People have been living in Central and South America for many, many years now. How did ancient people live in this area thousands of years ago? Archaeologists studying the area of the Central American land bridge have been working to answer this question.

What is the Central American land bridge? It is the land that is now the countries of Costa Rica and Panama. Like a modern bridge over a river, this land bridge was used by animals and people to travel back and forth. This Central American land bridge connects the northern land that is now Nicaragua, Mexico, and so on to the southern land that is now Colombia, Brazil, and other South American countries.

People who were already living in North America traveled down and across this land bridge. Scientists think they traveled there around 11,000 BC. They probably were following large animals that they hunted and ate. These people would have traveled on foot, following the herds of animals. They had no permanent houses. They would pack up their things and bring them along as they hunted. Their homes were like tents and were very easy to take down and put up. Archaeologists can tell these people traveled via the land bridge because they have found similar arrowheads and tools in both the land bridge and in areas further north and south.

These tools are the main record of people’s movement and settlement. Ancient people at this time made their tools, by hand, out of stone. Later, they used obsidian, which is a dark glass formed in volcanoes. They made small hand axes, arrowheads and spearheads by knapping. Knapping is when
you hit one stone with another to break off little pieces. Slowly, you can shape the stone however you want. When certain stones (like obsidian or flint) break, they leave very sharp edges, which can be used to cut.

Archaeologists don't find evidence of these tools very often. When so much time passes, natural things like rain, dirt and trees destroy and bury them. Scientists also think the oceans were lower back then. This means there once was more land that is now underwater. Probably there is more evidence of people living in the area under the sea off the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama.

It is hard to tell when people stopped traveling along the land bridge and began living there. One clue is when people began farming. On the land bridge, this was around 9,000 and 7,000 BC. In Panama, scientists have found evidence that people were growing bottle gourds, squash, and a few other things around that time. These would be in small gardens, not big farms. People weren't eating just the plants they grew at this time. They would gather fruits and nuts from the forest, hunt deer, fish for crabs and fish, and eat from their gardens.

Archaeologists now think that some forests were actually farms too, which makes it harder to determine when hunting and gathering stopped. Places we once thought were wild were perhaps maintained by ancient people. This would be like an apple orchard. It looks like a forest, but has actually been planted and taken care of by humans—you wouldn't know it was a farm for apples unless you looked more closely. The same thing probably happened on the Central American land bridge and elsewhere.

Slowly, people built more permanent houses on the land bridge. The first small village archaeologists have found is in Costa Rica, in a place called Tronadora Vieja. There are round pole and thatch houses, which are simple huts made out of long tree branches covered in leaves and grasses. These houses date to 3,800 BC and were destroyed when a nearby volcano exploded and buried them in ash. Scientists also found the earliest maize kensels on the land bridge, as well as metates. Metates are small stone tables used to grind maize into powder. This was used in cooking and baking, like flour. Nearby at Laguna Zoncho, archaeologists found a bigger village, with more houses and farms. People started living here after Tronadora Vieja, around 3,240 BC.

People were still hunting and gathering at this time, though. Why did some people settle down to farm and some people continue moving around? There are lots of ideas, but on the land bridge, archaeologists think it had to do with the amount of rain and water in the area. Places that had less water made it harder for the forests to remain full of fruits and animals. So in these dry areas, people started to farm more, build houses and stay put. So some groups kept hunting and gathering while others were starting to build and farm.

Archaeologists are still studying this part of the world. Hopefully in the years to come, we can find out more about how ancient people lived on the Central American land bridge.
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Scrambled Sentences

I. Rearrange the words into a sentence. Add correct capitalization and punctuation. (Hint: The first word of the sentence is in bold.)

1. believe to something or a proof evidence is gives reason something that

2. is another to hitting one break stone off little with pieces knapping

3. into are maize tables small powder metates stone used to grind
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Fragments

II. Write “S” if the words form a complete sentence. Capitalize and punctuate the sentences. Write “F” if the words are a sentence fragment. Change the fragments into complete sentences.

