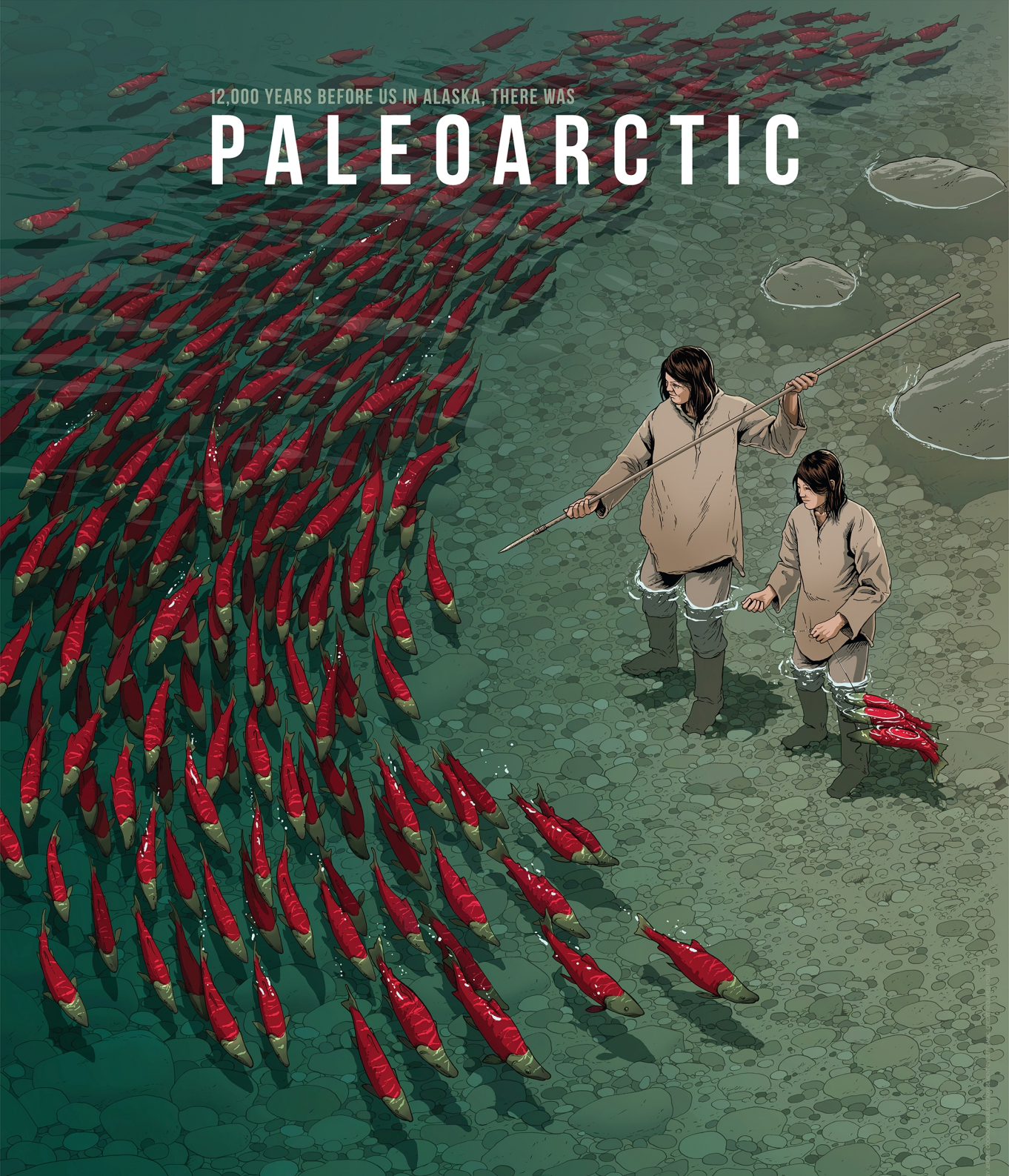


12,000 YEARS BEFORE US IN ALASKA, THERE WAS

PALEOARCTIC



FIRST ALASKANS, FIRST AMERICANS

The Paleoarctic were the very first humans to ever set foot in North America. During the final millennia of the Earth's last Ice Age, the Paleoarctic people moved from eastern Siberia to Alaska's outermost edge—about 1,000 miles across the Bering Land Bridge (also known as Beringia), a landscape that doesn't exist anymore because it's since been engulfed by the sea.

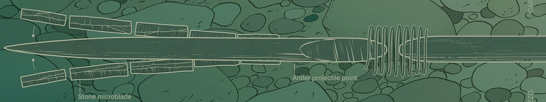
The only humans in an entirely new landscape, the Paleoarctic people quickly answered the question of how to survive by mastering brief windows of seasonal abundance: fall berries and bison, wasp(s) (lek), caribou, and Dall's sheep and spring waterfowl. During the near-total darkness of winter, they augmented the bounty of other seasons with the warmth-giving lures of trapped walrus, foxes, and marmots.

But in the daylong brightness of summer, they made the most of the abundant salmon that choked Alaska's rivers, becoming the first in a long line of Alaskans who would use fish as a primary food source. Adding fishing to their arsenal of food skills helped the Paleoarctic people thrive for nearly 6,000 years and successfully spread across the breadth of Alaska, taking advantage of its rivers along the way.



TOOLMAKING

Stimulated tool technology was essential to exploit Alaska's resources. But arguably the Paleoarctic people's greatest innovation was the microblade. Tiny, sharp slivers of stone—among the first standardized, interchangeable tool parts—fit snugly into tough but flexible caribou antler handles, together a strong and dandy combination.



RESOURCES BY SEASON

Far as initially, the Paleoarctic people took advantage of the most well-stocked smorgasbord Alaska's ever seen: now-disappeared animals such as bison, horse, and wapiti (b), plus still-native creatures like swan, hare, grouse, and caribou.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MARVELS AND MYSTERIES OF THE PALEOARCTIC AT [NPS.GOV/BELA](https://www.nps.gov/bela)

Alaska Archaeology Month is coordinated by the Public Education Group of the Alaska Anthropology Association and its sponsoring agencies. Visit them at alaskaanthropology.org.

Illustration by Michael S. Harty. Map by Michael S. Harty. Photo by Michael S. Harty.