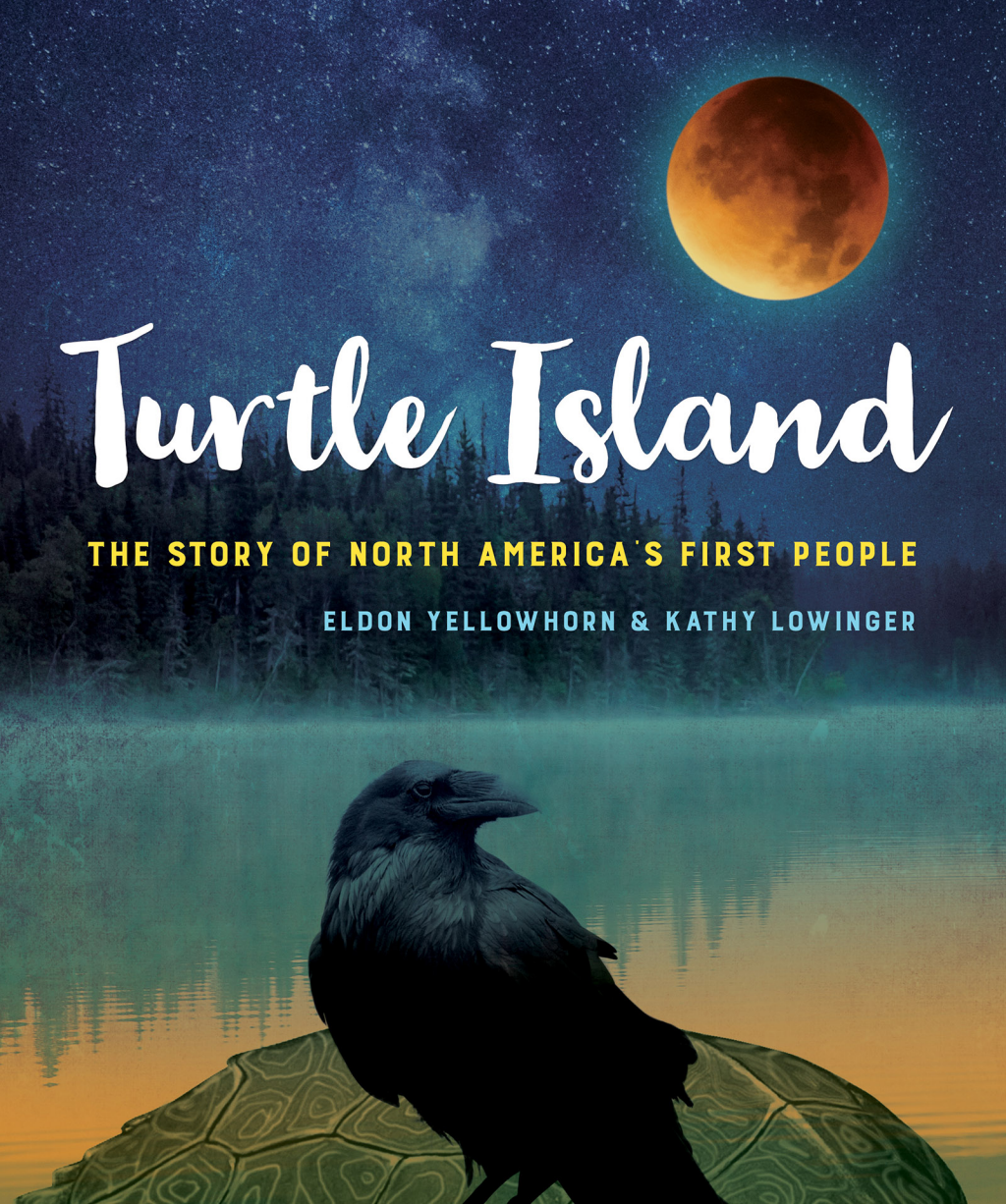


The background of the book cover is a composite image. At the top, a large, glowing orange and red full moon hangs in a dark blue, starry night sky. Below the sky is a dense forest of evergreen trees. In the foreground, a body of water reflects the moon and the forest. A black crow is perched on the back of a large turtle, which is partially visible at the bottom of the frame. The turtle's shell has a green and brown pattern.

