

## **Mammoths and the mammoth fauna: concluding remarks**

The First International Mammoth Conference was a homecoming of sorts for most of the participants. Many of us had already studied the mammoths and other species in collections housed at the conference's venue, the Zoological Institute in St. Petersburg. In my case, the last visit was eight years earlier when the city was still known as Leningrad. The November weather was about the same then as in 1995 - cold, wet, and grey. At the Conference the meeting room tended to be hot and stuffy, except when a window was opened to let in the traffic noises and, once a day, when least expected, the noontime boom of the cannon from the Peter and Paul fortress. The Russian hosts were eager to talk with the other participants, who for their part could not get enough of the Zoological Museum's unimaginable collections. We sat in a conference room with a giant painting of Charles Darwin looking forward towards each speaker, and we mingled in old rooms, dimly lit corridors, old fashioned exhibition halls, and the corners and niches of an institution built by tsar Peter the Great hundreds of years before. Peter's horse and dogs have been stuffed and placed in a display case to remind visitors of this Institute's pedigree. The participants at the Conference were part of a historical moment that should be seen as the beginning of a new age in mammoth studies - the age of open and facilitated international cooperation, as well as the end of another age - the time of fragmentation, when mammoth studies proceeded only at the pace of individual or institutional interest, with minimal exchange of information and an inadequate flow of knowledge among scholars of the world.

The Conference included a full schedule of presentations, from which only a fraction appeared as papers for this collection. The editing process was typically full of frustrations and minor triumphs - months passed before some papers showed up, the senior editor (me) was overseas in Africa incommunicado for three months each year, one contributor withdrew a paper just days after submitting it a full year and a half late, etc. The papers translated literally from Russian into English had to be transformed into colloquial language, not always gracefully or successfully, considering the limited resources available to me alone at a computer keyboard, in between lecturing, advising, committee-meetings, and all the other duties of a University professor. What is near miraculous, however, is that every Russian paper was sent via e-mail, in English (thanks to Tatyana Platonova, for the most part), arriving with no problems at all. Also near-miraculous is the willingness of the Natural History Museum Rotterdam (Natuurmuseum

Rotterdam) not only to host the Second International Mammoth Conference in 1999, but also to publish this collection of papers in their journal DEINSEA. Some papers were read by volunteer referees, namely Richard Klein of Stanford University, Adrian Lister of the University College of London, Guy Hoelzer of the University of Nevada, Reno, Andrei Sher of the Geological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Janet Rachlow of the University of Nevada, Reno, and Jeff Saunders of the Illinois State Museum. They are to be thanked for the time and interest they took in the manuscripts. Janis Klimowicz and I read, re-read, typed and re-typed everything many times but we still could not find just the right English phrasing for many translated passages. Now, as I reflect at the end of this process, I can only hope that readers find the collection interesting and worthwhile, and that it makes them hungry for the next ones. I am certain all the contributors look forward to more collections.

Russian science has fallen on hard times, and western scientists are often stunned to learn how their colleagues in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and hundreds of other cities sometimes go for months between paychecks, struggling to continue their scholarly work in the face of so much difficulty. We should all look to future cooperative research as the way to help keep alive Russia's involvement and leadership in the study of mammoths and the mammoth fauna. It was fitting and appropriate that the world's first mammoth conference should be held in Russia, just as is fitting that Russian experience, know-how, and interest must be encouraged by western support for the continued involvement of Russian scientists in future conferences. What we know about mammoths we know mainly because of Russian scientific work and Russian collections of fossil materials that are available for study. The bones in the basement of St. Petersburg's Zoological Institute will provide researchers with essential study specimens for decades to come. Others may visit the Institute, as I did, and spend days in the mammoth room, looking out frost-rimmed double windows while measuring and photographing bones. Some time in the future, another Mammoth Conference may be held in the Institute, just a short walk from the Winter Palace and the Hermitage Museum - surely one of the greatest treasures in the world - and the canals and painted buildings of a handsome old city. If the first conference is a good model for the future ones, the papers to emerge from these conferences will be new and exciting, full of the drama of discovery and scientific proof, and occasionally astonishing in detail or possibilities.

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