Best of Last Week–cause of large mammal decline, AI good imitator but not innovator, alcohol patterns and liver disease

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Prehistoric people are attacking an elephant. New research shows that humans and not the climate caused a sharp decline in almost all megafauna on Earth 50,000 years ago. Credit: First printed in Bryant & Gay, 1883. Wood carving by E. Bayard.

It was a good week for research on environmental impacts on human
history as a team of geologists, oceanographers and historians affiliated with several entities found evidence suggesting that North America's first people may have arrived by a sea ice highway as early as 24,000 years ago. Also, a team of ecologists, biologists and environmental scientists at Aarhus University, in Denmark, found evidence that people, not climate change, caused the decline of the giant mammals—their work involved studying the genes and history of surviving large mammals. And a team of geologists, mineralogists and Earth and ocean scientists affiliated with institutions in Canada, the U.S. and France discovered a 72-kilometer fault line on Canada's Vancouver Island. An earthquake centered there thousands of years ago is believed to have impacted the region's history.

In technology news, a joint team of nanochemists from the Italian Institute of Technology and BeDimensional S.p.A. developed a new system for producing green hydrogen cheaply and efficiently. It involves the use of small ruthenium particles and a solar-powered system for water electrolysis. And a trio of psychologists at the University of California found evidence that artificial intelligence systems excel at imitation but not innovation—such systems still lack the ability to view tools in a new way. Also, a team of bio-technologists and neurology specialists at GrapheneX-UTS Human-centric Artificial Intelligence Center at the University of Technology Sydney developed portable, noninvasive, mind-reading AI systems that can turn thoughts into text, providing communication options for people who cannot speak. And a team of technology specialists at Apollo Research found that large language models can strategically deceive users when under pressure.

In other news, a team of brain and mental health specialists at the Park Center for Mental Health, in Australia, found evidence that children who grow up with cats have double the risk of developing schizophrenia as they grow older. Also, a team of evolutionary specialists at the Institute of Evolution, HUN-REN Center for Ecological Research in Hungary,
working with a colleague from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, found evidence that senescence can accelerate evolution. And finally, a combined team of researchers from University College London, the Royal Free Hospital, the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge found that patterns of alcohol intake are a more accurate indicator of liver disease risk than overall consumption.

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