Turtle Island

THE STORY OF NORTH AMERICA'S FIRST PEOPLE

ELDON YELLOWHORN & KATHY LOWINGER



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annick press
toronto + berkeley



To Presley & Jerehelle —EY
For Pat —KL

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and Kathy Lowinger (text)

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CONTENTS

A Glimpse into the Past 4

The Beginning

Turtle Island 6

Chapter 1

Finding Our Way
to the Past 9

Chapter 2

North America in
the Days of Ice 15

Chapter 3

Listening to the Land 29

Chapter 4

Ideas Spread 43

Chapter 5

Change-Makers 55

Chapter 6

First Contact 67

Chapter 7

In the Year 1491 75

Chapter 8

After the End
of the World 87

Chapter 9

Healing the Circle 101

Selected Sources 109

Further Reading 110

Image Credits 111

Index 113

A Glimpse into the Past

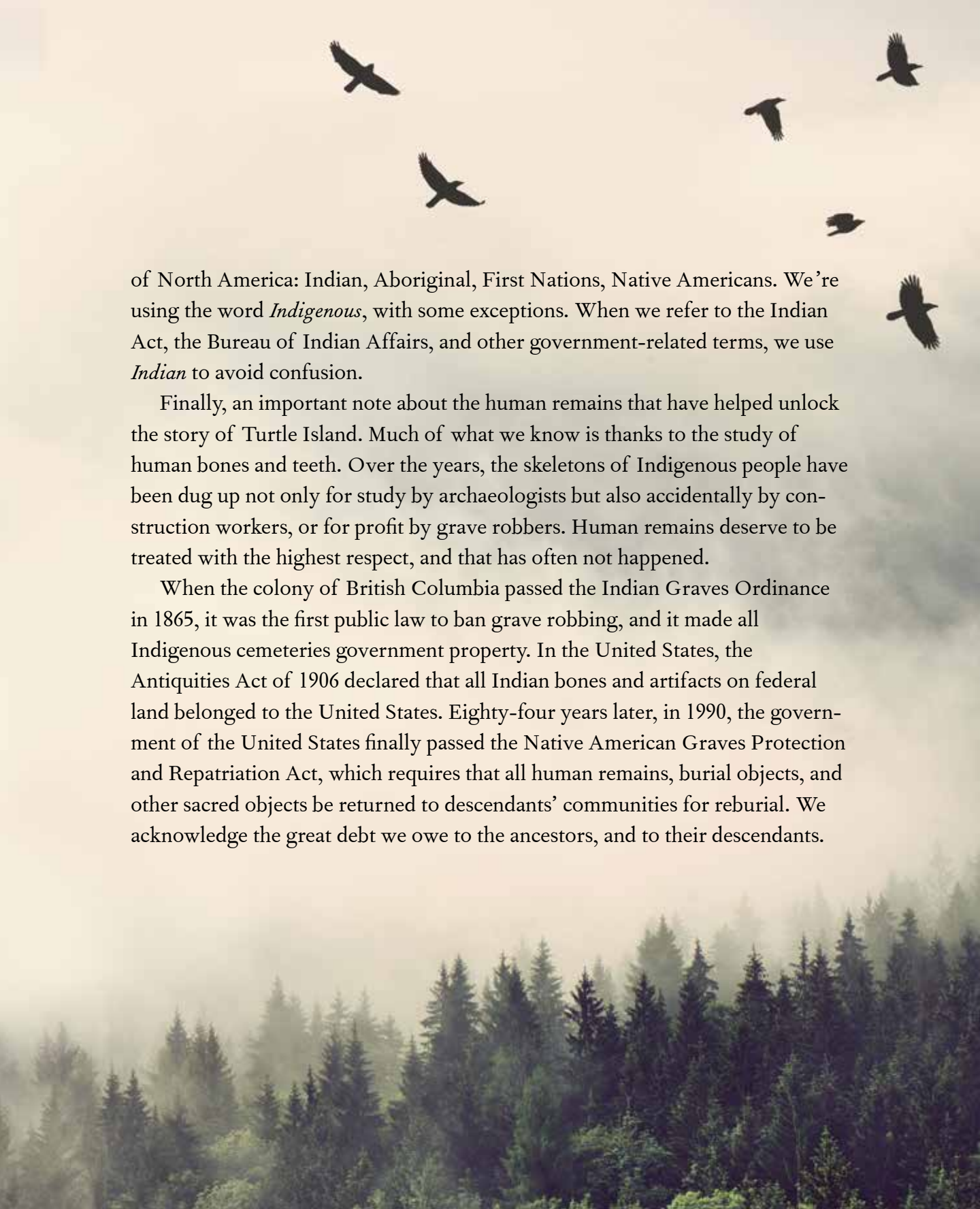
THIS IS AN UNUSUAL KIND of history book. Many people lived on this land from the beginning of human history to 1491. We could not possibly do justice to the stories of all those people, but we will give you a glimpse into their fascinating past, rich with accomplishment and tradition.