1. _______ the central american land bridge

2. _______ the passage is mainly about the development of civilization on the central american land bridge

3. _______ is made up of dark glass formed in volcanoes
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Conjunctions

III. Complete the sentence stems by using because, but, and so.

1. Scientists think that people traveled the land bridge around 11,000 BCE because ___
   ____________________________________________

2. They used the process of knapping because ______________________________________
   ____________________________________________

3. They maintained a healthy diet because _________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

4. People in Panama started farming between 9,000 and 7,000 BCE, but _________
   ____________________________________________

5. Water became scarce in some areas, so _________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Subordinating Conjunctions

IV. Complete the sentences.

1. When water became scarce in some areas, __________________________
   __________________________

2. Since the current landscape has evolved, __________________________
   __________________________

3. If ancient people were able to maintain forests as farms, __________________________
   __________________________
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Transitions

V. Connect the following sentences by using a transition from the word bank.

specifically   therefore   instead

1. The first people to travel the Central American land had no permanent dwellings.
   _________________, they lived in tents that were easy to take down and put up as they moved around.

2. Ancient people at this time made a variety of tools by hand.
   _________________, they made small hand axes, arrowheads and spearheads.

3. There is still so much information archaeologists do not know about how ancient people lived their lives. _________________, we must continue to ask questions, so these civilizations stay relevant and are not completely erased from history.
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Scrambled Sentences

I. Rearrange the words into a sentence. Add correct capitalization and punctuation. (Hint: The first word of the sentence is in **bold**.)

1. believe to something or a proof **evidence** is gives reason something that

   Evidence is something that gives proof or a reason to believe something.

2. is another to hitting one break stone off little with pieces **knapping**

   Knapping is hitting one stone with another to break off little pieces.

3. into are maize tables small powder **metates** stone used to grind

   Metates are small stone tables used to grind maize into powder.
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

**Fragments**

II. Write “S” if the words form a complete sentence. Capitalize and punctuate the sentences. Write “F” if the words are a sentence fragment. Change the fragments into complete sentences.

4. __F____ the central american land bridge
   The author describes the Central American land bridge and the people who traveled it.

5. ___S____ the passage is mainly about the development of civilization on the central american land bridge
   The passage is mainly about the development of civilization on the Central American land bridge.

6. ____F____ is made up of dark glass formed in volcanoes
   Obsidian is made up of dark glass formed in volcanoes.
III. Complete the sentence stems by using because, but, and so.

6. Scientists think that people traveled the land bridge around 11,000 BCE because scientists found similar arrowheads and tools in the land bridge and in areas further north and south.

7. They used the process of knapping because it allowed them to make tools with sharp edges.

8. They maintained a healthy diet because they ate plants, fruits, nuts, fished and hunted deer.

9. People in Panama started farming between 9,000 and 7,000 BCE, but they did not rely on it as their only food source.

10. Water became scarce in some areas, so it became increasingly difficult to maintain forests that were full of fruits and animals.
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

**Subordinating Conjunctions**

IV. Complete the sentences.

4. When water became scarce in some areas, it **became increasingly difficult to maintain forests that were full of fruits and animals.**
5. Since the current landscape has evolved, **additional artifacts and practices are harder to uncover.**
6. If ancient people were able to maintain forests as farms, **then modern science could use those practices to develop a more sustainable agricultural system.**
“Early People in the Central American Land Bridge”

Transitions

V. Connect the following sentences by using a transition from the word bank.

4. The first people to travel the Central American land had no permanent dwellings. **Instead**, they lived in tents that were easy to take down and put up as they moved around.

5. Ancient people at this time made a variety of tools by hand. **Specifically**, they made small hand axes, arrowheads and spearheads.

6. There is still so much information archaeologists do not know about how ancient people lived their lives. **Therefore**, we must continue to ask questions, so these civilizations stay relevant and are not completely erased from history.