

OKLAHOMA'S ICE AGE



Artist: Karen Carr

OKLAHOMA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

The "Great Ice Age" occurred during the Pleistocene Epoch, which lasted from about 1.65 million years ago until about 10,000 years ago. Cycles in which great ice sheets covered as much as a third of the Earth's surface characterized this episode in geologic history. In North America, the last great ice sheet covered virtually all of Canada and much of the northern United States, beginning to wane only about 11,000 to 12,000 years ago.

Although the ice sheets did not reach as far south as the area we now know as Oklahoma, the climate, vegetation, and animal life of the region would have been quite different. Average summer temperatures were

5°–10° Fahrenheit cooler and the climate was more moist. In the western and central part of the state, lush prairie grasslands intermingled with woodlands, while forests grew in the east. Large mammals roamed the land, including huge, herd-dwelling creatures with fantastic tusks and long trunks—Columbian mammoths (*Mammuthus columbi*), such as the one depicted here.

As the last great continental ice sheet was melting, the first human inhabitants of North America—Paleoindians—entered what is now Oklahoma. Clues recovered from ancient sediments in Oklahoma and elsewhere indicate that these early inhabitants hunted

the mammoths. For example, spear points and other tools found with the bones of a single mammoth at the Domebo site in Caddo County, Oklahoma, suggest that about 11,000 years ago, hunters using atlatls (spear throwers) trapped and killed the animal in a ravine. Sites such as Domebo help paleontologists, archeologists, geologists, and other scientists piece together the puzzle of what Oklahoma was like when humans hunted mammoths in the region, late in the Great Ice Age.