

Washington State History

Mr. Aitken - Richey Clovis Cache

What does the Richey Clovis Cache tell us about the earliest people to live in the Pacific Northwest?

Richey Clovis Cache

In 1987, while installing an irrigation pipe through an apple orchard near East Wenatchee, workers uncovered a cache (a collection of items) of prehistoric tools known as *Clovis points* buried below the surface. Clovis points are spearheads that were used by prehistoric people to hunt.

Mack and Susan Richey and Rick and Joanne Roberts jointly owned the East Wenatchee orchard at the time the discovery was made. The site has been variously known as the *Richey-Roberts cache*, the *Richey Clovis cache*, and the *East Wenatchee Clovis cache*.



Ash Over Artifact

In 1988, scientists from Washington State University examined the site. Hill Williams, a reporter for *The Seattle Times*, described the discovery after nearly a dozen stone spear points had been unearthed:

"The find, being excavated by anthropologists from Washington State University, could shed new light on the first people to appear south of the vast ice sheets in what is now Washington state. It could turn out to be the oldest evidence of humans in the state. The spear points were of a style used more than about 11,000 years ago. In addition, ash from an ancient volcanic eruption is mixed with the find, helping date the artifacts. The people in those times lived in a near-glacial environment still populated by huge animals that would become extinct: giant sloths, camels, oversized forms of bison and bear, and mastodon. The artifacts are a distinctive style known as Clovis points. Peter Mehringer, a WSU anthropologist, said the discovery has turned up more of the Clovis points than have been found anywhere else, even in the Southwest, where the Clovis people used them to hunt mammoth." (April 12, 1988).

The volcanic eruption appears to have come from Glacier Peak. Radiocarbon dating indicates this eruption occurred about 13,000 years ago.

Clovis

The name "Clovis" refers to a small town in New Mexico where many early artifact discoveries were made. Prehistoric people across the portion of North America not covered by ice sheets made the stone spear points known as Clovis points about 11,500 years ago.

The East Wenatchee cache predates Kennewick man (found near the Columbia River in 1996) by about 2,000 years and Marmes man (found near the Palouse River in 1968) by about 1,000 years.

In addition to spear points, other artifacts found at the East Wenatchee site include a chopper, scrapers, blades, knives, an engraving tool, and three flaked stone axes. Some of the artifacts tested positive for the presence of blood, and one knife tested positive for human blood. This could indicate an accidental self-inflicted cut during the butchering process. Michael Gramly, chief archaeologist during the 1990 dig, hypothesized that the artifacts were a cache left for use during a fall or winter hunt but for some reason never retrieved.



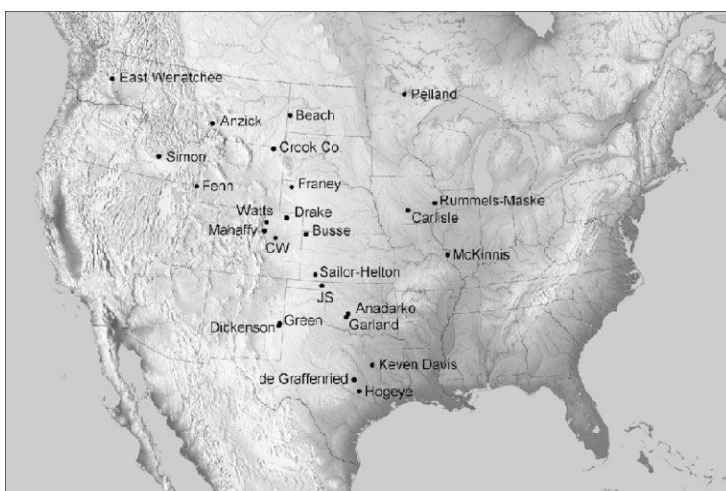
Some of the Clovis points found in East Wenatchee are more than nine inches long, making them some of the largest found anywhere to date. They are variously made of agate, quartz, and mastodon bone. Nearly 70 other artifacts were found during the two later digs, the most Clovis points yet found a single site.

Artifacts Under Apples

After a controversy, the site was sealed off. In an agreement between the Richeys and the Historical Society, the site would not be excavated again until 2007. No new digs have happened since then.

The extent of the East Wenatchee Clovis cache has not yet been known, nor has it been determined whether the points and other artifacts were used as hunting tools or as ceremonial objects. Presumably the artifacts identified so far may only be the beginning of what future digs will reveal about prehistoric life and the area's early inhabitants.

[Excerpt from HistoryLink.org, edited by Mr. Aitken for school use.]



Map of Clovis sites throughout the U.S. (from ResearchGate.net)