

Mid-Holocene climate and culture change in the Atacama Desert, Northern Chile

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Twenty archaeological campsites intercalated between more than 30 debris flows caused by heavy rainfall events between 6200 and 3100 14C yr B.P. have recently been discovered at Quebrada Puripica in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile. This record provides detailed information about extreme, short-lived climatic events during the hyperarid mid-Holocene period. For the first time, we found evidence of continuous human occupation in this area, filling the regional hiatus in the Atacama basin ("Silencio Arqueológico") between 8000 and 4800 14C yr B.P. The transformation of Early Archaic hunters into the complex Late Archaic cultural tradition was an adaptive process. During this time, the site was a local ecological refuge with abundant resources in a generally hostile environment. © 1997 University of Washington.