

The Woolly Mammoth

The woolly mammoth is a now-extinct species of mammoth that lived during the last ice age. The last one is thought to have died approximately 4,000 years ago. Woolly mammoths are among the most studied of all prehistoric animals because there have been more discoveries of their remains than most other prehistoric animals. These findings - mainly in Siberia and Alaska, have included frozen carcasses, skeletons, teeth, stomach contents, and depictions in prehistoric cave paintings.

Though we often picture an unimaginably large creature, the woolly mammoth was roughly the same size as a modern-day African elephant. It is the Asian elephant, however, that is considered to be the woolly mammoth's closest extant relative and the resemblance is visible; woolly mammoths just looked like very hairy elephants. They were covered in fur, with a short undercoat and an outer layer of long guard hairs, in order to protect them from the cold and harsh environment that the last ice age brought. They also had short ears and a short tail to decrease heat loss and minimise the risk of frostbite. Woolly mammoths used their long tusks and large trunk for fighting, foraging and moving objects. Their diet predominantly consisted of grasses and hedges.

For a time, early humans lived alongside these herbivores but hunted them for food and used their tusks and bones for making tools, art and even their homes.

Smilodon

Smilodon, more commonly known as the saber-toothed tiger, is one of the most famous prehistoric animals. Smilodon was megafauna, meaning that it was categorised as a very large animal that was terrestrial. They died out around 10,000 years ago, when most megafauna in North and South America disappeared.

In comparison with any extant wild cat that we know today, Smilodon was approximately the same size but much more robust in build. They had a jaw that could open much wider when comparing them with wild cats today. Their most distinct characteristic was their extraordinarily long upper canines which were like fangs; delicate and slim and perfect for killing prey. North America was the home to most Smilodon but discoveries of remains have been made in South America. Top of the food chain, the likes of bison, megatherium and camels were a Smilodon's ideal prey as they were large herbivores. The predator's ideal habitat is thought to have been areas like bush and forests, places with many opportunities for them to stealthily approach prey. The Smilodon's extinction is thought to be linked to the decline in larger herbivores. Smaller, more agile herbivores became more prominent and Smilodon were unable to adapt their hunting technique to suit the necessary change.

Megatherium

Megatherium is an extinct species of giant ground sloth. These were remarkably different to what we imagine when we talk about sloths nowadays. When comparing megatherium and the modern-day sloth, the megatherium was larger by up to ten times. Discoveries have also proven that megatherium would have reached 4 metres in height when standing on their hind legs. Being this height and able to walk on its two hind legs, megatherium is known to be the largest bipedal mammal to have ever lived.

Like the woolly mammoth, megatherium were also likely hunted by humans. This is known because their fossils have been discovered with knife marks on them. The similarities did not end there, however, as megatherium is also thought to have been herbivores.

1 What did megatherium and woolly mammoths have in common?

- A. They were both bipedal animals
 - B. They were both omnivores
 - C. They were both hunted by humans
 - D. They both looked like the modern-day elephant
-

2 Which of the following was not usual prey for Smilodon?

- A. Woolly mammoth
 - B. Bison
 - C. Camels
 - D. Megatherium
-

3 What is significant about the Asian elephant?

- A. They are approximately the same size as the woolly mammoth
 - B. They were alive at the same time as the woolly mammoth
 - C. They are the only animal alive today of a similar size
 - D. They are the woolly mammoth's closest living relative
-

4 What is meant when it says that the Smilodon was '*... top of the food chain...*'?

- A. It was the most frequent hunter amongst the main predators
 - B. It was the dominant predator
 - C. It was rich in nutrients
 - D. It had little trouble finding prey
-

5 Which of the following two features of a woolly mammoth were useful for minimising heat loss?

- A. Short trunk and short ears
- B. Short tail and long tusks
- C. Short ears and short tail
- D. Small mouth and short ears

6 How do we know that humans hunted megatherium?

- A. It was depicted in prehistoric cave paintings
 - B. The fossils that have been discovered have knife marks in them
 - C. They didn't, megatherium hunted humans
 - D. There are diary entries that have been discovered
-

7 "... *Smilodon* was approximately the same size but much more robust in build."

What is meant by this?

- A. The *Smilodon* was fatter in build
 - B. The *Smilodon* was more rigid in build
 - C. The *Smilodon* was broader in build
 - D. The *Smilodon* was stronger in build
-

8 Which of the following did the woolly mammoth not do with its tusks?

- A. Rummage for food
 - B. Kill prey
 - C. Move objects
 - D. Fight
-

9 Which two features mean an animal can be categorised as megafauna?

- A. Being of a large size and a herbivore
 - B. Being of a large size and a predator
 - C. Being of a large size and existing on dry land
 - D. Being of a large size and living in solitude
-

10 According to the passage, the *Smilodon*'s extinction can be attributed to which of the following?

- A. There was an increase in smaller, faster prey
- B. A more agile predator became too much competition for them
- C. There was an increase in more aggressive herbivores as prey
- D. The *Smilodon* became less agile

Prehistoric Animals

1	C
2	A
3	D
4	B
5	C
6	B
7	D
8	B
9	C
10	A