



Ice Age Coloradoans Camp North of Fort Collins

It may be the most significant archaeological dig in North America. The famous Lindenmeier Site, home to an inscrutable race of Paleo-Indians, is approximately 10 miles west of I-25 and a few miles south of the Wyoming border.

This ancient gathering place was discovered by amateur archaeologists in 1924, and then thoroughly researched by the Smithsonian Institution from 1934 through 1940. Uncovered were the many tools and discarded animal bones of Folsom Man, a hunter-gatherer who flourished 11,000 years ago near the end of the last Ice Age.

This culture's identifying icon, its great symbol, was the elegant Folsom point. This fluted projectile point is so intricate, so finely crafted, that modern stone tool makers using tools such as electric drills are virtually powerless to re-create it. How did Folsom Man make these spear points, and more importantly, why? The flutes or concave troughs, so difficult to execute without shattering the point, may have been crafted to allow more blood to flow when the point was thrust into a prey animal.

And Folsom Man's primary prey was formidable indeed— *Bison antiquus*, sometimes called the Super Bison or Ice Age Buffalo, was much bigger than our modern bison. A large male stood more than seven feet tall at the hump, weighed 3,500 pounds, and had massive horns that could stretch six feet from tip to tip. *Bison antiquus* became extinct not long after the Ice Age.

Another theory on the unique shape of the Folsom point says that it was lighter, and more aerodynamic, thus flying further when thrown. Then again, the flutes may have had religious significance. Whatever the reason, these magnificent projectile points were Folsom Man's crowning achievement. They rank him as arguably the premier stone tool artisan in North America, rivaling the best stone tool makers from Europe and Egypt. As if to prove that "technology" does not always advance from one epoch to the next, the stone-making skills of Folsom Man were eventually lost, and never again equaled in 10,000 years of subsequent New World aboriginal stone craftsmanship.

The discovery of several perfect Folsom points at Lindenmeier in 1935 gave rise to sensationalist headlines in the *Denver Post*: "Colorado's First Americans Revealed as Race of Supermen – Oldest Known Camp Site in Western Hemisphere." But how old was the Lindenmeier site? At that time no one knew for sure. The accepted date of first human habitation in North America was 4,000 years before the present. This date was staunchly defended by most archaeologists, including respected Smithsonian curator Ales Hrdlicka. A minority of scholars contended there were many archaeological sites, including Lindenmeier, which strongly suggested humans entered the Americas at a much earlier date.

Yet there was no conclusive proof of early habitation— none, that is, until the summer of 1935. That's when an extraordinary Colorado discovery would revolutionize the archaeological world. Lindenmeier excavator Loren Eisely uncovered a *Bison antiquus* skeleton (which could be reliably dated) with a Folsom point wedged between the vertebrae! This was the equivalent of a "smoking gun," proof positive that humans occupied the New World before the extinction of *Bison antiquus*— at the close of the Ice Age, more than 10,000 years ago!