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NEW EVIDENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF TURKEY IN THE EARLY POSTGLACIAL PERIOD OF THE NORTHERN GREAT BASIN

Stephen F. Bedwell¹

Archaeological excavations in the Fort Rock Valley area of south central Oregon (part of the farthest northward extension of the northern Great Basin) cast new light on the faunal picture of that area between 11,000 and 7,000 years ago.

In the summers of 1967 and 1968 an archaeological crew from the University of Oregon, under the direction of the author, excavated several caves located on the margins of a large pluvial lake² that existed in that area up until some time in the latter part of the eighth millennium.

In one cluster of early habitation sites, known as the Connley Caves, evidence of abundant human occupation was found in the form of tools, bone, and charcoal. The time of this occupation was established, through the use of radiocarbon 14 dating, as having occurred between 11,000 and 7,000 years ago (Bedwell, 1969). This material was also sealed off by a continuous six-inch layer of pumice from the eruption 7,000 years ago of Mount Mazama (the eruption that initiated the formation of present-day Crater Lake).

Bone material found in these caves was part of the refuse left behind by the human inhabitants of the area and serves as an indicator of the diet of these early peoples. Above the Mazama pumice at these sites the faunal material differed little in content from what would be found in this area during the present day. Below this layer, however, particularly in the 10,000- to 8,000-year period, large quantities of turkey bone were found.³ It is apparent that turkey was abundant in this relatively more moist anathermal period and was one of the staples in the diet of the local inhabitants. Nevertheless, after the Mount Mazama eruption at 7000 B.P. (a point in time that also coincides with the onset of the hot, dry alithermal period⁴) no more turkey remains had been found in any of the caves in the area. To the author's knowledge, this is the first report of turkey having been present in the northern Great Basin at any time. Distribution studies indicate that the nearest ranges, established through current reports, historic accounts, and archaeological investigations, are to be found in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado (Bent, 1932; Jewett, 1953; Schorger, 1966).

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²Ancient Fort Rock Lake (Allison, 1940, and Bedwell, 1969).

³Bone material identified by Robert W. Storer, Curator of Birds; and Joseph G. Struach, Research Assistant, Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. No species given.

⁴For a description of this period see Antevies (1938).