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Late Pleistocene and Holocene paleoenvironments of the North Pacific coast

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Abstract

Unlike the North Atlantic, the North Pacific Ocean probably remained free of sea ice during the last glacial maximum (LGM), 22,000 to 17,000 BP. Following a eustatic low in sea level of ca. \sim 120 m at 19,000 BP, a marine transgression had flooded the Bering and Chukchi shelves by 10,000 BP. Post-glacial sea-level history varied widely in other parts of the North Pacific coastline according to the magnitude and timing of local tectonism and glacio-isostatic rebound. Glaciers covered much of the continental shelf between the Alaska Peninsula and British Columbia during the LGM. Maximum glacier extent during the LGM was out of phase between southern Alaska and southern British Columbia with northern glaciers reaching their outer limits earlier, between 23,000 and 16,000 BP, compared to 15,000–14,000 BP in the south. Glacier retreat was also time-transgressive, with glaciers retreating from the continental shelf of southern Alaska before 16,000 BP but not until 14,000–13,000 BP in southwestern British Columbia.

Major climatic transitions occurred in the North Pacific at 24,000â€“22,000, 15,000â€“13,000 and 11,000â€“9000 BP. Rapid climate changes occurred within these intervals, including a possible Younger Dryas episode. An interval of climate warmer and drier than today occurred in the early Holocene. Cooler and wetter conditions accompanied widespread Neoglaciation, beginning in some mountain ranges as early as the middle Holocene, but reaching full development after 3000 BP.



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