

Spirit Cave Man

1. *Why is Spirit Cave Man important?*

Spirit Cave Man is one of only a few human skeletons ever found in the United States that are complete or nearly complete and older than 8,000 years. Only two of them are still in existence.

2. *Are Spirit Cave Man and Kennewick Man from the same group?*

We do not know. Information about the people who lived that long ago is too limited to reach any firm conclusions about possible relationships between these two individuals. However, the differences in their biological characteristics may be an indication that the two groups were not directly related.

3. *Is Spirit Cave Man a Native American as defined in NAGPRA?*

In a “friend of the court” (*amicus*) brief, Friends of America’s Past has asked the Nevada Federal District Court to consider this question. In 2004, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals found that Kennewick Man does not fall within NAGPRA’s definition of Native American. The evidence concerning Spirit Cave Man is no better. The Reno, Nevada federal District Court is in the Ninth Circuit.

4. *How distant is Spirit Cave Man’s time from ours?*

The gulf separating Spirit Cave Man’s time from ours is enormous. 9400 years is the equivalent of almost 500 human generations. It is twice the age of the Egyptian pyramids and more than four times the age of the Mayan pyramids of Central America. Agriculture was just beginning in the Middle East 9400 years ago, and was still unknown in the Americas. Writing was not even thought of. In the intervening years, numerous civilizations have come and gone, massive human migrations have occurred in Eurasia, Africa and the Americas, and the planet has gone through a multitude of climate and environmental fluctuations. Lifestyles have changed in ways we still do not understand, languages have arisen and disappeared (many without a trace), and whole groups of people have succumbed to disease, war, natural catastrophes and other causes. To trace the lineage of one person or group through all those changes and gaps in the known record is an impossibility. We simply cannot get there from here. See Friends of America’s Past *amicus* brief.

5. *What do we know about Spirit Cave Man times?*

Western Great Basin people of his time are thought to have been hunters and gatherers who used stone tools, exploited a wide range of animals and plants, and traveled long distances in their search for subsistence. Population density was low, and people probably lived in small, mobile, “free roaming” bands. Apart from these broad outlines, the known facts are meager. Great Basin archaeological evidence from the early

Holocene (10,000 to 7500 years B.P.) comes primarily from surface quarry sites, lithic sites and shallow cave deposits. There are no known village or house sites. Nor is there any evidence for other types of structures. The religious beliefs and world views of these ancient humans are unknown. Also lacking is any evidence concerning their rituals, ceremonies, customs, folklore, marriage and healing practices, kinship patterns or other key social arrangements. There are no known rock art sites for this period in the Great Basin. See Friends of America's Past amicus brief (references and some text deleted).

6. *What band or group did Spirit Cave Man belong to?*

We do not know. The evidence does not establish how many people lived in the region during his time, or how they were organized in groups or bands. We do not know how many different groups there may have been, or how they may have interacted (or competed) with one another. Nor do we know what happened to those groups between then and now. Some may have become extinct, and others may have moved to new homelands outside the region, including locations outside the United States. For more details, see Friends of America's Past amicus brief.

7. *Do we know what language Spirit Cave Man spoke?*

No. Since Spirit Cave Man is dead and his people did not have written records, the language he spoke is an unsolvable mystery. But whatever his language was, it is not likely to have reassembled any language spoken today anywhere in the world. For more details, see Campbell and Goddard amicus brief.

8. *What are the chances that Spirit Cave Man spoke a language ancestral to the Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone languages of the Tribe claiming his remains?*

Exceedingly small. It has been estimated that at least 85% of the languages once spoken in North America have become extinct. Even if Spirit Cave Man does have living linguistic descendants, it is impossible to determine who they are or where they reside today. They could be anywhere, even outside the United States in some far off part of central or South America. For more details, see Campbell and Goddard amicus brief.

9. *Do oral traditions provide reliable evidence of a connection between Spirit Cave Man and modern Native Americans?*

No. Oral narratives are extremely mutable, and are unlikely to retain any historical accuracy after even 500 to 1000 years. To use myths as proof of a claimed cultural or biological connection over a period of more than 9,000 years ignores all that has been learned about the nature of such stories, the process of oral transmission and how orally transmitted narratives change over time to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of the people who tell them. See Custred and Simic amicus brief.

10. *Can archaeology demonstrate a connection between Spirit Cave Man and the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe or other modern Native Americans?*

No. Significant gaps in the archaeological record, such as those discussed in BLM's determination concerning these ancient human remains, make it impossible to trace such a connection. The time interval is so great in this particular case that tracing any modern-day tribal group, or even American Indians generally, so far back into the past is beyond the bounds of any recognized historical science. See Ohio Archaeological Council amicus brief.

There are no known scientific ways of securely demonstrating whether the ca 9,400 year-old human remains from Spirit Cave represent a population of individuals who were or were not ancestral to the modern native peoples of the Lahontan Basin. Report to the Tribe from Donald Grayson, Anthropologist, University of Washington.

11. Can anything more be learned from further study of Spirit Cave Man?

Yes. Many important studies have never been performed on this skeleton, and many that have been need to be updated. In addition, new study methods that cannot be conceived of today will inevitably be developed in the future. The few Paleoamerican skeletal remains that have been found in this country are very different from modern human populations, and in some cases from each other. The reason for these differences can never be determined if Spirit Cave Man and other ancient skeletons are not preserved.