

Early People in the Central American Land Bridge

by James Folta



People have been living in Central and South America for many, many years now. How did ancient people live in this area thousands of years ago? Archaeologists studying the area of the Central American land bridge have been working to answer this question.

What is the Central American land bridge? It is the land that is now the countries of Costa Rica and Panama. Like a modern bridge over a river, this land bridge was used by animals and people to travel back and forth. This Central American land bridge connects the northern land that is now Nicaragua, Mexico, and so on to the southern land that is now Colombia, Brazil, and other South American countries.

People who were already living in North America traveled down and across this land bridge. Scientists think they traveled there around 11,000 BC. They probably were following large animals that they hunted and ate. These people would have traveled on foot, following the herds of animals. They had no permanent houses. They would pack up their things and bring them along as they hunted. Their homes were like tents and were very easy to take down and put up. Archaeologists can tell these people traveled via the land bridge because they have found similar arrowheads and tools in both the land bridge and in areas further north and south.

These tools are the main record of people's movement and settlement. Ancient people at this time made their tools, by hand, out of stone. Later, they used obsidian, which is a dark glass formed in volcanoes. They made small hand axes, arrowheads and spearheads by knapping. Knapping is when

you hit one stone with another to break off little pieces. Slowly, you can shape the stone however you want. When certain stones (like obsidian or flint) break, they leave very sharp edges, which can be used to cut.

Archaeologists don't find evidence of these tools very often. When so much time passes, natural things like rain, dirt and trees destroy and bury them. Scientists also think the oceans were lower back then. This means there once was more land that is now underwater. Probably there is more evidence of people living in the area under the sea off the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama.

It is hard to tell when people stopped traveling along the land bridge and began living there. One clue is when people began farming. On the land bridge, this was around 9,000 and 7,000 BC. In Panama, scientists have found evidence that people were growing bottle gourds, squash, and a few other things around that time. These would be in small gardens, not big farms. People weren't eating just the plants they grew at this time. They would gather fruits and nuts from the forest, hunt deer, fish for crabs and fish, and eat from their gardens.

Archaeologists now think that some forests were actually farms too, which makes it harder to determine when hunting and gathering stopped. Places we once thought were wild were perhaps maintained by ancient people. This would be like an apple orchard. It looks like a forest, but has actually been planted and taken care of by humans-you wouldn't know it was a farm for apples unless you looked more closely. The same thing probably happened on the Central American land bridge and elsewhere.

Slowly, people built more permanent houses on the land bridge. The first small village archaeologists have found is in Costa Rica, in a place called Tronadora Vieja. There are round pole and thatch houses, which are simple huts made out of long tree branches covered in leaves and grasses. These houses date to 3,800 BC and were destroyed when a nearby volcano exploded and buried them in ash. Scientists also found the earliest maize kernels on the land bridge, as well as metates. Metates are small stone tables used to grind maize into powder. This was used in cooking and baking, like flour. Nearby at Laguna Zoncho, archaeologists found a bigger village, with more houses and farms. People started living here after Tronadora Vieja, around 3,240 BC.

People were still hunting and gathering at this time, though. Why did some people settle down to farm and some people continue moving around? There are lots of ideas, but on the land bridge, archaeologists think it had to do with the amount of rain and water in the area. Places that had less water made it harder for the forests to remain full of fruits and animals. So in these dry areas, people started to farm more, build houses and stay put. So some groups kept hunting and gathering while others were starting to build and farm.

Archaeologists are still studying this part of the world. Hopefully in the years to come, we can find out more about how ancient people lived on the Central American land bridge.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the Central American land bridge?
 - A. a manmade bridge between North and South America
 - B. the ancient name for the country of Mexico
 - C. the land that is now the countries of Costa Rica and Panama
 - D. the flooded strip of land between Central and South America

2. What does the author describe in the passage?
 - A. the Central American land bridge and the people who traveled it
 - B. the gradual rise in ocean level on the Central American land bridge
 - C. the species of animals that crossed the Central American land bridge
 - D. the cultures of North American peoples before 11,000 BCE

