Monte Verde, Chile

The earliest evidence of human activity in the Western Hemisphere was uncovered in Monte Verde, Chile. Radiocarbon dating of bones and charcoal at this site tells us that people lived here about 33,000 years ago. This small group of people made their home on the banks of a small creek approximately 35 miles from the Pacific Ocean.

This site was originally excavated by in 1973 by Tom Dillehay and Dr. Mario Pino who were professors at Universidad Austral de Chile at the time. Numerous stones the size of an egg were found. The stones were probably for sling as well as for making a bola. Bola's were made of two rocks tied to a leather strap. When it was thrown it would wrap around the animals legs leaving it defenseless. Also, Tom and Mario found the remains of six mastodons, who are extinct cousins of the elephant, grinding stones, hammer stones, scrapers, digging sticks, projectile points, and the remains of many plant foods including wild potatoes.

In addition, the Tom and Mario discovered the remains of rectangular huts, which were probably the oldest dwellings ever discovered. Primarily, their homes were constructed out of wood. The foundation was made out of sand and gravel and the floors were made of rough-cut hardwood planks that were held together with stakes. Wooden poles were used to frame the walls, which were covered in animal skin. In all, they discovered 12 separate rooms. Inside the rooms the archaeologists found more tools, and plant remains. Largely, cooking was a community responsibility, and it was done around two large hearths.

A second site was found at the western end of the Monte Verde site. This hut was “Y” shaped and had a foundation of sand and gravel. It also had a raised platform floor, and animal skin walls. At this site they uncovered various medicinal plants and a large concentration of hearths. This may have been used as a ceremonial center. Some archaeologists believe that not only was this area was used for shamanistic healing, but also for ritual feasting.

Largely, the early Monte Verdeans were hunters and gatherers. They hunted birds, and other small game as well as the occasional elephant. They also ate berries, nuts, wild fruits, roots, seeds, and leafy vegetables. Archaeologists also believe that the Mesa Verdeans obtained plants from outside areas that matured throughout the year. This gave them something extremely important, a reliable food source. This idea is in direct conflict of those who believe that all hunters and gatherers were always migratory.

Besides, Monte Verde there is little evidence of human occupation in Chile that can be dated this far back. The next oldest sites are found at Taguatagua and Quero, Chile. These sites date back more than 11,000 years. Taguatagua and Quero excavations yielded the remains of now extinct horses and mastodons as well as various tools. Surprisingly, there is very little evidence that supports the existence of life in the Andes Mountains before 11,000 years ago.
Monte Verde Questions

Answer using complete sentences

1. How long have people lived in Monte Verde, Chile?

2. What were the stones found at Monte Verde used for?

3. State five things that were excavated at Mont Verde.

4. Describe the huts that the scientist found at this site,

5. Describe the second site that was “Y” shaped and state its probable use.

6. What did Monte Verdeans hunt?

7. Name five other things that they ate?

8. What are the next two oldest sites found in Chile and how old are they?

9. What types of things were excavated in Quero and Taguatagua?

10. When do scientists believe that people first began living in the Andes?