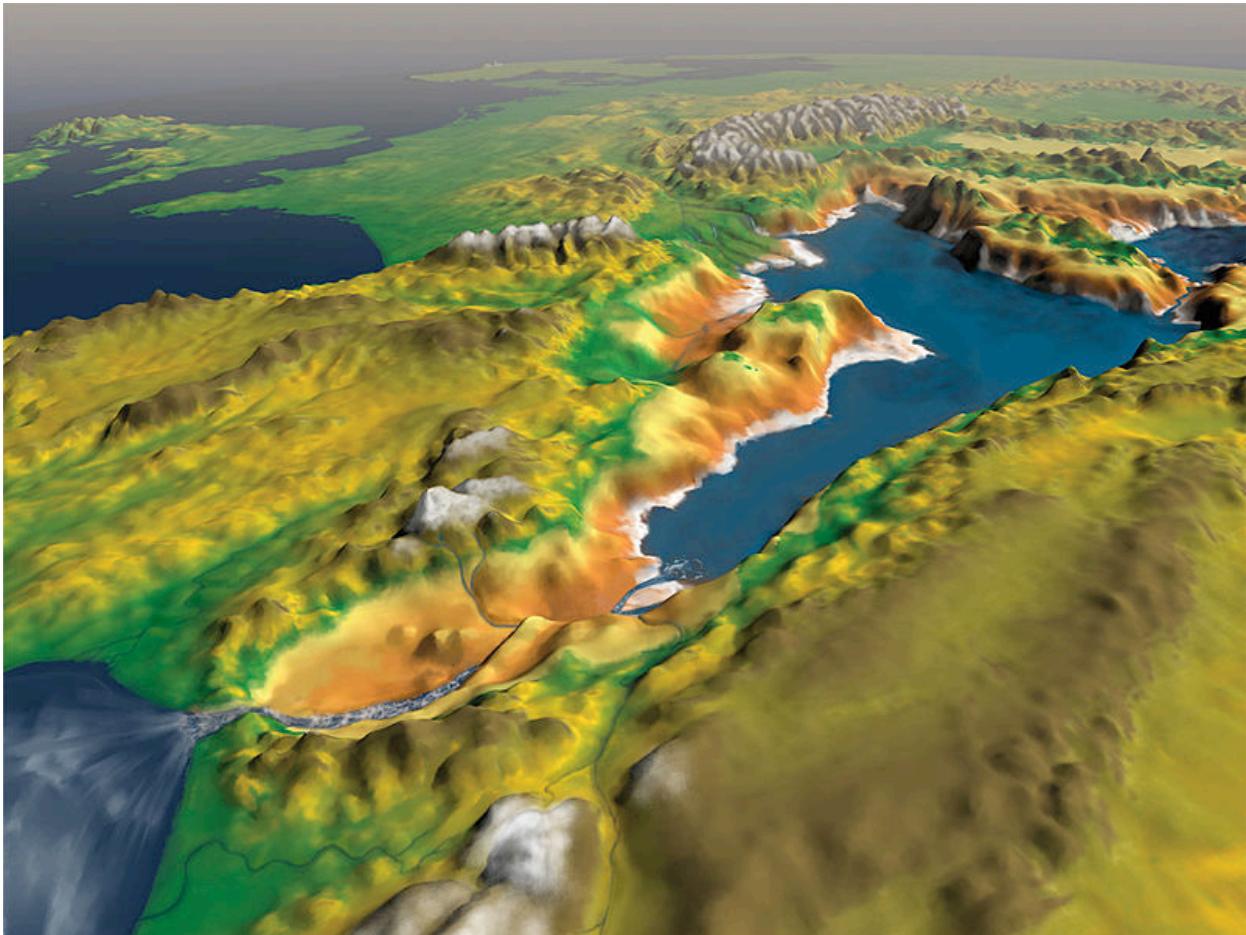


5,300,000 – Five Million Three Hundred Thousand Years Ago

- Geology
 - The Straits of Gibraltar closed about 300,000 years previous, cutting off the Mediterranean Basin from the world's oceans. As a result, the Mediterranean Sea dried up, leaving a parched desert with only a few salt lakes at an elevation as low as 5 kilometers below sea level. (The lowest place on Earth in 2,000CE is the Dead Sea, which is less than half a kilometer below sea level.) Ocean water is now gushing through the Straits of Gibraltar and will fill the entire Mediterranean Sea within a year or two, drowning countless desert plants and animals.



