

# Million-year-old DNA sheds light on the genomic history of mammoths

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Temporal genomic data hold great potential for studying evolutionary processes such as speciation. However, sampling across speciation events would, in many cases, require genomic time series that stretch well back into the Early Pleistocene subepoch. Although theoretical models suggest that DNA should survive on this timescale<sup>1</sup>, the oldest genomic data recovered so far are from a horse specimen dated to 780–560 thousand years ago<sup>2</sup>. Here we report the recovery of genome-wide data from three mammoth specimens dating to the Early and Middle Pleistocene subepochs, two of which are more than one million years old. We find that two distinct mammoth lineages were present in eastern Siberia during the Early Pleistocene. One of these lineages gave rise to the woolly mammoth and the other represents a previously unrecognized lineage that was ancestral to the first mammoths to colonize North America. Our analyses reveal that the Columbian mammoth of North America traces its ancestry to a Middle Pleistocene hybridization between these two lineages, with roughly equal admixture proportions. Finally, we show that the majority of protein-coding changes associated with cold adaptation in woolly mammoths were already present one million years ago. These findings highlight the potential of deep-time palaeogenomics to expand our understanding of speciation and long-term adaptive evolution.

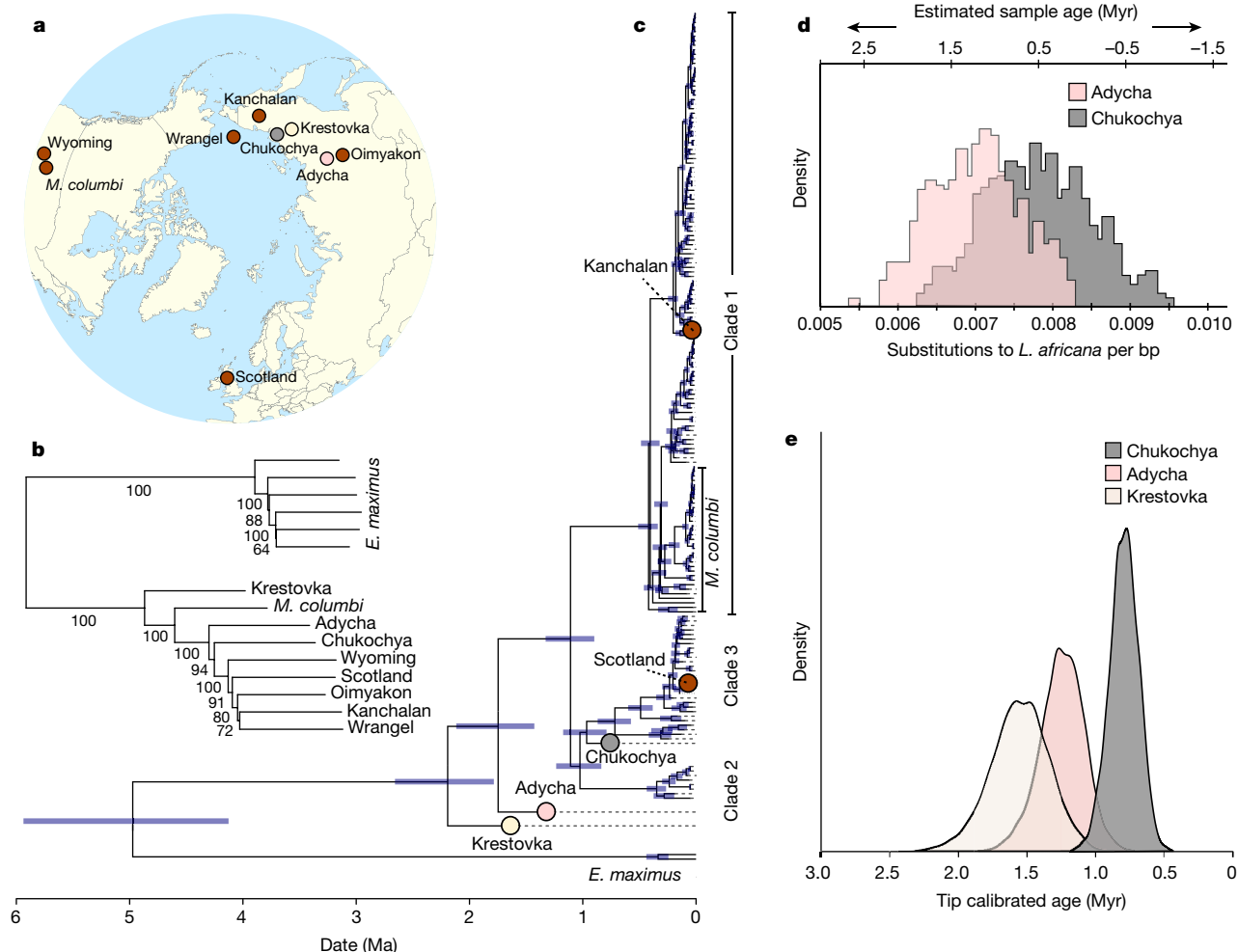
The recovery of genomic data from specimens that are many thousands of years old has improved our understanding of prehistoric population dynamics, ancient introgression events and the demography of extinct species<sup>3–5</sup>. However, some evolutionary processes occur over timescales that have often been considered beyond the temporal limits of ancient DNA research. For example, many present-day mammal and bird species originated during the Early and Middle Pleistocene<sup>6,7</sup>. Palaeogenomic investigations of their speciation process would thus require recovery of ancient DNA from specimens that are at least several hundreds of thousands of years old.