This isn't the kind of history where one event leads to another along a straight line. We do follow a time line of sorts—from the Ice Age to 1491, with concluding chapters that bring us up to the present. In between, the dates are only a rough guide, and—before 1491—are all approximate unless otherwise noted. In places, we tell the story through myths, and we don't ascribe even rough dates for those. Instead of telling Turtle Island's story through dates, we look at what life was like in different places across North America to celebrate the wisdom and ingenuity of the people.

Another thing you'll find unusual about this book is the lack of names. That goes for individuals, groups, and places. We simply don't have names to attach to the engineers who built Cahokia or the artists who painted the images in the Lower Pecos or the inventors of the ovens that turned a poisonous plant into something good to eat. We aren't always sure what people called themselves, the groups they lived in, their neighbors, or their land. Names are very powerful, so instead of misusing them, we have steered away when we could. However, you will see the names of several archaeologists because we do know who they are.

There was no such thing as Canada, the United States, or Mexico. The borders we know today didn't exist, but to help you find your way, we've used current names of places.

The most important name is what to call the people who are the subject of this book. You've probably heard different ways to describe the original people

The background of the entire page is a misty, forested landscape with evergreen trees. In the upper half, several birds are shown in flight as dark silhouettes against the lighter sky. There are five birds in the upper section and one larger bird on the right side, partially overlapping the text area.

of North America: Indian, Aboriginal, First Nations, Native Americans. We're using the word *Indigenous*, with some exceptions. When we refer to the Indian Act, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other government-related terms, we use *Indian* to avoid confusion.

Finally, an important note about the human remains that have helped unlock the story of Turtle Island. Much of what we know is thanks to the study of human bones and teeth. Over the years, the skeletons of Indigenous people have been dug up not only for study by archaeologists but also accidentally by construction workers, or for profit by grave robbers. Human remains deserve to be treated with the highest respect, and that has often not happened.

When the colony of British Columbia passed the Indian Graves Ordinance in 1865, it was the first public law to ban grave robbing, and it made all Indigenous cemeteries government property. In the United States, the Antiquities Act of 1906 declared that all Indian bones and artifacts on federal land belonged to the United States. Eighty-four years later, in 1990, the government of the United States finally passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which requires that all human remains, burial objects, and other sacred objects be returned to descendants' communities for reburial. We acknowledge the great debt we owe to the ancestors, and to their descendants.

The Beginning

Turtle Island

FROM THE HAUDENOSAUNEE TRADITION

The Story of Sky Woman

Long before the world was created, there was an island in the sky where the Sky People lived. One day, a tree toppled over and tore a hole in the sky. A pregnant Sky Woman grew curious about the hole. She came near—so near that she tumbled through the opening. She grabbed at tobacco and strawberry plants, but they didn't stop her fall. She was still clutching the tobacco and strawberries when a flock of birds swooped to catch her.

