

DISTRIBUTIONAL CHANGES IN EARLY MAN SITES
IN RESPONSE TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT
IN THE CONTERMINOUS UNITED STATES:
9,000 B. P. TO 2,000 B. P.

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the literature on the post-Pleistocene environment of North America revealed two conflicting theories concerning Holocene climatic changes. According to Antevs, the mid post-Pleistocene (Altithermal) was a time of warm, dry conditions in the Southwest. To Martin, it was a time of sub-humid conditions in that region. In this study the changing distribution of radiocarbon dated early man sites was examined for the period 9,000 B. P. to 2,000 B. P. to determine which theory they best supported.

It was found that a general increase, for all regions of the conterminous United States, took place from 9,000 B. P. to 7,000 B. P. From 7,000 B. P. to 5,000 B. P. however, a decrease in sites occurred. This period approximately coincides with Antevs' Altithermal, and includes the time considered to be the height of the Altithermal, or the period of "thermal maximum." After 5,000 B. P., there is once again an increase in the number of sites. Further examination revealed that this increase was not solely the result of either the development of agriculture or better preservation of early man sites, but may reflect ameliorating climatic conditions.

Based on the assumption that drought conditions will result in a contraction of early man sites from arid regions,

and humid conditions will result in an expansion of sites into mesic regions, it was hypothesized that, if Martin and his supporters were correct, the Altithermal should have resulted in an increase of sites in the Southwest. Since the reverse occurred, this study concludes that Antevs' theory of a warm, dry Altithermal is more likely correct.