Mammoths (*Mammuthus* sp.) appeared in Africa approximately five million years ago (Ma), and subsequently colonized much of the Northern Hemisphere<sup>8,9</sup>. During the Pleistocene epoch (2.6 Ma to 11.7 thousand years ago (ka)), the mammoth lineage underwent evolutionary changes that produced the southern mammoth (*Mammuthus meridionalis*) and steppe mammoth (*Mammuthus trogontherii*), which

later gave rise to the Columbian mammoth (*Mammuthus columbi*) and woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*)<sup>10</sup>. Although the exact relationships among these taxa are uncertain, the prevailing view is that the Columbian mammoth evolved during an early colonization of North America about 1.5 Ma and that the woolly mammoth first appeared in northeastern Siberia about 0.7 Ma<sup>8,10</sup>. Mammoths similar to *M. trogontherii* (and considered conspecific with it) inhabited Eurasia from at least around 1.7 Ma; the last populations went extinct in Europe about 0.2 Ma<sup>8</sup>.

To investigate the origin and evolution of woolly and Columbian mammoths, we recovered genomic data from three mammoth molars from northeastern Siberia that date to the Early and Middle Pleistocene (Fig. 1a, Extended Data Figs. 1, 2). These molars originate from the well-documented and fossiliferous Olyorian Suite of northeastern Siberia<sup>11</sup>, which has been dated using rodent biostratigraphy tied to the global sequence of palaeomagnetic reversals as well as to correlated

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**Fig. 1 | DNA-based phylogenies and specimen age estimates.** **a**, Geographical origin of the mammoth genomes analysed in this study. **b**, Phylogenetic tree built in FASTME on the basis of pairwise genetic distances, assuming balanced minimum evolution using all nuclear sites as well as 100 resampling replicates (based on 100,000 sites each). **c**, Bayesian reconstruction of the mitochondrial tree, with the molecular clock calibrated using radiocarbon dates of ancient samples for which a finite radiocarbon date was available, as well as assuming a log-normal prior on the divergence between the African savannah elephant (not shown in the tree) and mammoths with a mean of 5.3 Ma. Blue bars reflect 95%

highest posterior densities. Circles depict the position of the newly sequenced genomes. **d**, Densities for age estimates of the Adycha and Chukochya samples on the basis of autosomal divergence to African savannah elephant (*L. africana*). Owing to stochasticity among the tested blocks, a subset of genomic regions in the Krestovka and Adycha genomes are estimated as younger than the corresponding genomic region in the Wrangel mammoth genome, resulting in negative values. Myr, million years. **e**, Densities for age estimates of the Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya samples on the basis of mitochondrial genomes, as inferred from the Bayesian mitochondrial reconstruction.

