

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

December 18 2023, by Bob Yirka

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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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