3. Why do scientists think that people traveled the land bridge around 11,000 BCE?
 - A. because scientists found fossilized human footprints in the land bridge
 - B. because scientists found similar arrow heads and tools in the land bridge and in areas further north and south
 - C. because scientists found remains of tent-like residences in the land bridge
 - D. because scientists found evidence of cattle herding in the land bridge

4. People in Panama started farming between 9,000 and 7,000 BCE but did not rely on it as their only food source. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?
 - A. "Places we once thought were wild were perhaps maintained by ancient people."
 - B. "One clue is when people began farming. On the land bridge, this was around 9,000 and 7,000 BCE."
 - C. "Scientists have found evidence that people were growing bottle gourds, squash, and a few other things around that time. These would be in small gardens, not big farms."
 - D. "It is hard to tell when people stopped traveling along the land bridge and began living there."

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. the rise of agriculture in South America from 9,000 BCE to today
- B. how global warming has affected wildlife on the Central American land bridge
- C. the development of civilization on the Central American land bridge
- D. flint knapping and its importance in ancient Central American culture

6. Read the following sentences: "Places we once thought were wild were perhaps **maintained** by ancient people. This would be like an apple orchard. It looks like a forest, but has actually been planted and taken care of by humans-you wouldn't know it was a farm for apples unless you looked more closely."

As used in the passage, what does "**maintained**" mean?

- A. kept in order
- B. planned
- C. destroyed
- D. seeded

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The first people to travel the Central American land had no permanent dwellings; _____ they lived in tents that were easy to take down and put up as they moved around.

- A. moreover
- B. specifically
- C. therefore
- D. instead

8. What is knapping and for what did ancient people use it?

9. Why don't archeologists often find evidence of tools in the Central American land bridge? Provide two examples from the text.

10. How can archeologists tell when people started to settle on the land bridge, as opposed to just moving across it? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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8. What is knapping and for what did ancient people use it?

Knapping is when you hit one stone with another to break off little pieces and shape the stone in the manner of your choosing. Ancient people used knapping to make arrowheads, spearheads and small hand axes.

9. Why don't archeologists often find evidence of tools in the Central American land bridge? Provide two examples from the text.

Archeologists don't often find evidence of tools in the Central American land bridge because over time they have been destroyed and buried by rain, dirt and trees. Furthermore, scientists think that the oceans were lower in the past, so many artifacts are likely underwater now.

10. How can archeologists tell when people started to settle on the land bridge, as opposed to just moving across it? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Archeologists can tell when people began to settle on the land bridge from when they began farming. In Panama, archeologists found evidence that people were growing small gardens, which shows they were staying in that place and not roaming. Archeologists can also tell when people began to live on the land bridge from finding and dating permanent settlements.

The Secrets of Viking Ships

by ReadWorks



Today, the Vikings are mostly known as violent pirates and raiders. And it is true that Vikings did raid and destroy many towns and villages along coastlines, all the way from what is now northern Russia to Morocco. But the Vikings were also traders and merchants and didn't simply destroy things. They also built towns and markets of their own, including Hedeby, which in the 10th century had a population of 1,500, making it the largest trading town in northern Europe. At their height, the Vikings attacked, settled or traded on four continents. They were active all the way from Canada (they became the first Europeans to travel to the Americas) to present day Istanbul.

All of their travel, trade and warfare were made possible by Viking ships, which were far more advanced than anything else sailing around Europe at the time. The most famous, and most feared, was the *drekar*, or longship. At sea, these ships could move quickly thanks to their large sails. The hulls of the ships were shallow and fat, which made them ride high in the water. This meant they could be driven right onto beaches, where the soldiers would jump over the side to attack and plunder villages and cities. The ships were also light enough that they could be carried from one body of water to another over short sections of land called portages. This greatly extended their range.

Several such *drekar* ships were found off the coast of Roskilde, formerly the capital of Denmark, between 1957 and 1962. The longest *drekar* measured 119 feet long with a crew of 100 men and space for 72 oars. With its gigantic sail, shallow hull and so many oarsmen, the ship must have been incredibly fast and highly maneuverable.

