



GROUND
SLOTH



Ground sloth, *Lestodon armatus*
South American giant, Plaster cast of specimen
Museum of Comparative Zoology
VPRA-4476

On display at the Harvard Museum of Natural History
[Cenozoic Mammals](#)

The last giant sloths probably lived about 10,000 years ago at the end of the Pleistocene period. These plant-eating creatures rivaled elephants in size! Some stood 20 feet (6 m) tall and weighed several tons. Ground sloths originated in South America and spread northward by drifting on trees and debris to the West Indies and by migrating over the Central American land bridge to North America.

Unlike modern sloths, which spend most of their time in trees, ground sloths spent all of their time on the ground. Ground sloths were herbivores with very large claws and relatively small, blunt teeth, which they probably used for browsing on trees and shrubs. The shape of their hip bones indicates that they could stand up on their hind legs. This would have allowed them to reach high up into trees for the best leaves and twigs.

Harvard Museums of Science & Culture (HMSC) is a partnership of four Harvard museums that present captivating programming for all ages and a dynamic array of permanent and changing exhibits. HMSC invites you to connect with Harvard University's distinctive collections and vital research on human civilizations, biodiversity, and the history of Earth and science.

Share your creations with us on social media **#ColorOurCollections** and **#HMSCconnects**

Continue exploring our museums:

[HMSC connects!](#)

[Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments](#)

[Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East](#)

[Harvard Museum of Natural History](#)

[Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology](#)

HMSC HARVARD MUSEUMS OF SCIENCE & CULTURE

Copyright © 2020 The President and Fellows of Harvard College