

Paleoindian-age sites on the Peruvian coast

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Due to lower sea levels during the Terminal Pleistocene and the presumed location of many early archaeological sites on the now-drowned continental margin, archaeological information on early coastal lifeways and climate is scarce. However, recent site survey strategies stressing areas of narrow shelf have permitted the discovery of several maritime-adapted, Paleoindian-age (Terminal Pleistocene) sites on the Peru coast. Coupled with prior studies of sites in interior coastal plain settings, these new discoveries point to diverse lifeways and variable climate during the early human settlement of western South America. In this presentation, I review data on lifeways and climate from early sites in this region. These include the fishing settlements of Quebrada Jaguay, Ring Site, and Quebrada Tacahuay in southern Peru, where the shelf is narrow; interior coastal plain sites of the Paiján complex in northern Peru, where the shelf is relatively wide; and the possibly mixed economy (shoreline gathering plus hunting) hinted at by the Amotape campsites, clustered around the Talara Tar Pits in northernmost Peru, where the shelf is again narrow.