Zanclean Flood filling the Mediterranean Basin

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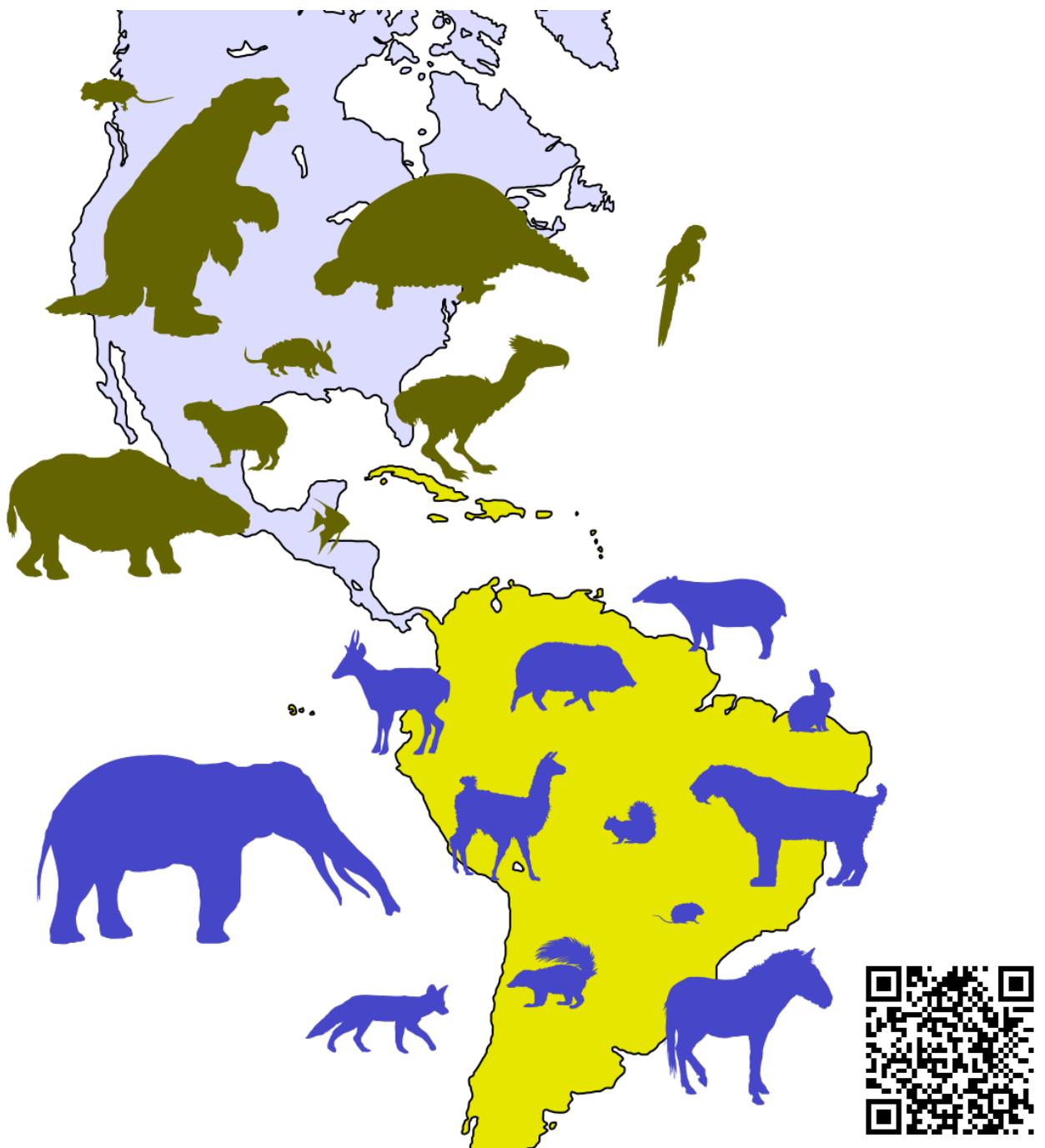


3,000,000 – Three Million Years Ago

- Geology
 - The volcanic Isthmus of Panama rose up above sea level and connected the North and South American Continents for the first time.
- Biology
 - For the first time, land and freshwater animals could travel between the two American Continents creating the Great American Biotic Interchange (GABI).

South America gained rattlesnakes, horses, tree squirrels, cottontail rabbits, tapirs, deer, camels (llamas, vicuñas, etc.), elephant relatives, otters, skunks, raccoon relatives, bears, wolves, cougars, lions, saber-toothed cats, and many more.

