



Arrows and Atl Atls: A Guide to the Archeology of Beringia

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ARROWS AND ATL ATLS: A GUIDE TO THE ARCHEOLOGY OF BERINGIA. By E. James Dixon. Anchorage: U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, Shared Beringian Heritage Program, 2013. 321 pp. Free (available in softcover by contacting Katerina_wessels@nps.gov or online at <http://www.nps.gov/akso/beringia>). ISBN: 978-0-9853948-2-0.

Reconstructing the prehistory of the lost subcontinent of Beringia is the goal of *ARROWS AND ATL ATLS* by E. James Dixon, himself one of the pioneers in Beringian archaeology. The authorship of a guidebook for the public must be held to its own standard: Speech to the public requires both outreach and authority. Its strength is in its unpretentious composition and readable discussion of climate and its role in transforming cultures. It is not the breezy and classic memoir of *ANCIENT MEN OF THE ARCTIC* by J. Louis Giddings (1967). After all, Dixon penned such a work years ago, *QUEST FOR THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST AMERICANS* (1993). *ARROWS AND ATL ATLS* offers considerably more than a retrospective résumé on Beringia—the unglaciated lowland largely *between* Siberia and Alaska which ranges from the Northwest coast of the Cordillera to the Aleutians and all of Chukotka. The farthest excursion beyond Beringia takes the reader to the Ainu and their migrations into the Kuriles. One yardstick that is not emphasized sufficiently is the 7000 years of Ice Patch data from the British Columbia alpine reaches above Beringia; significantly, both atl-atls and bow and arrow were recovered in the same locales!

The public relations creation of Beringia was the fruit of several individuals from the 1930s to the late 1970s: the pioneering botanist Björn Kurten and the geologist Dave Hopkins further galvanized by a rousing ecological debate between the palynologist Paul Colinvaux and the paleontologist Dale Guthrie. Two research testaments, both edited by Hopkins, and based on conferences, enshrined Beringia as an academic subdiscipline: i.e., *THE BERING LAND BRIDGE* (HOPKINS, 1967) and *THE PALEOECOLOGY OF BERINGIA* (HOPKINS ET AL., 1982). Archaeologists were largely bystanders in the early Beringia debates, offering only the late entry of humans as consumers of a vast and plentiful Pleistocene megafauna. Notably, though, in the first testament, archaeologist Bill Laughlin prefigured the importance of the coast in the peopling of Beringia, a perspective extended by Dixon, as Hans Müller-Beck set the stage for the narrative of the Eurasian steppe that guides many researchers today. The other geologic drama was the profound rise in sea level after the Pleistocene ice melted, which set the stage for the

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maritime expansion of the Holocene in a post-Beringia age. In many ways, the drowning of Beringia, its demise, is the story that Dixon is relating in this volume.

The organization of the book parallels the latitudinal direction of Beringia, west to east, with chapters progressively on west, central, eastern, and southern regions of Dixon's greater Beringia. Each chapter is internally organized to recount the last 12,000 years of prehistory, in effect standing alone. Such an approach has its benefits and drawbacks. For the early period, each chapter recapitulates the previous, while for the later periods, readers are forced ahead and retrace their steps in the next chapter.

The artifact illustrations are of high quality and well chosen, and supplement the text in the proverbial sense, of a thousand words; however, not all figures had appropriate scales. The volume is not indexed, a minor inconvenience. Each chapter benefits from a readable time line, well-illustrated with diagnostic artifact types.

Any synthesis of Beringian archaeology is beset by burgeoning data; and perforce must selectively marshal the data of the author's greatest familiarity. The strengths of this work are the strengths of Dr. Dixon, the peopling of the New World and the maritime record of the Northwest Coast. For much of the remaining geographic coverage, especially in western and northern Alaska, the results and reconsiderations of the last 15 years are missing from the book. Dixon's selective vision is apparent in his treatment of Old Whaling; there is no mention of the controversy over the reality of whaling in this culture, despite the independent revisionist efforts of two sets of researchers, i.e., Allen McCartney and James Saville and Chris and John Darwent. Both revisionist groups reject that the culture practiced whaling.

The treatment of the Russian data is a major strength of the book; the illustrations of artifacts from Ushki Lake and Zhukov Island are first rate. Some of the earliest discovered sites, Yana in

far western Beringia, could only receive a brief mention since the latest results and illustrations were not yet available to the author.

On the guidebook balance sheet, Dr. Dixon provides about 80 pages, fully one quarter of the book, as a biographical appendix, faced by portraits of variable quality. In view of the book's style, the sketches are crucial to following the text that is peppered with biographic asides and references. Nonetheless, one may quibble with the selection of some researchers, termed *Pioneers*. More aptly, the biographies are of key researchers, many are among the last generation's best and brightest (e.g., Charles Holmes). It is gratifying that Native researchers are included, such as Margaret Kirsteatter, Simon Paneak, and Herbert Anungazuk. However, some true *pioneers* are missing: Sergei Rudenko, Sergei Arutiunov, Mischa Bronshtein, Lydia Black, Charles Lucier, Dale Guthrie, Allen McCartney, Bill and Karen Workman, Jean Aigner, Anne Shinkwin, or Edwin S. Hall.

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