Peopling of North America

1. The Land Bridge
2. Coastal Entry
3. Atlantic Theory
4. Pacific Theory
5. African Theory
6. Creationist Theory
7. Problems with the theories – The Native Perspective

Theory: A general idea that explains a large set of factual patterns
Definition from: http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0072549238/student_view0/glossary.html

1. The Land Bridge:
People hunted and gathered for food. As their food sources became scarcer they started looking for ways to hunt larger animals. The largest animals moved across the Bering Strait into what would become North America. The Bering Strait was exposed land and was not under water. The Ice Fields in the northern parts of North America soaked up all the water. People followed the herds across the Bering Strait and then into North America. As the ice fields melted, the people spread south. At first it was simply a matter of following their food. It got more complicated as time passed mostly due to people who settled in various locations.

Evidence for this theory includes pieces of pottery, hunting tools and various other artifacts in the shallow water of the Bering Strait. Also, the people of various native groups in North America can have similar DNA patterns to native peoples in northwestern Asia.

2. Coastal Theory:
People who propose this theory claim that North America was linked to the rest of the world by a series of islands that are no longer exposed. Some evidence exists to show that early humans may have “island hopped” to find their way into North America then moved into South America.

Evidence for this theory includes a common design in floating vessels such as canoes and boats. There is also some geologic evidence in the shallow waters off the BC coast. The western Canadian coastline is also evidence of this theory in all of its various islands. Also, the 13,000 year old bones of a woman were found on Santa Rosa Island off the coast of Florida. The only possible way some scientists see her bones being on the island with no other remains is that she was left there and the rest of her people left on boats, “island hopping” to the next location.

3 & 4. Atlantic / Pacific Theory
Those who believe in this theory claim that early humans built boats and crossed the oceans to get to North America. Those who claim this theory state that it would have been easy for early humans to build these kinds of boats due to the strength of the hunting and shaping tools of the time. They believe that it was not only possible but probable that these boats were built with very little technology and that the ocean crossings were not overly long or drawn out.
Evidence for this theory includes the DNA patterns of some of the native peoples in North America match those of people from Japan called the Ainu. There are also many similarities in the cultures of several northern native populations within Canada, Russia, Greenland, and Northern Europe.

5. African Theory
Early immigrants to South America may have come from Africa by boats. The basis of this theory is the same as the previous two in that they would have used boats to travel. However, the result is that instead of spreading south, the population spread north.

Evidence to form this theory comes from skulls in burial sites. Features of skulls from some native groups in South America and southern North America tend to have similar features with African and Australian native populations.

6. Creationist Theory
This theory holds that humans spread from the original pairing of man and woman with Adam and Eve. God or some other deity created the Earth and the population spread from Adam and Eve. In Christian religions the concept comes mostly from the book of Genesis in the Bible. The book of Mormon relates more specifically to North America and is proposed by the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

7. The Native Perspective
Depending on who you ask in various native communities you will have different answers.

Traditional Mi’kmaw teachings hold that Glooscap created man and woman from the Ashe tree and that they populated the region. Glooscap was the messenger of the Creator who created the Maritime region from the best materials and what was left over Glooscap left in a pile and formed Newfoundland.

Other groups have other beliefs. One holds that a turtle saved people from a great flood and brought them to North America and safety. Another says that the creator put people here to protect the animals on the land.

The native perspective is more spiritual and tends not to have solid evidence other than the belief of the people who hold them. They get left out of serious conversation and are not taken seriously by mainstream religious groups. Courts are now deciding some of this when native groups claim some lands as spiritual or as sacred grounds. Native groups tend also to get ignored and therefore their theories are not mentioned in textbooks.