

18.4 Solving a History Mystery: Little Ice Age Ends Norse and Anasazi Settlements

Background: Scientists have started to call the time period we live in the Anthropocene because of the impact of human beings on global climate and the physical world. Since the Industrial Revolution began about 1750 AD, the concentration of Greenhouse gases in the atmosphere like Carbon Dioxide and Methane have increased sharply leading to global warming. Raising temperatures are averages and not uniform, so climate change can have a different impact on different parts of the planet. In history, we can see how temperature change affected regions differently during the period known as the Little Ice Age starting in the Northern Hemisphere in about 1100 AD.

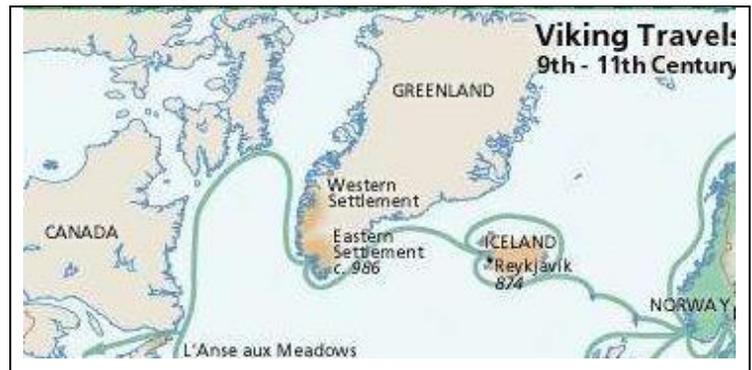
Questions

1. What happened to Norse North Atlantic settlements?
2. What happened to the Anasazi civilization of the Four Corners region?
3. How did the same climate vent impact the two groups differently?
4. How do the experiences of the Norse and Anasazi help us better understand climate change in the Anthropocene?

A. Collapse of Norse Settlement in the North Atlantic

Sources: <https://www.livescience.com/14381-ice-age-viking-departure-greenland.html>; <https://norse-mythology.org/vikings-explorers-settlers/>

Between 800 and 1,000 AD Norse sailors established settlements on the Faroe Islands northwest of Scotland, Iceland, Greenland and in Labrador. Ice cores samples from Greenland show that declining temperatures during the "Little Ice Age" preceded the abandonment of Norse settlements there during the 14th century. The cooling started around 1100 AD and average temperatures drop 7F. Growing seasons were shortened and ice impeded sea travel, communication with other settlements, and trade. Iceland was settled by the Norse c. 875 AD. At the start of the 13th century Iceland was under Scandinavian rule, but its population became increasingly isolated as colder temperatures interfered with migration from the mainland and trade.



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B. Disappearance of the Anasazi from the Four Corners Region of the United States

Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/riddles-of-the-anasazi-85274508/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/08/science/08anasazi.html>

The people we know as the Anasazi built an urban agricultural civilization in the Four Corners region of the United States where Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico meet. Then during the 13th century they abandoned their settlements and seemed to disappear. We know believe they migrated south along the San Juan River and their descendants are the Pueblo people of New Mexico. As Anasazi civilization developed and as population increased, their communities became for fragile and dependent on climate. When the Little Ice Age brought drought to the region where they lived, the yield of the maize (corn) crop declined, villages went to war with each other over food and water, and eventually the Anasazi left the area.

