



Columbian Mammoths: Giants of the Ice Age

Did you know not all mammoths were woolly mammoths? The woolly mammoth was just one of nearly a dozen different species of mammoths. Another species was the Columbian (pronounced “cuh-LUM-be-un”) mammoth.

Columbian mammoths lived during the Pleistocene Epoch (“PLY-stuh-SEEN EP-uck”), sometimes called the Ice Age. The Pleistocene Epoch started 2.5 million years ago and ended about 10,000 years ago. Even though

people call it the Ice Age, not all the world was covered in ice. Sheets of ice called glaciers (“GLAY-shurs”) covered most of what is now Canada and the northern United States, but the lands that became the southern United States and Mexico were not under ice.

Columbian mammoths were grazers, or animals that eat mostly grass. To make sure they had enough to eat, they lived in savannas (“suh-VAN-uhs”). Savannas are warm grasslands with scattered trees, and they were away from the glaciers. This was different from the woolly mammoths, which lived closer to the glaciers in lands called steppes (“STEPS”), cool plains with shrubs, herbs, and a little grass.

How big was a Columbian mammoth? Huge! They were about 14 feet tall, or 4.3 meters. They also weighed as much as 10 tons, the same as a school bus. This made them much bigger than woolly mammoths, which were about 10 feet tall (3 meters) and weighed 6 tons.

So why were they called Columbian mammoths? Scientists use New Latin to name animals. In New Latin, “Columbia” means “land of Columbus”, or North America. Columbian mammoths lived in North America and nowhere else, so this is a good name. Most Columbian mammoth fossils have been found in the United States or Mexico.

1. What is another name for the Ice Age?
2. What do grazers eat?
3. What does “Columbia” mean?
4. What is the difference between a savanna and a steppe?
5. List three differences between Columbian mammoths and woolly mammoths.