

[« back](#)

Study: Native Americans Weren't the First

By Jennifer Viegas, *Discovery News*

type size: [A] [A] [A]

Sept. 6, 2004 — DNA analysis of skulls found in Baja California that belonged to an extinct tribe called the Pericues reveal that the Pericues were not related to Native Americans and that they probably predated Native Americans in settling the Americas, according to an announcement Monday.

The finding, released at the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BA) Festival of Science in Exeter, England, adds support to a theory that a number of groups arrived in the Americas via different routes and at varying times, possibly as early as 25,000 years ago.

The study also suggests that the two oldest known Americans — Peñon woman and Kennewick Man — might have belonged to the Pericues tribe.

Even before the DNA analysis, Silvia Gonzalez, lead author of the study and a geoarchaeologist from Liverpool John Moores University, noted that the Pericues skulls were long and narrow, as opposed to the more broad and round features found in early Native American skulls.

"Because of their skull morphology, long and narrow (dolicocephalic) the Pericues could be related to the oldest Americans known, which are Peñon Woman in the Basin of Mexico at 12,755 before the present, and Kennewick Man at 9,700 years old," Gonzalez told *Discovery News* just before Monday's announcement.

"Hence, if this was true, they would be older than the Native Indians. The oldest dated Pericue material is only 3,000 years before the present, although there are cave paintings in Baja California dated to 7,500 BP and Clovis points that must be 11,000-11,500 years old."

The genetic study suggests that the Pericues did not originate in Northern Asia, where many experts believe Native Americans first came from. Instead, Gonzalez said the Pericues are closer to the ancient populations of southern Asia, Australia, and the South Pacific Rim.

The surprising link to early Australasian-Melanesian people could mean that the first Americans arrived in the New World in some kind of floatcraft that traveled over the Pacific Ocean.

"A coastal Pacific migration route is possible," Gonzalez said.

She explained that the Pericues were a hunter-gatherer society that lived on shellfish, fish, cacti and other plants in the desert area of Baja California. Objects found in the area suggest that the Pericues used stone tools.

Gonzalez indicated that they had a complex burial system involving mortuary-like burial areas located both along the coast and in caves. She also noted they also used wooden spear throwers, and likely painted bones with red ochre, as early decorated shells and pearls have been found in Baja.

"The missionary descriptions indicated that the men were naked and the women wore grass skirts, and they were very tall and slim," Gonzalez added. "They became extinct during the 18th century due to the lifestyle changes imposed by the missionaries to a sedentary way of life."

Chris Stringer, head of human origins at The Natural History Museum London, told *Discovery News*, "This work is very important in adding further weight to the idea that the first inhabitants of the Americas did not resemble present-day Native Americans.

"These finds are physically distinct and some Mexican fossils have been dated close to the earliest known human occupation of the Americas," he said.

He added, "However, it is difficult to trace their point of origin as people 10,000 or 20,000 years ago did not look like their modern counterparts in many parts of the world, including Africa, Europe, and China.

"It is likely that southeast Asia 20,000 years ago was inhabited by people who more closely resembled present-day Polynesians or Australian aborigines so this could indeed be a source for the first Americans. They could have taken a coastal route to get there around the North Pacific — it seems unlikely that they came directly across the Pacific."

Silvia Gonzalez believes several migrations took place, with people coming from North East Siberia, the Western Pacific, and even from Euro

So far, the fossil database in the Americas, beyond the more recent Native American finds, has proven to be quite sparse, perhaps due to weatl related erosion of remains. Gonzalez hopes future DNA studies, craniometrics (skull analysis), and additional evidence will shed more light on Pericues and other early Americans.

[« back](#)

Picture: DC

Contributors: Jennifer Viega

By visiting this site, you agree to the terms and conditions of our [Visitor Agreement](#). Please read. [Privacy Polic](#)

[Copyright © 2004 Discovery Communications Ir](#)

The leading global real-world media and entertainment compan

What's On
Tonight
TV Schedule ↻

Shop
Discovery
Store
Go Now ↻



[Discovery Channel](#) [TLC](#) [Animal Planet](#) [Travel Channel](#) [Discovery Health](#) [Discovery Store](#)

discoverynews.com

[Site Index](#)

Search



September 06, 2004 EDT

[Back to Main](#)

[Advertisement](#)

discovery news

[Photo Zoom](#)



Pictures: AP/Perfect Image/James Chatters |

Kennewick Man: Not Native American?
Above is a clay model of the head of Kennewick Man, based on a 9,200-year-old skull. DNA studies reveal that the ancient man, long claimed as a Native American, may in fact be related to the Pericues.

Pictures: AP/Perfect Image/James Chatters |