faunas with absolute dating from eastern Beringia (Extended Data Fig. 2, Supplementary Section 1). One of the specimens (which we refer to as 'Krestovka' on the basis of its find locality) is morphologically similar to the steppe mammoth (a species that was originally defined from the Middle Pleistocene of Europe (Supplementary Information section 1)), and was collected from Lower Olyorian deposits that have been dated to 1.2–1.1 Ma. The second specimen (referred to as 'Adycha'), which is also of *M. trogontherii*-like morphology (Supplementary Information section 1), is of a less-certain age within the Olyorian Suite (1.2–0.5 million years old). However, the morphology of the Adycha specimen (Extended Data Fig. 1) strongly suggests that it dates to the Early Olyorian, and probably to between 1.2 and 1.0 Ma. The third specimen (referred to as 'Chukochya') has a morphology consistent with being an early form of woolly mammoth (Extended Data Fig. 1) and was discovered in a section in which only Upper Olyorian deposits are exposed, which implies that it dates to 0.8–0.5 Ma (Supplementary Section 1).

We extracted DNA from the three molars using methods designed to recover highly degraded DNA fragments<sup>12,13</sup>, converted the extracts into libraries<sup>14</sup> and sequenced these on Illumina platforms (Supplementary Information section 2, Supplementary Table 1). We merged the reads

and mapped them against the African savannah elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) genome ('LoxAfr4')<sup>15</sup> and an Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) mitochondrial genome<sup>16</sup>. We found that the DNA recovered from the Early and Middle Pleistocene specimens was considerably more fragmented and had higher levels of cytosine deamination than DNA from permafrost-preserved samples dating to the Late Pleistocene subepoch (Extended Data Figs. 3, 4, Supplementary Information section 4). To circumvent this, we used conservative filters and an iterative approach that was designed to minimize spurious mappings of short reads (Supplementary Information section 5). This approach allowed us to recover complete (over 37× coverage) mitogenomes from all three specimens, and 49 million, 884 million and 3,671 million base pairs of nuclear genomic data for the Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya specimens, respectively (Supplementary Table 3).

### DNA-based age estimates

To estimate specimen ages using mitogenome data, we conducted a Bayesian molecular clock analysis that was calibrated using samples with finite radiocarbon dates (tip calibration) and a log-normal prior



posterior density) (Fig. 1c). We obtained a similar divergence time estimate (between 2.65 and 1.96 Ma based on the 95% confidence interval) from the autosomal data, but caution that this analysis is based on limited genomic data (Supplementary Information section 7). Moreover, estimates of relative divergence using  $F(A|B)$  statistics<sup>4</sup> show that the Krestovka nuclear genome carries fewer derived alleles than any other mammoth genome at sites at which the high-coverage woolly mammoth genomes are heterozygous, which provides further support for the notion that the Krestovka mammoth lineage diverged after the split with Asian elephant but before any of the other mammoth genomes analysed here (Extended Data Fig. 5, Supplementary Information section 8).

Overall, these analyses suggest that two evolutionary lineages (that is, two isolated populations persisting through time) of mammoths inhabited eastern Siberia during the later stages of the Early Pleistocene. One of these lineages, which is represented by the Krestovka specimen, diverged from other mammoths before the first appearance of mammoths in North America. The second lineage comprises the Adycha specimen along with all Middle and Late Pleistocene woolly mammoths.

### Origin of the Columbian mammoth

Several lines of evidence suggest that—compared to all other mammoths—the Columbian mammoth derives a much higher proportion of its ancestry from the lineage represented by the Krestovka mammoth. We performed analyses using  $D$  statistics<sup>4</sup>, which revealed a strong signal of excess derived allele-sharing between the Columbian mammoth and the Krestovka specimen (Fig. 2a, Supplementary Information section 8). This is at odds with the average phylogenetic position of the Krestovka genome being basal to all other mammoth genomes, as under a scenario without subsequent admixture the  $D$  statistic would not deviate from zero. We further investigated this pattern using Tree-Mix<sup>21</sup>. Without modelling migration (admixture) events, none of the models fit the data (residuals  $> 10 \times \text{s.e.}$ ). Instead, we observed a good fit when modelling one migration event (admixture weight = 42%, residuals  $< 2 \times \text{s.e.}$ ) (Supplementary Information section 8), which indicates that part of the ancestry of the Columbian mammoth is derived from the Krestovka lineage.

