

Adovasio, J. M. with Jake Page  
THE FIRST AMERICANS  
In Pursuit of Archaeology's Greatest Mystery  
Random House (352 pp.)  
\$25.95  
August 2002  
ISBN: 0-375-50552-0

An engrossing account of recent developments in this long-running and contentious scientific debate.

Dr. James M. Adovasio founded, and now directs, the Mercyhurst Archaeological Institute in Erie, Pennsylvania. Jake Page has written more than a dozen books on natural science and was formerly the science editor at *Smithsonian* magazine. Their collaboration, in terms of unity of style, is seamless. The topic, however, begets a good deal of fractiousness. Few areas of contemporary science, with the exception of the creationism vs. evolution argument, have engendered such fierce dogmatism and even fiercer adherents. The authors present their case with reasonableness and clarity, beginning with Adovasio's early field work at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter near Pittsburgh. There, in 1974, Adovasio found charcoal from two hearths that placed humans in the vicinity nearly four thousand years before they were supposed to have set foot anywhere on the continent. Though he vowed not to, the author became ensnared in what Tom D. Dillehay, a professor of anthropology at the University of Kentucky, called the "dishonesty, double standards, and phony scientific posture" of scholars with an axe to grind or a reputation to uphold at all costs. Despite widely accepted methods, such as radiocarbon dating, to fix the time of human habitation in the Americas, much evidence was discounted as a mare's nest. Add to this potent brew the various ethnic groups with an advocacy intent on their being the *first* Americans, from a lost band of Israelites to survivors of a sunken Atlantis to wandering Welshmen in their sealskin coracles — to say nothing of the modern Native Americans themselves — and one has all the ingredients for an intellectual brouhaha that frequently reached the vitriolic flashpoint. At issue was the sacrosanct notion that nomadic mammoth hunters crossed the frozen Bering Strait during the last glacial period about 12,000 years ago. Adovasio contends they arrived millennia earlier, most likely by boat, and that the contributions of women were more critical to their success than previously credited.

Affording glimpses into both the detective nature of the scientific process and the viciousness of academic infighting, this volume has appeal for the scientist and the general reader alike.