The birds set her down on the Great Turtle's back. Other animals dove to the ocean floor and brought mud up to the surface. They packed the mud on the Great Turtle's back. Over and over, they dove down until they had brought up enough mud to make room for trees and plants to grow. Then they dove some more. When they were finished, they had made a whole world on the Great Turtle's back. Sky Woman gave birth, and when she did she became the mother of the people. The land has been called Turtle Island ever since.

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE, who live around the Great Lakes, have told Sky Woman's story for countless generations. Turtle Island is what they call the land that was created thanks to Sky Woman and the Great Turtle. Of course, many other groups of people have lived in North America, each of them with their own name for their home.





*North
America*

*Pacific
Ocean*

*Atlantic
Ocean*

Finding Our Way to the Past

THE WAY TO TURTLE ISLAND

- ★ The Story Myths Tell
- ★ The Story Science Tells
- ★ The Story Your Imagination Tells
- ★ Together, they are a path
that takes us into the past

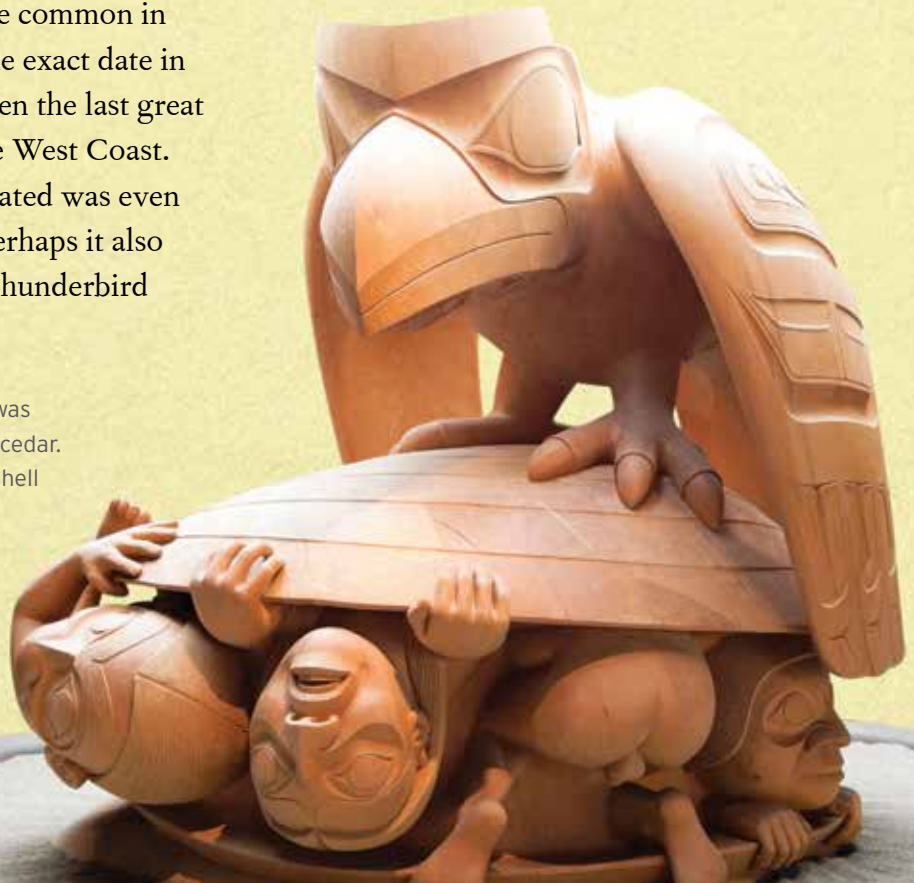
THE STORY MYTHS TELL

Even though thousands of years have gone by, we have ways to step back into the past. One way is by listening to ancient myths, or traditional stories, that are handed down from one generation to another. Writing and papermaking were not traditions among the peoples of North America. Instead, the past is captured in myths, preserved for us thanks to memory and storytelling.

