

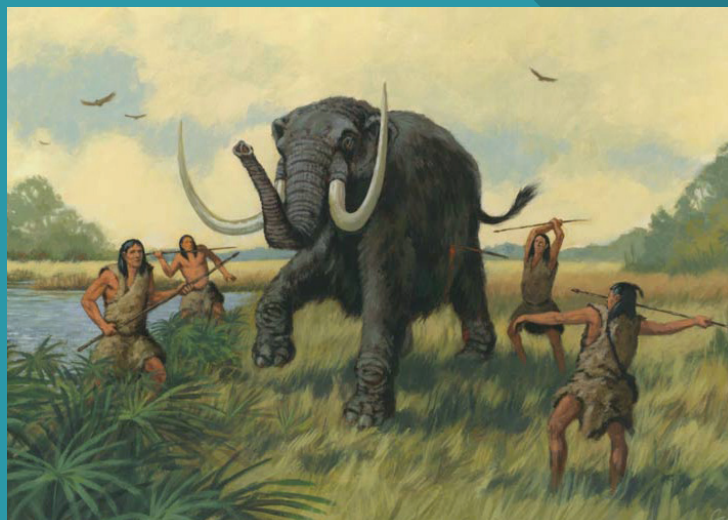
# THE FIRST FLORIDIANS

Before the arrival of colonizers from Europe, the peninsula that would become Florida was home to tens, or even hundreds of thousands, of indigenous people. The first ancestors arrived during the Pleistocene, also known as the Ice Age, over 15,000 years ago. At that time glaciers covered much of North America, reaching as far south as modern day Chicago.

The Florida the first ancestors arrived in was very different than today. Lower water levels meant that the coast line extended about fifty miles further into the gulf than it does now. There was also less rainfall, so the land was drier and there were fewer rivers. The animals that roamed the landscape were also different. Megafauna, larger versions of animals that exist today, lived in Florida. The ancestors hunted these mammoths, mastodons, large tortoises, and other animals, and thrived.

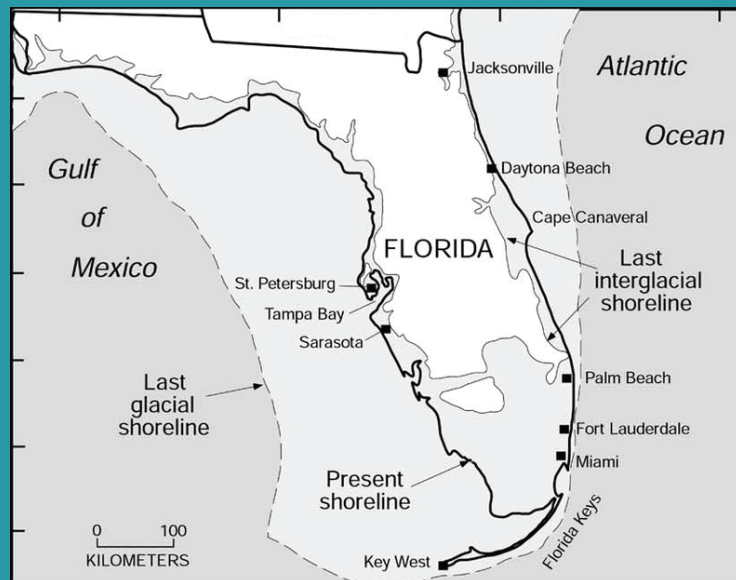
As global temperatures warmed, the Ice Age ended. The megafauna began to die off, rainfall increased, and sea levels rose. The ancestors learned to overcome these challenges. New technologies, such as the atlatl (or spear thrower) greatly improved hunting. Canoes were created to navigate the landscape as more rivers, and eventually the Everglades, emerged.

By the time the first Spanish arrived, indigenous Floridians flourished in large societies that had developed a wide variety of strategies for living across different landscapes. In northern Florida they fished, farmed, and hunted. In South Florida, where farming was less practical, they focused much more on fishing and collecting the abundant resources available in the Everglades and the Caribbean waters. Colonizers disrupted thousands of years of adaptation, ingenuity, and success. Yet, traditions passed down from the ancestors persist and continue today among the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the descendants of the first people of Florida.



Above: Artist's depiction of Vero Man, Florida Ancestors, hunting a mammoth. Finds from an archaeological site near Vero Beach, Florida showed that ancient Floridians were present during the Pleistocene.

Below: A map of Florida's coastline demonstrating the change between the Pleistocene and modern day.



Map data: Muhs, Daniel & Wehmler, J.F. & Simmons, Kathleen & York, Lauren. (2003). Quaternary sea-level history of the United States. *Developments in Quaternary Science*. 1. 147-183. 10.1016/S1571-0866(03)01008-X.

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