But Viking ships weren't just built for warfare. Another type, called the *knarr* or ocean-going ship, had cargo holds built into the bow and stern. One such cargo ship discovered near Roskilde was capable of carrying 24 tons, or 48,000 pounds. The *knarrs* would have looked similar to the *drekar*s except they were longer, fatter and taller, and the space dedicated to cargo left less room for oarsmen. These were the backbones of the Viking empire, which they used to carry everything from gold coins to timber, spices and fine fabrics.

Both the *drekar* and the *knarr* were built using the same method called the clinker method. Traditionally, oceangoing ships have used a keel, shaped like the fin of a fish. The keel sinks into the water below the hull. It helps the ship maintain a straight line through the water and counters the force of the wind against the sail, which otherwise might blow the ship over. Traditional ships are also built with ribs which function just like the ribs on a human being, starting at the spine and growing out in a curve to protect the space inside.

Using the clinker system, Viking ships had no deep keel. Instead they were built fat enough to carry lots of soldiers or pieces of cargo whose weight helped keep the ship planted in the water. The construction process started with a heavy piece of wood at the bottom. From there, oak tree trunks were split into long, thin planks. Two planks were fastened to the bottom piece, and then each plank was fastened to the one before it like overlapping shingles on the roof of a house. A massive beam was laid across the bottom to strengthen it and also to support the mast. Finally, crossbeams were laid inside to create a deck and benches for oarsmen to sit. The result was sturdy, fast and light.

Viking ships were so advanced for their time they often were the biggest, tallest and most striking ships many people had ever seen. The Vikings made them even more intimidating using bright colors and intricate designs. A monk at the St. Omer Monastery, in France, wrote this description of a royal Viking ship in 1013:

"On one side lions molded in gold were to be seen on the ships, on the other birds on the tops of the masts indicated by their movements the winds as they blew, or dragons of various kinds poured fire from their nostrils...."

The description makes clear that Vikings were not simple marauders. They built a wealthy empire through trade as well as plunder and used their wealth to continuously improve their ships.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is a *drekar*?

- A. a Viking town
- B. a merchant ship
- C. a longship
- D. an ocean-going ship

2. The author tries to persuade the reader of what?

- A. Vikings were only violent pirates and raiders.
- B. There was no connection between the Vikings' success and their ships.
- C. Viking ships were more advanced than ships today.
- D. Vikings were not simply pirates and raiders.

3. The Vikings considered speed an important quality in a ship. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A. The hulls of the *drekar* were shallow and fat so the ships rode high in the water
- B. The *drekar* had very large sails and space for many oarsmen.
- C. The *drekar* were light enough to be carried from one body of water to another.
- D. The *drekar* could be driven right onto beaches to allow soldiers to jump over the side.

4. Read the following description of the *knarr*: "The *knarrs* would have looked similar to the *drekar*s except they were longer, fatter and taller, and the space dedicated to cargo left less room for oarsmen. These were the backbones of the Viking empire, which they used to carry everything from gold coins to timber, spices and fine fabrics."

What can you infer about the *knarrs*?

- A. They were not designed for warfare.
- B. They were faster than the *drekar*s.
- C. They were designed to carry soldiers.
- D. They were used for the same purpose as *drekar*s.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. why Vikings are known as violent pirates
- B. the different kinds of Viking ships
- C. how Vikings decorated their ships
- D. the two methods used to build Viking ships

6. Read the following sentences: "Viking ships were so advanced for their time they often were the biggest, tallest and most **striking** ships many people had ever seen. The Vikings made them even more intimidating using bright colors and intricate designs."

What does "**striking**" mean in this sentence?

- A. violent
- B. dangerous
- C. impressive
- D. delightful

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Vikings designed and used their ships for multiple purposes, _____ warfare, trade, and travel.

- A. finally
- B. although
- C. ultimately
- D. including

8. Describe the *knarr*.

9. Describe the differences between Viking ships and other ships at the time.

10. Explain whether Vikings should be known mostly as pirates and raiders. Support your argument using details from the passage.

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The *knarr* was an ocean-going ship. It had cargo holds built into the bow and stern. They were longer, fatter, and taller than *drekars*, and had less space for oarsmen.