To further assess the evolutionary context of the Krestovka lineage within the population history of mammoths, we used two complementary admixture graph model approaches<sup>22,23</sup>. We exhaustively tested all possible phylogenetic combinations relating the three ancient individuals with one Siberian woolly mammoth, one Columbian mammoth and one Asian elephant. We set the latter as outgroup, including only sites identified as polymorphic in six Asian elephant genomes to limit the effects of incorrectly called genotypes (Supplementary Information section 8). None of the graph models without admixture events provided a good fit to the data, thus ruling out a simple tree-like population history. By contrast, graph models with only one admixture event provided a perfect fit, explaining all  $45f_4$ -statistic combinations without significant outliers. On the basis of point estimates obtained from the two admixture graph model approaches, we estimate the Columbian mammoth to be the result of an admixture event in which 38–43% of its ancestry was derived from a lineage related to the Krestovka genome, and 57–62% from the woolly mammoth lineage (Fig. 2b, Extended Data Fig. 6).

We obtained additional support for the complex ancestry of the Columbian mammoth by using a hidden Markov model that aimed at identifying admixed genomic regions from an unknown source (that is, ghost admixture)<sup>24</sup> (Supplementary Information section 9). This analysis, which was done without including any of the Early and Middle Pleistocene specimens, suggested that roughly 41% of the Columbian mammoth genome originates from a lineage genetically differentiated from the woolly mammoth (Extended Data Fig. 7a). We subsequently

built pairwise-distance phylogenetic trees for the genomic regions identified as being the result of ghost admixture and found them to be closely related to the Krestovka genome (Extended Data Fig. 7b, Supplementary Information section 9). By contrast, when excluding these regions, the remaining part of the Columbian mammoth genome falls within the diversity of Late Pleistocene woolly mammoths (Extended Data Fig. 7c, Supplementary Information section 9).

Finally, our  $D$  statistics analysis also identified higher levels of derived allele-sharing between the Columbian mammoth and a woolly mammoth from Wyoming (Fig. 2a). On the basis of  $f_4$  ratios, we estimate 10.7–12.7% excess shared ancestry between these genomes (Supplementary Section 9), consistent with a previous study<sup>15</sup>. Because the Columbian mammoth carries a large proportion of Krestovka ancestry, gene flow from the Columbian mammoth into North American woolly mammoths would have resulted in a larger proportion of allele-sharing between Krestovka and the Wyoming woolly mammoth. Our finding of no excess allele-sharing between the Krestovka genome and any of the sequenced woolly mammoths—including the individual from Wyoming (Supplementary Table 7)—therefore indicates that this second phase of gene flow may have been unidirectional, from woolly mammoth into the Columbian mammoth. This implies that the composition of the genome of the Columbian mammoth (as identified in the  $D$  statistics, admixture graph models and ghost-admixture analysis) is the result of two admixture events, in which an initial approximately 50% contribution from each of the Krestovka and woolly mammoth lineages was followed by an additional approximately 12% gene flow from North American woolly mammoths (Fig. 2c).

### Insights into mammoth adaptive evolution

The woolly mammoth evolved into a cold-tolerant, open-habitat specialist through a series of adaptive changes<sup>8</sup>. The antiquity of our genomes makes it possible to investigate when these adaptations evolved. To do this, we identified protein-coding changes for which all Late Pleistocene woolly mammoths carried the derived allele and all African savannah and Asian elephants carried the ancestral allele ( $n = 5,598$ ) (Supplementary Table 8). Among the variants that could be called in the Early and Middle Pleistocene genomes, we find that 85.2% (782 out of 918) and 88.7% (2,578 out of 2,906) of the mammoth-specific protein-coding changes were already present in the genomes of Adycha (*M. trogontherii*-like) and Chukochya (early woolly mammoth), respectively (Supplementary Information section 10, Supplementary Table 9). Moreover, we did not detect significant differences in the ratio of shared nonsynonymous to synonymous sites among our sequenced Early, Middle and Late Pleistocene genomes (Supplementary Table 9). Thus, despite the transitions in climate and mammoth morphology at the onset of the Middle Pleistocene, we do not observe any marked change in the rate of protein-coding mutations during this time period.