Some myths are based on facts, some tell about the deeds of gods and heroes, and some describe rituals. Creation myths such as the story of Sky Woman tell how the world came to be. Others explain what happens to us after we die. And still others tell us how we should behave during the time in between. Whether they are funny, frightening, or full of information, myths are sacred to the people who tell them, listen to them, and pass them on. Myths don't just belong to the past—Indigenous people still tell the ancient stories because they value their spoken traditions as a vital way to understand history.

For instance, geologists know that earthquakes were common in the past. We know the exact date in late January 1700 when the last great earthquake shook the West Coast. The tsunami it generated was even recorded in Japan. Perhaps it also inspired the story “Thunderbird and Whale.”

Bill Reid's *Raven and the First Men* was carved from a giant block of yellow cedar. In Haida myth, Raven found a clamshell on the seashore, with tiny people emerging from it. He coaxed them out so that they could share in the wonderful world.



FROM THE TRADITION OF THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHWEST PACIFIC COAST

Thunderbird and Whale

Thunderbird and Whale were gigantic. Whale was so enormous that every living thing in the world could rest on top of him. As for Thunderbird, he was also huge. He could carry a whole lake on his broad back. He was so mighty that if he shifted a single feather, he could unleash thunder and make the lake send a torrent of water cascading to earth.

One day, Thunderbird landed on Whale's back. He dug his sharp talons into Whale's flesh. Desperate to dislodge Thunderbird, Whale dove to the deepest part of the ocean. But though Thunderbird was dragged underwater, he wouldn't let go. As the two struggled and thrashed, their battle unleashed a mighty buckling of the earth and ocean.

The story of Thunderbird and Whale is a memorable way to tell the story of an earthquake and a tsunami.



A Mohawk elder is speaking at a council meeting. In her hand, she holds a story belt, woven with reminders of what she wishes to say.



Storytellers sometimes used stone carvings, shells, rugs, or pottery to illustrate the stories they were telling or to jog their memories. This wampum belt is a reminder for the Haudenosaunee people, who live near the Great Lakes. Special symbols and details of events were woven into wampum belts to act as cues to the storyteller.

THE STORY SCIENCE TELLS

Archaeology is a science that gives us another way to discover the past. Archaeologists study physical remains to piece together what happened thousands, or even millions, of years ago.

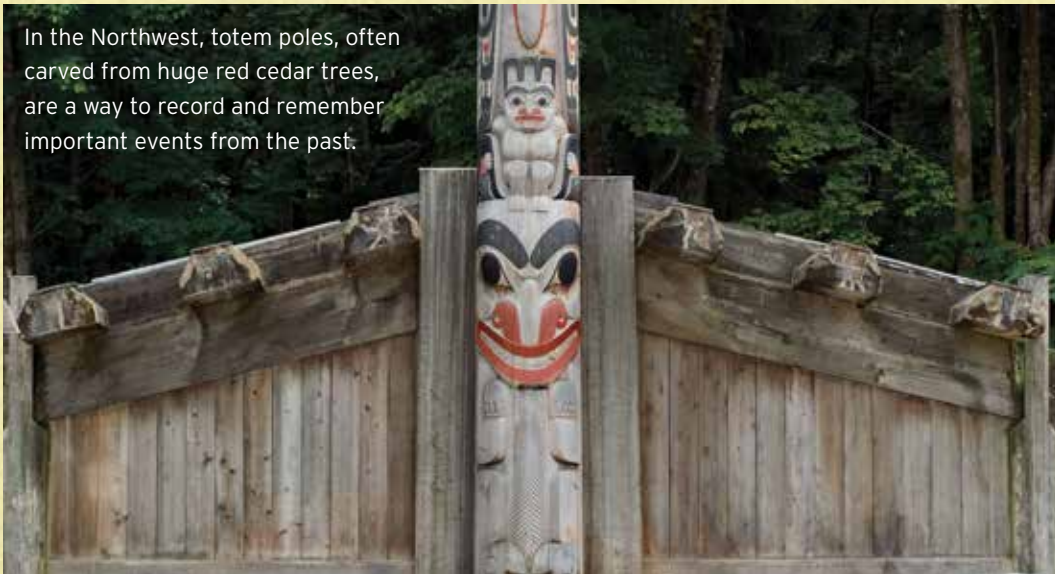
We leave traces behind after we are gone: our tools, clothing, art, garbage, and even bones and teeth. Over time, floods or landslides, or layers of earth, rocks, or water can cover those traces. Archaeologists uncover those signs of life. They dig in the ground, dive underwater, and even use satellite technology to find clues to the past. One small piece of bone or stone can be like a book full of information, if you know how to read it.