North America gained opossums, armadillos, ground sloths, porcupines, hummingbirds, parrots, terror birds, capybaras, glyptodonts, vampire bats, and many more.



2,000,000 – Two Million Years Ago

- Biology
 - Wild bovines develop from earlier species. Of special interest is the aurochs, from which cattle will be domesticated in about 8,500 BCE. The last aurochs will die in 1627 CE. Two million years is a substantial time for a species to prevail. Will humans be around so long?



Aurochs (reconstruction from various sources)

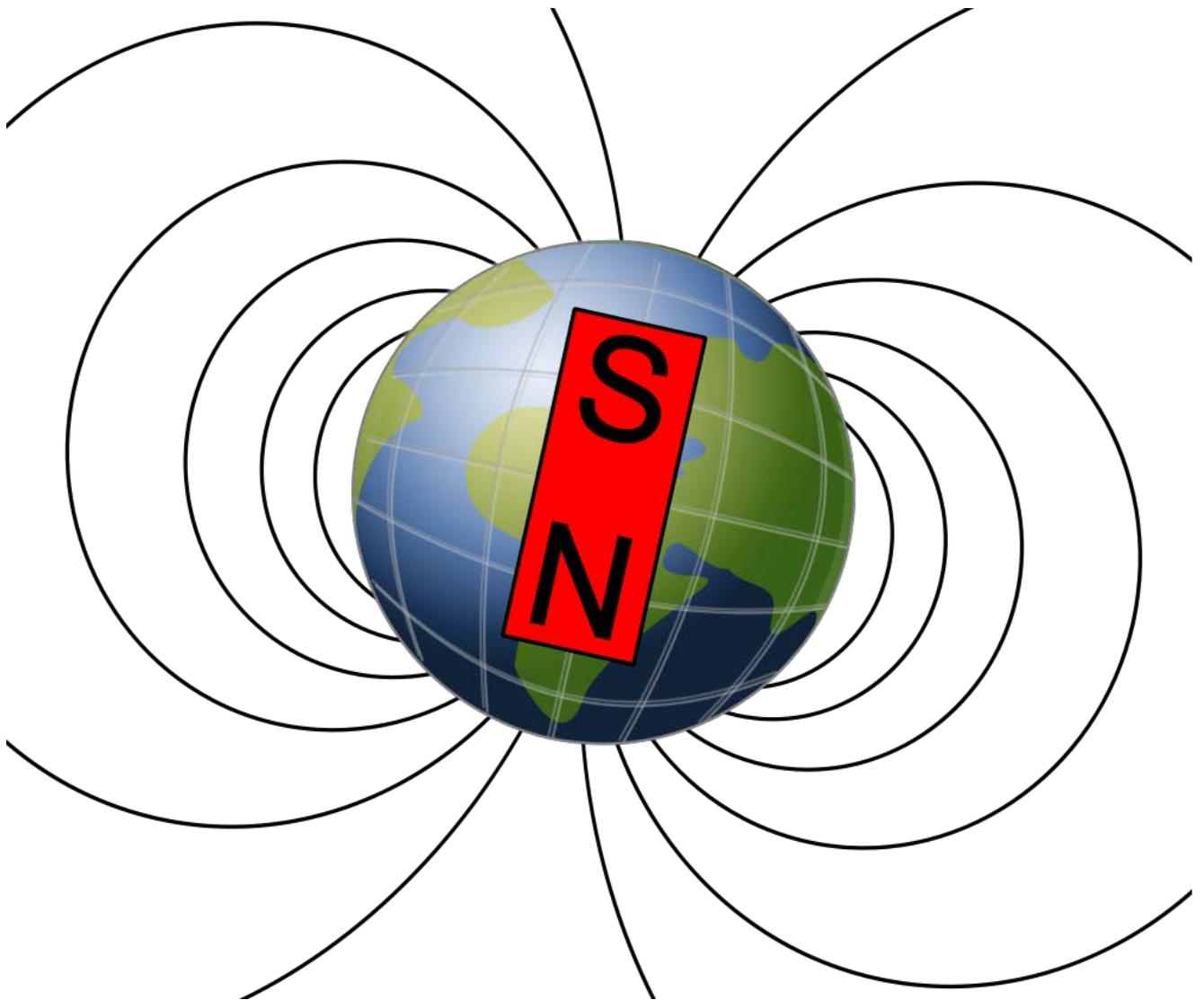
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780,000 – Seven Hundred Thousand Years Ago

- Geology
 - The Earth's magnetic field reverses itself – again. What was the Earth's South Magnetic Pole is now the North – and vice versa. It is quirky. Sometimes it remains the same for over 50 million years, sometimes it reverses after “only” a hundred thousand years. Nothing particularly bad seems to happen when the Earth's magnetic field reverses itself, but we can imagine that the animals using the magnetic field for navigation (some birds and turtles) may get confused.