9. Describe the differences between Viking ships and other ships at the time.

Students should mention the following points:

Viking ships were built using the clinker system; other ships were not. Viking ships did not have deep keels like other ships. Viking ships were more advanced than other ships at the time.

10. Explain whether Vikings should be known mostly as pirates and raiders. Support your argument using details from the passage.

Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage.

Sample answer: Vikings should not be mostly known as pirates and raiders. While they did raid and destroy towns, they were also traders and merchants. They built towns and markets of their own. Their ships reflect their dual roles: they built *drekars* for warfare and *knarrs* for transporting goods. Their empire was built on both raiding and trading.

A Club for Explorers

by W.M. Akers



What's at the bottom of the ocean? People have wondered that for a long time. To find out what lay far beneath the waves, scientists developed diving equipment, like flippers, goggles and scuba tanks. They built scientific submarines to go even farther underwater, where they found fish and plant life that had never been exposed to the sunlight. But no matter how advanced their technology, no one could go all the way to the bottom of the deepest part of the sea-the Mariana Trench-which is in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

At 36,000 feet below sea level, the deepest part of the trench, known as the Challenger Deep, is deeper than Everest is tall. In 1960, two men attempted to get to the bottom of it. In a cramped submarine called the *Trieste*, Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh descended slowly to the bottom. They made the trip safely. When they landed on the ocean's floor-farther down than anyone had ever gone-they kicked up so much dirt, they couldn't see what was out there.

It was fifty years before anyone attempted to make the trip again. In 2012, film director James Cameron-best known for movies like *Avatar* and *Titanic*-became the first man to make a solo dive to the bottom of Challenger Deep. It took 90 minutes for his tiny, torpedo-shaped submarine to reach the bottom. Like any good filmmaker, he made sure to bring a camera. In fact, he brought a lot of them-3D cameras that captured the bottom of the sea in detail that Piccard and Walsh could never have dreamed of. The footage, said the expedition's chief scientist Doug Bartlett, is "so, so beautiful."

"It's unlike anything that you'll have seen from other subs or other remotely operated vehicles," he said.

Besides the cameras, Cameron's submarine carried a flag: a red, white and blue banner with an "E" and "C" on it. It's the official emblem of the Explorers Club, an international organization dedicated to promoting exploration worldwide. For over a century, they have helped lead the charge into the unknown. And no matter how deep mankind goes, they will never be finished.

What Does the Club Do?

Founded in 1904, the Explorers Club was started by a group of men who had previously belonged to the Arctic Club of America. In those days, polar exploration was the cutting edge of science, but the men who had conquered the North and South Pole wanted to broaden their horizons. They welcomed jungle explorers, mountain climbers, and the deep sea divers who paved the way for Piccard, Walsh and Cameron.

"It was meant to bring together explorers, to promote exploration and to promote knowledge of it to

the public," said Mary French, the archivist at the Explorers Club, who spoke to us recently by phone. French is responsible for documenting the history of the club, whose membership rolls have included some of the greatest explorers of all time. Those explorers include Roald Amundsen, who led the expedition that first reached the South Pole, and Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon.

Whenever its members go on an expedition, French explained, they bring along an Explorers Club flag. Many of these flags have a long history of their own. The one that Cameron took to the bottom of Challenger Deep, for example, had previously been to the top of Mount Everest-meaning that it had been both to the top of the world and the bottom.

"Among our retired flags is one that in 2007 was taken on an expedition to the true North Pole," said French. "Team members went under the ice in a submarine to find the magnetic North Pole, not over the ice, because that isn't true north. They went on a deep-sea dive under the ice."

A Famous Trip across the Water

Perhaps the most famous Explorers Club expedition was made in 1947, by a Norwegian adventurer named Thor Heyerdahl. Heyerdahl had a theory that ancient South Americans could have traveled across the Pacific Ocean and settled in islands in Polynesia—a journey of over 4,000 miles, across some of the most dangerous water on Earth. To prove his theory, Heyerdahl used centuries-old technology to build an open-air raft called *Kon-Tiki*. In this primitive raft, six Scandinavian explorers set out on the journey of a lifetime.

"It's a very classic adventure story," said French. "A story that's kind of timeless."