Previous analyses have identified specific genetic changes that are thought to underlie a suite of woolly mammoth adaptations to the Arctic environment<sup>25</sup>. For these variants ( $n = 91$ ), we assessed whether the Adycha and Chukochya genomes shared the same amino acid changes as those observed in Late Pleistocene woolly mammoths (Supplementary Table 10). We found that among genes that are possibly involved in hair growth, circadian rhythm, thermal sensation and white and brown fat deposits, the vast majority of coding changes were present in both the Adycha (87%) and Chukochya (89%) genomes (Supplementary Table 10). This suggests that Siberian *M. trogontherii*-like mammoths (that is, Adycha) had already developed a woolly fur as well as several physiological adaptations to a cold, high-latitude environment (Supplementary Information section 11). However, in one of the best-studied genes in the woolly mammoth (*TRPV3*, which encodes a temperature-sensitive transient receptor channel that is potentially involved in thermal sensation and hair growth<sup>25</sup>), we find that only two out of four amino acid changes identified in Late Pleistocene woolly



mammoths were present in the early woolly mammoth genome (Chukochya). This indicates that nonsynonymous changes in this gene occurred over several hundreds of thousands of years, rather than during a single brief burst of adaptive evolution.

## Discussion

Our genomic analyses suggest that the Columbian mammoth is a product of admixture between woolly mammoths and a previously unrecognized ancient mammoth lineage, represented by the Krestovka specimen. Given the finding that each of these lineages initially contributed roughly half of their genome to this ancient admixture, we propose that the origin of the Columbian mammoth constitutes a hybrid speciation event<sup>26</sup>. This hybridization event appears not to have imparted any shift in the average molar morphology of North American populations<sup>10</sup>, but can explain the mitochondrial–nuclear discordance in the Columbian mammoth<sup>18</sup>, in which all known Columbian mammoth mitogenomes are nested within the mitogenome diversity of the woolly mammoth (Fig. 1c). On the basis of the mitogenome phylogeny, we estimate that the most recent common female ancestor of all Late Pleistocene Columbian mammoths lived approximately 420 ka (95% highest posterior density, 511–338 ka), providing a likely minimum date for when this hybridization event occurred (Fig. 1c). Because mammoths had already appeared in North America by 1.5 Ma, these findings imply that before the hybridization event North American mammoths belonged to the Krestovka lineage. Given the morphology of the Krestovka specimen, this corroborates a previously proposed model<sup>10</sup> that the earliest North American mammoths were derived from an *M. trogontherii*-like Eurasian ancestor, rather than originating from an expansion of the southern mammoth (*M. meridionalis*) into North America<sup>27</sup>.

Our findings demonstrate that genomic data can be recovered from Early Pleistocene specimens, which opens up the possibility of studying adaptive evolution across speciation events. The mammoth genomes presented here offer a glimpse of this potential. Even though the transition from an *M. trogontherii*-like (Adycha) to woolly (Chukochya) mammoth represents a marked change in molar morphology (Extended Data Fig. 1), we do not observe an increased rate of genome-wide selection during this time period. Moreover, many key adaptations identified in Late Pleistocene mammoth genomes were already present in the Early Pleistocene Adycha genome. We thus find no evidence for an increased rate of adaptive evolution associated with the origin of the woolly mammoth. This is consistent with previous work that suggested that the major shift in habitat and morphology of mammoths happened earlier, between *M. meridionalis*-like and *M. trogontherii*-like mammoths<sup>8,10</sup>.

The retrieval of DNA that is more than one million years old confirms previous theoretical predictions<sup>1</sup> that the ancient genetic record can be extended beyond what has been previously shown. We anticipate that the additional recovery and analysis of Early and Middle Pleistocene genomes will further improve our understanding of the complex nature of evolutionary change and speciation. Our results highlight the value of perennially frozen environments for extending the temporal limits of DNA recovery, and hint at a future deep-time chapter of ancient DNA research in which specimens from high latitudes will have an important role.

## Online content

Any methods, additional references, Nature Research reporting summaries, source data, extended data, supplementary information, acknowledgements, peer review information; details of author contributions and competing interests; and statements of data and code availability are available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03224-9>.

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## Methods

No statistical methods were used to predetermine sample size. The experiments were not randomized, and investigators were not blinded to allocation during experiments and outcome assessment.

