

## **Paleo-Indian Hunters of Central Chile 13,500 – 10,800 BCE**

### **(Paleo-Indian period)**

#### **Environment and Geography**

The first humans arrived in the Americas at a time when the glacial climate of the Pleistocene was beginning to improve. In Central Chile, the melting of the ice left behind a landscape of lakes and rushing rivers as well as more abundant vegetation that attracted herds of large Pleistocene animals, including the so-called 'megafauna'—mastodons, New World horses, marsh deer, paleo-lamas and milodon.

#### **Economy**

These early hunters took full advantage of the abundance of megafauna around the region's lakes and ravines, encircling the animals then attacking them with large rocks and stone-tipped spears to bring them down. They used stone instruments to slaughter their prey and used their bones to craft artifacts such as piercing tools. It is likely that they supplemented their diet with water plants and fruit gathered in the surrounding forests.

#### **Art**

The scant evidence recovered to date provides no clues about this aspect of early hunter culture. However, a spear point made of carved bone with geometric designs that was found at Tagua Tagua, an ancient lake bed in Region VI, constitutes one of the earliest known artistic expressions on the American continent.

#### **Social Organization**

Very little is known about this aspect of early hunter culture, but it is likely that these groups lived in small family bands, a unit that was suited to their highly mobile way of life. They probably also divided up their work by sex and age group.

#### **Beliefs and Funeral Rites**

To date, insufficient evidence has been recovered to allow us to refer to this aspect of early hunter culture.

#### **Settlement Pattern**

No residential camps have been located to date for these groups, only slaughtering sites. However, as highly mobile groups we believe they occupied natural shelters as they ranged over an extensive territory in search of the resources they needed to survive.

## History

Although there is still some debate around when exactly the Americas were first populated, it is a now accepted fact that the first colonizers came from Northeast Asia across the Bering Strait more than 15,000 years ago. From there, they began to populate the lands to the south, and by around 13,500 BCE were leaving traces of their presence on the shores of the ancient lake of San Vicente de Tagua Tagua. There, mastodon remains have been found with tool marks, as well as some stone tools. These ancient hunter gatherers were the first to inhabit the region, and after the extinction of the *megafauna*, the cornerstone of their early economy, these groups focused on hunting new smaller species, in the times leading up to the Archaic Period.