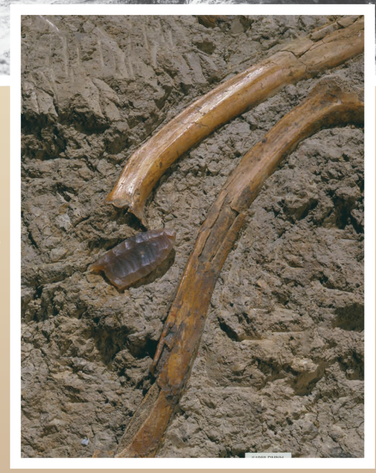
In 1916, a sheep rancher named William Spencer discovered bones and human artifacts in Moss Agate Arroyo outside of Mule Creek Junction in east-central Wyoming. He picked some of these up and kept them. In 1919, a cowboy naturalist by the name of George McJunkin also discovered bones in an arroyo with human artifacts outside of Folsom, New Mexico. He picked some of these up, kept them, and tried to get professionals interested in looking at the site. Due to McJunkin's efforts, professionals in 1927 confirmed the artifacts were associated with extinct bison from the Late Pleistocene 10,000 to 11,000 years ago. This marked the beginning of Paleoindian archaeology in the Americas. Ten years later Spencer's site became the type site for the Agate Basin complex, one of the major North American Paleoindian complexes. This year we celebrate 100 years since Spencer's discovery at Agate Basin, as well as other significant Wyoming Paleoindian localities of the first Americans.

Excavations at the Agate Basin site 1942.

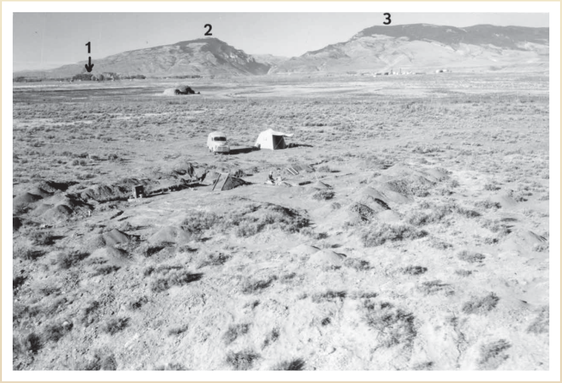


Folsom point in situ. The find was unearthed in 1927 near Folsom, New Mexico.

Following 1927, with the acceptance of the existence of Pleistocene humans in the North America, many people began searching for points of the type found in Folsom, New Mexico. In particular, Yuma County and much of the rest of northeast Colorado became a hotbed of Paleoindian finds; so much so that archaeologists adopted the term *Yuma* to describe non-Folsom lanceolate projectile points. The name didn't stick. In archaeology, context is everything and the Yuma finds were not in original geologic context as they generally were recovered from the surface of blow-outs. In addition, the Yuma points were also stylistically variable and archaeologists suspected that several types were included under this one term. More sites were needed to find answers to these problems.

Agate Basin, Eden, and Scottsbluff projectile points.

Enthusiastic amateurs searching for evidence of Pleistocene (Ice Age) humans after the initial Folsom discoveries scoured hillsides and arroyos throughout the west, including Wyoming. They were successful in finding Yuma points in geologic context at several Wyoming locales. On the basis of the single component undeflated sites of Finley, Horner, and Agate Basin (in the vicinity of Eden, Cody, and Mule Creek Junction in Wyoming) the Yuma category was split into Eden, Cody, and Agate Basin complexes. Other sites outside of Wyoming, for example Scottsbluff in Nebraska, yielded similar single component finds that accounted for other varieties of the overarching *Yuma* category. Today all three of these Wyoming sites are nationally recognized with listings of Agate Basin and Finley in the National Register of Historic Places and Horner as a National Historic Landmark.



Horner site excavations 1949.

In the early 20th century, Paleoindian research was based on a few sites that demonstrated great antiquity of humans in North America. Many of these finds, including Finley, Horner, and Agate Basin, helped define individual cultural complexes and their associations with extinct fauna. But absolute dates, as well as temporal positions relative to other complexes, were lacking or poorly understood. By mid-century, Paleoindian archeologists were searching for a well-stratified, multiple component site to establish the relationships between the many known Paleoindian cultural complexes.

Hell Gap, discovered in 1959, provided just such a site for the Great Plains. The site produced a stratified, radiocarbon-dated sequence of Paleoindian artifacts confirming the relationships between the eight Paleoindian complexes present. Hell Gap is also the type-site for three Paleoindian complexes—Goshen, Hell Gap, and Frederick. The definition of these types in conjunction with the well-stratified deposits contributed data to important typological debates of the 1950s and 1960s.

But it is more than just a type-site. The significance of Hell Gap extends far beyond its important contribution to establishing the Paleoindian chronology. The site has provided and continues to provide a wealth of information on early North American lifeways. Unlike many of the sites documented in the early and mid-part of the 20th century which were mostly big game kill sites, Hell Gap provides a rare example of a Paleoindian domestic camp site. The archaeological record at Hell Gap represents a far broader range of prehistoric activity than most of the other known sites. The Hell Gap site was recently listed as a National Historic Landmark making it the second Paleoindian site in Wyoming to be so recognized.

Finley site excavations 1940.

1965 International Quaternary Association Field Excursion to the Hell Gap site. Cynthia Irwin-Williams (standing in excavation pit) explains the site and stratigraphy to the group.

Cynthia Irwin-Williams and Henry Irwin (both with walking sticks) at the Hell Gap site. George Agogino (in plaid shirt) is behind Irwin-Williams.

Since the completion of the initial Hell Gap field studies 50 years ago, hundreds of Paleoindian sites have been recorded throughout Wyoming. The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office maintains files on these important cultural resources, while the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist maintains the collections. Housed in the Department of Anthropology building on the campus of the University of Wyoming, these collections and records offer unprecedented opportunities for Paleoindian research. We've come a long way, but still have much to learn.

Goshen, Hell Gap, and Frederick projectile points.

Front cover photograph and projectile point photographs by Richard Collier, Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources. Hafting of the projectile points by Russell Richard. Jim Chase produced the Frederick projectile point cast. Folsom point image courtesy Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Finley site image courtesy of the Penn Museum. Agate Basin and Hell Gap photos on file, Department of Anthropology, University of Wyoming. Graphic design by Mariko Design LLC/Elizabeth Ono Rahel.

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Celebrating a Century of Paleoindian Archaeology in Wyoming

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