### Morphometry of mammoth molars

Mammoth molars were measured according to a previously described method<sup>10</sup> (Supplementary Information section 1). Samples considered are as follows: *M. meridionalis*, about 2.0 Ma, Upper Valdarno, Italy (type locality) ( $n = 34$ ); *M. trogontherii*, about 0.6 Ma, Süssenborn, Germany (type locality) ( $n = 48$ ); and *M. primigenius*, Late Pleistocene of north-eastern Siberia (Russia) and Alaska (USA) ( $n = 28$ ). Early ( $n = 8$ ) and Late ( $n = 15$ ) Olyorian samples are from localities in the Yana–Kolyma lowland (Lower Olyorian Suite is about 1.2–0.8 Ma; Upper Olyorian Suite is 0.8–0.5 Ma) (Extended Data Fig. 2). Early to early Middle Pleistocene samples (about 1.5–0.5 Ma) from North America are from Old Crow (Yukon, Canada), Leisey Shell Pit 1A and Punta Gorda (both in Florida, USA), and the Ocotillo Formation (California, USA) (combined,  $n = 16$ ). Original data have previously been published<sup>10</sup>, along with further details on sites and collections.

### DNA extraction and sequencing

Samples from Early and Middle Pleistocene mammoth molars (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya specimens) as well as Late Pleistocene samples (Scotland and Kanchalan specimens) were processed in dedicated ancient DNA laboratories following standard ancient DNA practices (Supplementary Information section 2). Following DNA extraction<sup>12</sup>, we constructed double- or single-stranded Illumina libraries<sup>14,28</sup>, which were treated to remove uracil caused by post-mortem cytosine deamination<sup>13</sup>. We subsequently sequenced these libraries using Illumina platforms, generating from 200 to 2,350 million paired-end reads ( $2 \times 50$  or  $2 \times 150$  bp) per specimen (Supplementary Table 1).

### Sequence data processing and mapping

We combined our sequence data with previously published genomic data from elephantids<sup>15</sup> (Supplementary Table 2). For the five samples sequenced in this study, we trimmed adapters and merged paired-end reads using SeqPrep v.1.1<sup>29</sup>, initially retaining reads either  $\geq 25$  bp (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya specimens) or  $\geq 30$  bp (Scotland and Kanchalan specimens), and with a minor modification in the source code that enabled us to choose the best base-quality score in the merged region instead of aggregating the scores<sup>5</sup> (Supplementary Information section 3). For genomic data from the straight-tusked elephant and the Scotland and Kanchalan mammoths (which had been treated with Afu uracil-DNA glycosylase (UDG), leaving post-mortem DNA damage at the ends of the molecules (Supplementary Tables 2, 3)), we removed the first and last two base pairs from all reads before mapping. The merged reads were mapped to a composite reference, consisting of the African savannah elephant nuclear genome (LoxAfr4), woolly mammoth mitogenome (DQ188829) and the human genome (hg19) using BWA aln v.0.7.8 with deactivated seeding ( $-l 16,500$ ), allowing for more substitutions ( $-n 0.01$ ) and up to two gaps ( $-o 2$ )<sup>30,31</sup>. The human genome was included as a decoy to filter out spurious mappings in genomic conserved regions<sup>32</sup>. Next, we removed PCR duplicates from the alignments using a custom Python script<sup>5</sup>. After obtaining initial quality metrics for the genomes, we removed reads  $< 35$  base pairs from the BAM files using samtools v.1.10<sup>33</sup> and awk for all remaining analysis (Supplementary Section 4).

### Ancient DNA authenticity and quality assessment

All ancient genomes were treated to reduce post-mortem DNA damage. For the most ancient samples (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya), we took several steps to assess the authenticity and quality of the data (Supplementary Information section 4). First, only reads that mapped

uniquely to nonrepetitive regions of the LoxAfr4 reference and had a mapping quality  $\geq 30$  were retained; reads that mapped equally well to the human genome reference (hg19) in our composite reference were removed to reduce possible biases caused by contaminant human reads<sup>32</sup>. Second, we used a method based on the rate of mismatches per base pair to the reference to assess the rate of spurious mappings for all reads between 20 and 35 bp and at 5-bp intervals between 35 and 50 bp (Supplementary Information section 4). This enabled us to identify a sample-specific minimum read length cut-off, above which we consider reads to be correctly mapped and endogenous (Supplementary Information section 4, Supplementary Table 3). On the basis of this, we applied the longest sample-specific cut-off ( $\geq 35$  bp, for the Krestovka specimen) for all samples. We used mapDamage v.2.0.6<sup>34</sup> to obtain read-length distributions for all ancient samples. Finally, an assessment of cytosine deamination profiles at CpG sites, which are unaffected by UDG treatment<sup>13</sup>, was done using the platypus option in PMDtools (<https://github.com/pontusk/PMDtools>)<sup>35</sup>. A full set of ancient DNA quality statistics are available in Supplementary Tables 1–3.

