Monte Verde: Seaweed, Food, Medicine, and the Peopling of South America

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The identification of human artifacts at the early archaeological site of Monte Verde in southern Chile has raised questions of when and how people reached the tip of South America without leaving much other evidence in the New World. Remains of nine species of marine algae were recovered from hearths and other features at Monte Verde II, an upper occupational layer, and were directly dated between 14,220 and 13,980 calendar years before the present (~12,310 and 12,290 carbon-14 years ago). These findings support the archaeological interpretation of the site and indicate that the site's inhabitants used seaweed from distant beaches and estuarine environments for food and medicine. These data are consistent with the ideas that an early settlement of South America was along the Pacific coast and that seaweeds were important to the diet and health of early humans in the Americas.

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