

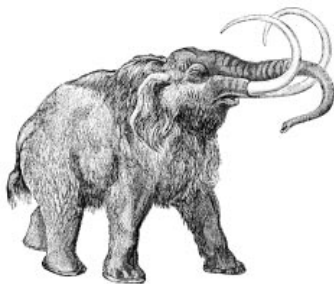
**Chapter 1 Viewpoint Activity**

Thousands of years of human history passed before written history began. Early humans interacted with each other and with the natural environment around them (textbook pages 6–8). Some scientists, led by Paul Martin, think that human hunters in North America were the main reason that many kinds of huge animals, such as the woolly mammoth and the giant sloth, disappeared about 10,000 years ago. Others, such as paleontologist Edwin Colbert, blame their extinction on other causes, such as a sudden change in climate. ♦ *As you read about this prehistoric mystery, think about what it might mean today. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**What Killed the Woolly Mammoth?**

**Paul S. Martin** About 10,000 years ago, as glaciers retreated into Canada and as man moved southward at the end of the last Ice Age, North America suddenly and strangely lost most of its large animals. Native North American mammals exceeding 100 pounds in adult body weight were reduced by roughly 70 percent. The casualty list includes mammoths, mastodon, many species of horses and camels, . . . the giant beaver, tapirs and others totaling over 100 species. Despite this fantastic loss of large animals during the Pleistocene, . . . the fossil record shows no loss of small vertebrates, plants, aquatic organisms, or marine life.

. . . My own hypothesis is that man, and man alone, was responsible for the unique wave of Late Pleistocene extinction. . . . About 12,000 years ago, when the Paleo-Indians swept into North America across the Bering bridge . . . we can be confident that they were old hands at hunting woolly mammoths and other large Eurasian mammals. In contrast, the New World mammoth and other species of big game had never encountered man and were unprepared for escaping the strange two-legged creature who used fire and stone-tipped spears to hunt them in communal bands.



NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES

**Edwin H. Colbert** Then at the end of the Ice Age, when the last of the great continental glaciers was retreating. . . there was a relatively sudden and widespread extinction of mammoths throughout the world. The woolly mammoth disappeared from northern Europe, Asia, and North America, as did the more southerly types in these continents. . .

What was the reason for the wiping out of the mammoths? Why should these huge and seemingly successful animals suddenly disappear from a scene which they had so long dominated? Was man concerned with their extinction? It hardly seems probable, for even though at this late date he was a clever and an efficient hunter, he was still rather scattered—certainly not a numerous member of the faunas to which he belonged. Therefore, it is difficult to see how primitive hunters might have prevailed against the mammoths to such an extent as to cause their sudden and almost complete destruction.

The answer to this question may always remain a secret.

Source:(1) “Pleistocene Overkill” by Paul S. Martin; (2) “Mammoths and Men” by Edwin H. Colbert, both in *Ants, Indians, and Little Dinosaurs* (©The American Museum of Natural History, 1975).

**Questions to Discuss**

1. What facts about the disappearance of the animals do both writers accept? When did this happen?
2. How does Martin explain the extinction of large animals? Why does Colbert think this explanation does not work?
3. **Determining Relevance** Why is it important that the extinctions occurred soon after humans arrived on a new continent? What kind of evidence might a scientist look for to give further proof of this idea?