HOW OLD IS IT? SCIENCE ANSWERS THE QUESTION

Relative Dating

Archaeologists use relative dating to tell the age of an artifact. Let's say you find a porcelain tea-cup decorated with violets. If you find porcelain saucers nearby that are the same color, are made of the same material, and have similar decorations of violets, relative dating might lead you to assume the cup and saucers are the same age. Often relative dating takes into account layers of findings, assuming that older objects will be found buried below things that are newer. But relative dating has limits. For instance, soil and the objects in it can be moved by flowing water, construction work, and even worms.

In the Northwest, totem poles, often carved from huge red cedar trees, are a way to record and remember important events from the past.



Absolute Dating

Absolute dating methods are much more accurate.

RADIOCARBON DATING: The tissues of every living thing absorb ordinary carbon and radioactive carbon. At death, the radioactive carbon starts to decay. Because scientists know the rate of decay, they can tell when death occurred.

POTASSIUM ARGON DATING: Rocks and stone can't be dated with radioactive carbon, but scientists know that when rocks are formed they contain tiny amounts of radioactive substance. From the time a rock is created, the radioactive material starts to disappear. Because we know how long that loss takes, we can tell when the rock was formed.

LUMINESCENCE DATING: This method is used to date artifacts such as pottery. If a sample is burned at high heat, it will give off a different color depending on its age. This is an accurate method, but it also means damaging the artifact.

THE STORY YOUR IMAGINATION TELLS

There's one more way to discover the past, and that is by using your own imagination. You can begin to understand what it was like to live in a different time or place only if you imagine yourself there. Your imagination can fill in the gaps between myths and science to help make long-ago people come alive to you: What do you think they cared about? What did they think was funny?

What songs did they sing? What hopes and dreams did they have?

Myths, science, and imagination—together, they form a map of Turtle Island.



Archaeology students at Nipissing University work on an excavation site on Nipissing First Nation territory.



Arctic Ocean

Beringia

Siberia

Bering Sea

North America

Meadowcroft

Pacific Ocean

Japan

Monte Verde

Yucatán

North America in the Days of Ice

100,000 to 13,000 years ago

THE ICE AGE

★ When—and how—did people first come to North America?

★ Visit the Ice Age:
the land, the animals, and the people

ARRIVAL

A Mystery Story

Nobody agrees on exactly when or how the story of human life in North America begins. Archaeological evidence, such as bones and stone tools, tells us that human beings had to cross Asia to get to North America from Africa. We can only guess why. Perhaps they were fleeing enemies, or maybe they were following herds of game animals—or maybe they just wanted to know what lay beyond the next hill or river.

We may never know why people arrived in North America, but we are beginning to learn when and how they came.

DID THEY COME BY LAND?

Think of the very highest mountains you can name: Denali, Everest, Kilimanjaro. Around 110,000 years ago, those mountains were invisible under the thick layer of ice that covered much of the earth. The ice was 3.2 km (2 miles) thick in places, and so forbidding and cold that nothing could live on it. So much water was locked up in the ice that sea levels were far lower

A TIME CAPSULE

The first ancestors of humanity, called *hominins*, lived around 6 million years ago. This seems like a long time, but in terms of the earth's history—about 4 billion years—it is the blink of an eye. Hominins branched into different groups, and around 200,000 years ago one of those branches became our direct ancestors, *Homo sapiens*. We know this from bones and teeth that have been found in Africa. Our ancestors began to spread out from Africa 75,000 years ago, eventually reaching all the other continents.

than they are now. The seas that remained were frigid because they were studded with icebergs that had broken off the ice fields.