For three months, the little boat drifted westward, carried by the tides and the faint Pacific winds. They ate coconuts, sweet potatoes and fish they caught themselves. As they endured the elements, people back home followed their every movement, hoping that the brave Scandinavians would arrive safely.

"That was a very popular expedition at the time," said French. "It was kind of like a reality show. It was in the newspaper every day."

When they finally made it across the sea—passing not too far from the Mariana Trench—they were greeted by a tribe of native Polynesians, who threw them a big party. For their daring, Heyerdahl and his crew became some of the most famous people in the world, and the Explorers Club flag they took with them became one of the most famous in French's collection.

Can You Be an Explorer?

French said that if she could choose any Explorers Club expedition to have gone on, she would have picked *Kon-Tiki*. She called it "a classic example" of the explorer's mentality. What does it take to be an explorer?

"The rebelliousness that's required to go against people who are saying that it's not possible," she said. "Questioning authority, and not just authority, but standard knowledge. Having your own ideas,

and exploring those ideas for your own knowledge, and not just to impress other people."

At a recent Explorers Club dinner, James Cameron was given an award for his trip to Challenger Deep. French said that he called exploration "curiosity in action."

"It could be something as humble as going out and hiking a trail," she said. "Or it could be much bigger-like becoming an astronaut."

As long as you're "seeking the answers to questions," she concluded, you can be an explorer.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the international organization, The Explorers Club, dedicated to promoting?

- A. exploration worldwide
- B. prevention of exploration
- C. protection of the Mariana Trench
- D. the films of James Cameron

2. What does the passage describe?

- A. submarine technology
- B. the Explorers Club
- C. James Cameron's film career
- D. deadly expeditions throughout history

3. James Cameron is a member of the Explorers Club.

Which evidence in the text best supports this conclusion?

- A. He brings the flag of the Explorers Club on his dive.
- B. He brings many cameras on his dive.
- C. He is known for making movies such as *Avatar* and *Titanic*.
- D. He was the first man to make a solo dive to the bottom of Challenger Deep.

4. What do all explorers have in common?

- A. They all have been to the bottom of the Challenger Deep.
- B. They all actively seek the answers to questions.
- C. They all belong to the Explorers Club.
- D. They all go on dangerous expeditions.

5. What is the passage mainly about?

- A. the Explorers Club and expeditions of its members
- B. James Cameron's life and achievements
- C. how to discover the unknown at the bottom of the ocean
- D. the work of Mary French, the archivist at the Explorers Club

6. Read the first two sentences of the passage: "What's at the bottom of the ocean? People have wondered that for a long time."

Why might the author start the passage with this question?

- A. to introduce a passage about swimming
- B. to establish a setting for the rest of the passage
- C. to introduce the Arctic Club of America
- D. to show how universal the desire to explore is

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____ the club was called the Arctic Club of America; later, it became the Explorer's Club.

- A. Instead
- B. Moreover
- C. Ultimately
- D. Initially

8. What is the Explorers Club?

9. Explorers tend to be the first ones to accomplish a goal or complete an expedition. Provide an example from the passage to support this statement.

10. James Cameron calls exploration "curiosity in action." Give an example from the passage of curiosity in action and explain why it might be considered "curiosity in action."

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8. What is the Explorers Club?

Students should explain it is a club started by a group of men who had previously belonged to the Arctic Club of America and who welcomed jungle explorers and mountain climbers into their club. It was meant to bring together explorers, to promote exploration, and to promote knowledge of it to the public. It has paved the way for modern explorers.

9. Explorers tend to be the first ones to accomplish a goal or complete an expedition. Provide an example from the passage to support this statement.

Answers may vary. Students may note any of the following examples from the text:

Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh were the first to attempt to get the bottom of Challenger Deep. Roald Amundsen was the first person to reach the South Pole. Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon.

10. James Cameron calls exploration "curiosity in action." Give an example from the passage of curiosity in action and explain why it might be considered "curiosity in action."

Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. For example, students may explain that Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* expedition is a good example of "curiosity in action" because he was curious about an idea-whether or not ancient South Americans could have traveled across the Pacific Ocean and settled in Polynesia-and he put it into action by making the journey himself.