

On the other side of the controversy, as promulgated in *Natural History*:

- At 76 North American Clovis sites, only 14 revealed signs of megafauna butchering, and then only of mammoths and mastadons. There were no signs that the Clovis people actively hunted the other 33 species of megafauna that perished at the same time.
- The North American megafaunal extinctions coincide with those in Asia

and Europe where humans had lived and hunted these animals for millennia without exterminating them.

- Finally, the opinion that a "widespread environmental event" was the probable cause of the extinctions.

(Kerr, Richard A.; "Megafauna Died from Big Kill, Not Big Chill," *Science*, 300: 885, 2003. Reeb, Stephan; "Not Guilty," *Natural History*, 112:16, May 2003)

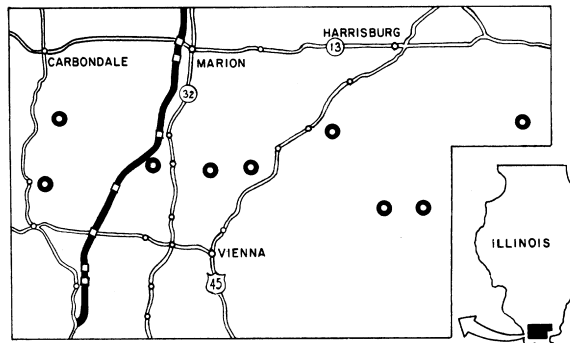
ILLINOIS'S ANCIENT MAGINOT LINE

Mainstream archeologists rarely mention the 100-mile-long string of stone forts and walls that stretch across southern Illinois. Between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, fortified hilltops protected an unidentified population against some very real threat. The threat had to be dire to induce men and women to drag innumerable large stones from the river bottoms to their present elevated positions.

In the latest issue of *Ancient American*, W. May elaborates on this impressive defense line. He focuses on the section called the Lewis Wall near Makanda.

The Lewis Wall bisects the top of a steep cliff, running on a linear east-west axis for 285 feet. Six feet high at its highest point, with an average thickness of five feet, the structure is a dry stone rampart containing an estimated forty thousand stones, all of them apparently conveyed by hand up the sheer incline from the dry streambed two hundred feet below. Stone cairns, or ceremonial rock piles, appear at the rear entrance. The structure was raised ingeniously by fitting together mostly flat stones chosen for moderate size and a rough although uniform fit, the same technique used in building the other walls.

Of course, many stones in the Illinois stone walls have been appropriated by European settlers. Some walls were once



Some of the stone forts distributed east-west across southern Illinois. The Lewis Wall is located at the circle just south of Carbondale.

six to ten feet high and extended up to 600 feet. Organic material lodged in the walls yield a wide range of Precolumbian radiocarbon dates: 50, 400, and 900 A.D.

(May, Wayne; Stone Walls of Southern Illinois," *Ancient American*, #50, p. 3, 2003)

Comment. The wide span of radiocarbon dates poses a problem: It seems unlikely that the Illinois walls were built over a period of nearly 900 years. Perhaps some of the dates are incorrect.

A COLD BARRIER TO INTERNAL PARASITES

It was once believed that Old World human internal parasites first arrived in the New World with Columbus. However, studies of Precolumbian burials have proven that the indigenous peoples of the Americas had already been afflicted with all manner of hookworms, hairworms, giant roundworms, and related disgusting internal inhabitants.

The problem arising is that some of these Pre-Columbian New World parasites are strictly tropical species. It is most unlikely that those invaders from Asia crossing the cold Bering land bridge 12,000 years ago would have carried these tropical species in their viscera. Rather, these warm-climate parasites probably came by boat from ports located in lower latitudes, such as Southeast Asia, Africa, or the Mediterranean.

(Jett, Stephen; "Pre-Columbian Trans-Oceanic Contacts: The Present State of the Evidence," *NEARA Journal*, 36:4, Winter 2003) NEARA = New England Antiquities Research Association.

Comment. Jett's article also summarizes the evidence for Pre-Columbian diffusion from studies in human genetics, the distribution of cultivated plants, languages, and ancient inscriptions. It's a voluminous and impressive dossier.

ASTRONOMY

ARE THERE NO OTHER EARTHS OUT THERE?

The expectation of science-in-general has always been that circling the billions upon billions of stars are at least millions upon millions of planets. And, of course, some of these multitudinous planets will be