As the sea level dropped, a new land we call Beringia appeared, joining Asia and Alaska. It is underwater now, but Beringia was once a huge expanse crisscrossed by rivers and covered in grasslands. Though it is sometimes called a land bridge, Beringia stretched 1,609 km (1,000 miles) from north to south.

Beringia was warm enough to live in for humans and the game they hunted. Generations of hunters followed animals farther and farther east until, without realizing it, they had reached a new continent, at least 14,000 years ago.

Once people got across Beringia to what is now called Alaska, they would have found their way blocked by cold, barren areas that led to immense fields of ice. When the Ice Age was coming to an end around 13,000 years ago, a passage opened up through the ice fields. Animals and the people who hunted them now had a path to follow south, and they kept going, right to the farthest tip of South America.

An artist imagines people walking across Beringia. It took many generations of people gradually moving east as they followed game. Animals and humans must have stayed away from the ice fields because there were no plants and no game to eat there, and there was always the danger of sudden floods.



NEW EVIDENCE SHAKES AN OLD THEORY

The theory that the only way south was by foot through the ice passage has been turned upside down, thanks in part to new research methods that allow archaeologists to uncover signs of human life that are far south of that ice-free corridor, and far apart from each other and from Beringia.

Meadowcroft, Pennsylvania

On November 12, 1955, a farmer named Albert Miller out walking his fields near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, found some old bones in a groundhog burrow. His find led to the discovery of what was soon known as Meadowcroft Rockshelter, a site that changed our ideas of how people settled North America. American archaeologist James Adovasio began to dig at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter and eventually unearthed millions of signs left by human beings—bits of bones and stones, charcoal from fire pits, and even scraps of weaving. Radiocarbon dating showed that these artifacts were anywhere from 16,000 to 19,000 years old—in other words, from the Ice Age. The ice fields were swept by endless roaring winds, and from time to time, floods of water gushed out from under the ice, drowning everything in their path. Crossing them would have been an impossible challenge for those first people.

And yet humans were sitting in a rock shelter in Meadowcroft, roasting deer on a spit, when a vast field of ice separated them from Beringia.

Monte Verde, Central Chile

Adding to the mystery, other places where humans once settled have been found. In 1978 American anthropologist Thomas D. Dillehay was digging at an archaeological site in south-central Chile called Monte Verde. He and his colleagues found stone and bone tools, traces of wooden buildings, partially chewed plants, and even a teenager's footprint preserved in clay. Radiocarbon dating revealed the site to be 12,500 years old.

Yucatán, Mexico

In 2008, Mexican cave divers found more new evidence that made scientists question how humans came to the Americas. They were diving in an underwater cave in Yucatán, Mexico, when, to their amazement, they found human bones buried in the cave's floor. The bones were those of a young woman. Hers are the oldest human remains found in North America. Nobody knows her real name, so the divers called her Eva.

The cave was not underwater 13,600 years ago when Eva died. Her people must have taken a lot of trouble to bury her because they carried her body along a dark, twisting, underground passage almost half a kilometer (a quarter of a mile) from the cave's opening to the spot that would be her grave.



Archaeologists named her 'Naia. She was a teenaged girl who lived 12,000 to 13,000 years ago. Her remains were found in a cave in Hoyo Negro, Mexico. Though it was dry when 'Naia lived and died, the cave is now flooded. A diver brushes debris from her skull.

ALL THIS EVIDENCE was a puzzle for scientists. How could people be living as far away and as far apart as Pennsylvania 16,000 years ago, Chile 12,500 years ago, and Mexico 13,600 years ago when in those times the way from Beringia was blocked by ice?

What if Beringia wasn't the only way to North America?

DID THEY COME BY SEA?

The first human beings to reach North America may have followed the northern coastline of the Pacific Ocean from Asia. The North Pacific Current would have aided their travels as they paddled their boats from present-day Japan or Siberia.

On Triquet Island, off the central coast of British Columbia, archaeologists from the University of Victoria discovered a site that was once a village occupied by the ancestors of the Heiltsuk people. Further excavations uncovered evidence that people had lived there since ancient times. Radiocarbon dating showed the artifacts to be over 14,000 years old.