The illustration shows “S” (south) in the north and “N” (north) in the south. That is because it is the south pole of other magnets that attract the north pole end of a compass needle. The Earth's Magnetic North Pole is actually a south and the Earth's Magnetic South Pole is really a north. (Perhaps more than turtles and birds find all of this confusing.)

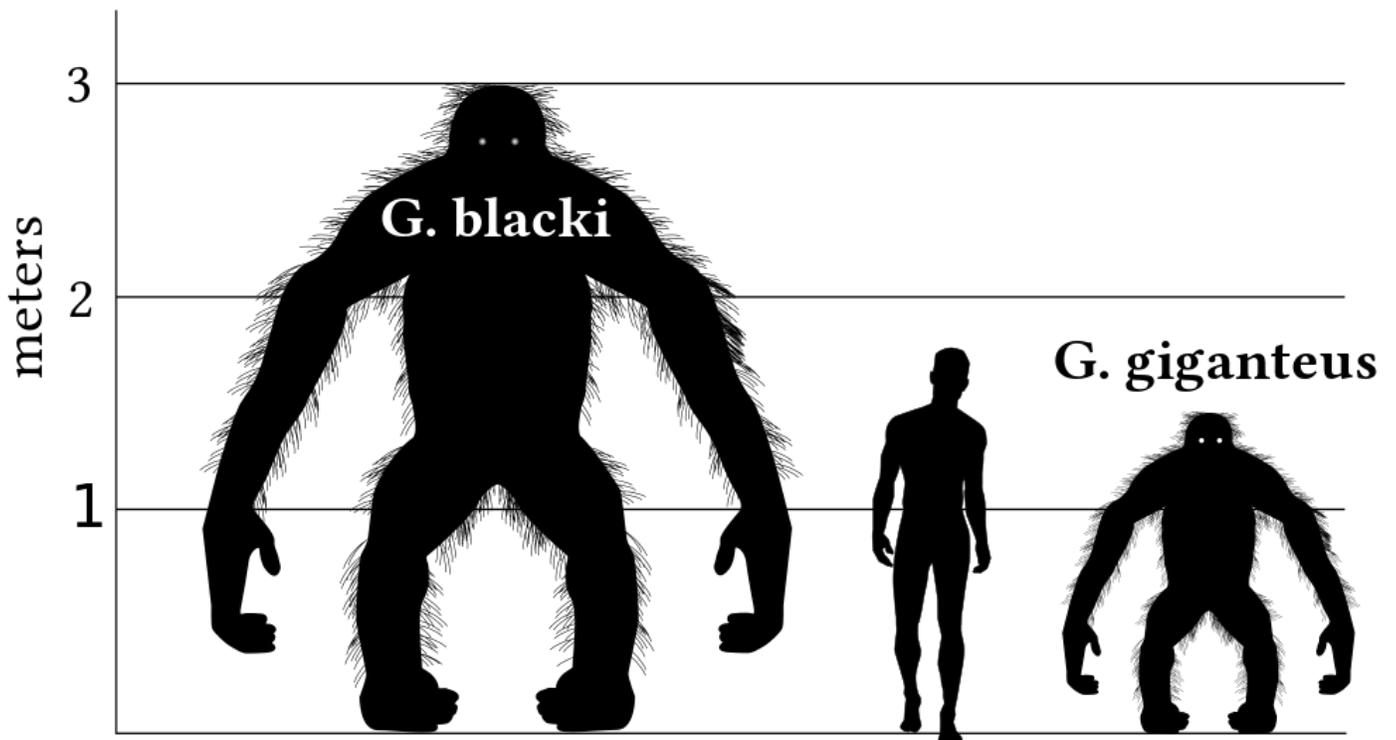


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300,000 – Three Hundred Thousand Years Ago

- Biology
 - The largest ape that ever lived, becomes extinct. A relative of the orangutan, it lived in Asia. There were several species of the genus. The illustration below compares the sizes of *Gigantopithecus blacki* and *Gigantopithecus giganteus* with a human, *Homo sapiens*.



1.8 meter tall human male compared to Gigantopithecus species

This graph is based on orangutan proportions in a bipedal stance.

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