Science Matters

New evidence for ancient sea route

When and how did ancient Asians first reach the Americas? The top 20th century theory pointed to an ice-free corridor into North America. Newer facts indicate a coastal route.

ASIA



A rocky land bridge gave migrants a clear path across "Beringia" (the Bering Strait region) during the latest Ice Age

Ancient 'ice free' path'
would have allowed migrants
to pass the glaciers





KELP HIGHWAY

Dating of that route continues to be a problem – recent estimates are that it opened about 14,000 to 15,000 years ago White Sands, New Mexico: Fossil human footprints 21,000 to 23,000 years old

SOUTH



New geologic study of rocks in northwest Canada do not bear chemical evidence of having been exposed to the sun earlier than 13,800 years ago

Sites shown on this map are some of the locations in the Americas where human artifacts have been reliably dated much earlier than the "ice-free" land route Monte Verde: Town and large structures 18,500 years old

The rejected 'trans-Pacific' hypothesis

An alternative theory on these migrations is the possibility that Pacific islanders sailed across to South America

The 1947 Kon-Tiki expedition tested that hypothesis, which later historical and genetic data disproved



Polynesians perfected sailboat building and navigation long ago, allowing them to make long opebn sea voyages

Sea travel along the Kelp Highway

How was the long voyage to the Americas possible?

EXHIBIT A: Ancient seafaring

Few wooden boats can last for thousands of years, but evidence has been found on East Asian islands of ancient sea travel

Source: Jorie Clark of Oregon State University; Proceedings of the National Science Academies (US); Todd J. Braje of San Diego State University; Science magazine; Paleocoastal Research Project Graphic: Helen Lee McComas, Tribune News Service © 2022 TNS

EXHIBIT R: Seaweed heds

rich in fish and wildlife ran from Japan to Baja California

Studies since 2007 show that ancient travelers could have followed this Kelp Highway past Alaska and far south along the American coast