

New study reveals how the first people to inhabit America got there



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A new study reveals the **first people** to inhabit America migrated from North Asia more than 10,000 years ago – and they covered more than 20,000km on foot. The research states that the journey took thousands of years, spanned multiple generations and saw them walk the bulk of the distance to South America. So, what did the researchers find? (stock image)
(Picture: Getty)

It's generally thought that humans, or more specifically, **Homo sapiens**, evolved from a group of hominids in Africa. According to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the fossils of early humans who lived between 6 and 2 million years ago come from Africa. And it was between 2 million and 1.8 million years ago they moved to Asia. But this study reveals that this longest migration of early humans – from Asia to South America – took place over a long period of time (Picture: Getty)

What did researchers do?

Publishing their study in the journal Science, the research is based on DNA sequencing of 1,537 modern humans from 139 different ethnic groups. The researchers compared shared genetic traits and ancestry, which allowed them to reconstruct the ancient journey, and map out when different populations diverged (Picture: Getty)

One result suggested that early humans managed to successfully migrate to the northwestern tip of South America around 14,500 years ago – where modern day Panama meets Colombia. This topic has been long debated, as there have been **other studies** which say that some human-made artefacts, such as cave paintings and pendants made from giant sloth bones (pictured), have been found in South America and date back to 27,000 years ago (Picture: Thaís Pansani, Pierre Gueriau via AP)

Corresponding author Dr Kim Hie Lim from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, said: 'Those migrants carried only a subset of the gene pool in their ancestral populations through their long journey. Thus, the reduced genetic diversity also caused a reduced diversity in immune-related genes, which can limit a population's flexibility to fight various infectious diseases. This could explain why some Indigenous communities were more susceptible to illnesses or diseases introduced by later immigrants, such as European colonists. Understanding how past dynamics have shaped the genetic structure of today's current population can yield deeper insights into human genetic resilience' (Picture: Getty)

Once the early humans were in South America, the research shows that they split into four major populations. This included a group in the Amazon basin, others in the dry Chaco region in the east, some south to Patagonia's ice fields, and others in the valleys of the Andes Mountains. The researchers believe that their findings could also help explain the genetic diversity of Asia, where the early humans migrated from, which they say is higher than in other parts of the world, including those in America (Picture: Getty)

Senior author Dr Stephan Schuster from NTU said: 'This reshapes our understanding of historical population movements and lays a stronger foundation for future research into human evolution. Our new insights underscore the importance of increasing the representation of Asian populations in genetic studies, especially as genomics plays a critical role in personalised medicine, public health, and the understanding of human evolution' (Picture: Getty)