

ZOOLOGY
**NATURE
 RAMBLINGS**
by Frank Thone



Before Santa Claus

► LONG BEFORE St. Nicholas became Santa Claus, with his six-in-hand team from Lapland, reindeer figured in the mid-winter feast. But they were the meat on the table, rather than the steeds of the giftbringer; and the winter was a most uncommonly long and severe one.

Much longer and colder than any that Grandpa remembers, that winter was, for it was the Great Ice Age itself, that shoved deep glacial fields over most of Europe, where our Stone Age ancestors were struggling to keep themselves alive despite thousands of years of cold, hard times.

Bones piled up in their old dwelling-places, and vividly realistic animal paintings and sculpturings left by the astonishingly talented artists among those primitive peoples, show that during a very considerable part of this long period a species of reindeer was a prime source of food, besides furnishing hides for clothing and bone and antler for weapons, tools and ornaments. These Ice Age predecessors of ours depended on the reindeer as the hunting Indians of northern Canada nowadays depend on the reindeer's big, wild cousin, the caribou.

As a matter of fact, the reindeer which the Stone Age men hunted seems to have been closer to the modern American caribou more closely in some respects than it was to the modern European reindeer. Certainly it was considerably bigger than the domestic reindeer of Lapland.

Whether the modern reindeer is a descendant of the larger ancient animal, or represents a species that was distinct from it even during the Ice Age, there is no present way of telling. It is at least a plausible guess (though nothing more) that the modern domes-

tic reindeer resulted from a long process of selection in which men strove to get animals that would be manageable despite the intractability and general obstreperousness of the whole reindeer-caribou tribe. For the big, wild caribou is simply too strong for a man to "horse around," whereas the reindeer is small enough to be managed by the short but sturdy Lapps, no matter how he may

balk at being harnessed, or how much the female animal may object to being milked.

Science News Letter, December 16, 1944

Aysen territory, in southern Chili, is reported to have vast untapped natural resources in huge tracts of virgin timber, fertile farm lands, and deposits of gold, coal and other minerals.

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