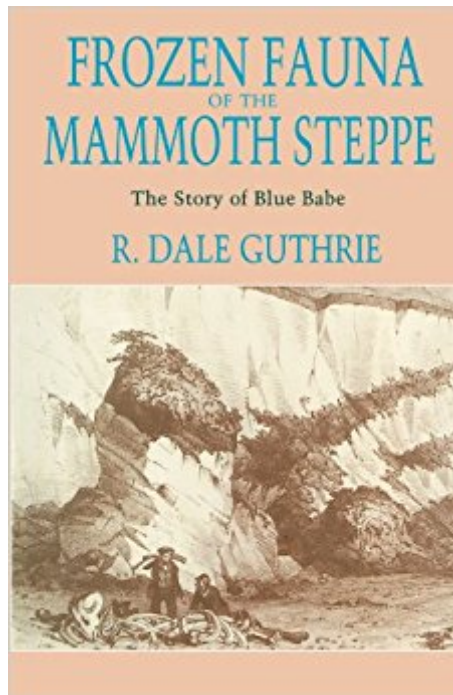




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Frozen Fauna Of The Mammoth Steppe: The Story Of Blue Babe



Synopsis

Frozen mammals of the Ice Age, preserved for millennia in the tundra, have been a source of fascination and mystery since their first discovery over two centuries ago. These mummies, their ecology, and their preservation are the subject of this compelling book by paleontologist Dale Guthrie. The 1979 find of a frozen, extinct steppe bison in an Alaskan gold mine allowed him to undertake the first scientific excavation of an Ice Age mummy in North America and to test theories about these enigmatic frozen fauna. The 36,000-year-old bison mummy, coated with blue mineral crystals, was dubbed "Blue Babe." Guthrie conveys the excitement of its excavation and shows how he made use of evidence from living animals, other Pleistocene mummies, Paleolithic art, and geological data. With photographs and scores of detailed drawings, he takes the reader through the excavation and subsequent detective work, analyzing the animal's carcass and its surroundings, the circumstances of its death, its appearance in life, the landscape it inhabited, and the processes of preservation by freezing. His examination shows that Blue Babe died in early winter, falling prey to lions that inhabited the Arctic during the Pleistocene era. Guthrie uses information gleaned from his study of Blue Babe to provide a broad picture of bison evolutionary history and ecology, including speculations on the interactions of bison and Ice Age peoples. His description of the Mammoth Steppe as a cold, dry, grassy plain is based on an entirely new way of reading the fossil record.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am enjoying this book immensely. However I wish I had noticed the publication date before purchasing this in 2014. Knowledge, discoveries, and theories change so fast in this branch of science so I would be interested in an updated volume or an addendum describing any new theories. However all in all this is a great book.

What a reconstruction. Reviving the past is about the details, and this book is full of them. Blue Babe comes alive, and in an environment unknown to us but Guthrie's steppe becomes real too.

ONE OF THE GREATEST BOOKS IN MY COLLECTION

there are no words to say more; they will spoil the very meaning of classic. I have quit late acquaintance with this very good book

Starting with a 36,000-year-old bison mummy washed out of ancient permafrost by a gold miner, zoologist and paleontologist R. Dale Guthrie discusses the events that led to Blue Babe's death and the preservation of his carcass. That's what a bare-bones summary of this book would be, but that doesn't do it justice. In a clear, readable (but not grammar-school) style, Guthrie wanders through related subjects such as frozen mammoths, the ecology and behavior of "Ice-Age" steppe bison, wild horses, mammoths and even Alaskan lions, and how Blue Babe probably looked in life -- and makes them fascinating. Readers may have trouble understanding chapters 8 and 9 of this book if they haven't read "Paleoecology of Beringia", another out-of-print gem which anthologizes the work of several paleontologists. Guthrie is a proponent of the "Mammoth Steppe" theory, which holds that during the Pleistocene most of Alaska and Siberia were not covered by soggy tundra or coniferous trees but by a cold, dry steppe or brushland that could support mammoths, horses, bison and other large grazers. In these two chapters, he turns away from Blue Babe to tackle and refute the objections raised by two other scientists in "Paleoecology..." (successfully, in my non-scientist opinion). I suspect most readers will find this the duller part of the book, but it's hard to discuss the big animals of the Pleistocene without talking about why they could exist then but are extinct or much rarer in our warmer modern world.

Written in a clear and enjoyable style, this book's description of the discovery, excavation, and the background of Blue Babe, a 35,000-year-old bison from Alaska's late Pleistocene is complete with many color and B&W photos as well as explanatory line-drawings. The discovery was made in 1979

about 15 miles north of Fairbanks, Alaska, at a goldmining operation. For the reader interested in ice-age mammals, how such specimens are found, recovered, and prepared for exhibition, this book is a good general guide through those stages. Dr. Guthrie has a long and outstanding career studying the Pleistocene mammals of Alaska, and his expertise and experience in explaining such topics to the lay-reader comes through well.

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