### Allele sampling

To minimize coverage-related biases, all subsequent analyses were based on pseudo-haploidized sequences that were generated by randomly selecting a single high-quality base call at each autosomal genomic site using ANGSD v.0.921<sup>36</sup>. For base-calling, we considered only reads  $\geq 35$  bp, a mapping and base quality  $\geq 30$  and reads without multiple best hits (-uniqueOnly 1). Finally, we masked all sites within repetitive regions as identified with RepeatMasker v.4.0.7<sup>37</sup>, CpG sites, sites with more than two alleles among all individuals and sites with coverage above the 95th percentile of the genome-wide average, to reduce false calls from duplicated genomic regions.

### Reconstruction of mitogenomes, tip-dating and mitochondrial DNA phylogeny

Mitochondrial genomes for the five newly sequenced samples were assembled using MIA<sup>38</sup> with the Asian elephant (NC\_005129)<sup>16</sup> mitogenome as reference for Adycha, Krestovka and Chukochya specimens, and the mammoth mitogenome (NC\_007596) as reference for the Late Pleistocene woolly mammoth samples from Scotland and Kanchalan, restricting the input reads to those  $\geq 35$  bp for each (Supplementary Section 5). This yielded mitochondrial assemblies with coverage of 37.8 $\times$ , 47.5 $\times$  and 77.1 $\times$  for the Adycha, Krestovka and Chukochya specimens, and 99.6 $\times$  and 179.5 $\times$  for the Scotland and Kanchalan samples, respectively. These assemblies were then aligned using Muscle v.3.8.31<sup>39</sup> together with previously published elephantid mitogenomes<sup>18,19,40</sup>. Following alignment partitioning, the HKY model with a gamma-distributed rate heterogeneity<sup>41</sup> and a proportion of invariant sites or just a proportion of invariant sites, was identified as best-fitting for each alignment partition using jModelTest v.2.1.10<sup>42</sup> (Supplementary Information section 5). To estimate the age of the three oldest *Mammuthus* samples (Adycha, Krestovka and Chukochya), we performed a Bayesian reconstruction of the phylogenetic tree using BEAST v.1.10.4<sup>43</sup>. We calibrated the molecular clock using tip ages for all ancient samples with a finite radiocarbon date, as well as a log-normal prior of 5.3 Ma on the genetic divergence of *Loxodonta* and *Elephas–Mammuthus* as obtained from previous genomic studies<sup>15</sup> (Supplementary Table 4). In addition, we tested for an older divergence (7.6 Ma) between *Loxodonta* and *Mammuthus* that is more consistent with the fossil record<sup>16</sup> (Supplementary Information section 5). For both priors, we used a standard deviation of 500,000 years. We assumed a strict molecular clock and the flexible skygrid coalescent model<sup>44</sup> to account for the complex cross-generic demographic history of the included taxa. The ages of all samples beyond the limit of radiocarbon dating were estimated by sampling from log-normal distributions with priors based on stratigraphic context and previous genetic studies, using two Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) chains of 100 million generations, sampling

every 10,000 and discarding the first 10% as burn-in (Supplementary Table 5, Supplementary Information section 5).

### Genetic dating on the basis of autosomal data

Age estimates for the Adycha and Chukochya specimens (the Krestovka specimen was excluded as too few autosomal bases were available for this analysis) were estimated on the basis of autosomal data following a previously described method<sup>17</sup>, using the American mastodon (*Mammuth americanum*; an outgroup to all elephantids) and the African savannah and Asian elephant genomes as outgroups. We inferred the ancestral state for a given base in the African savannah elephant reference genome by requiring that the alignments of the mastodon, two African savannah elephants and five Asian elephants are present and identical at that nucleotide. We used the high-coverage and radiocarbon-dated Wrangel Island woolly mammoth genome as a calibration point<sup>5</sup>. Each difference to the ancestral state was then counted for the Wrangel genome and the focal *Mammuthus* genome for all sites at which both genomes had a called base. We calculated the relative age of each individual as  $(n_w - n_m)/n_w$ , on the basis of the number of derived changes in the Wrangel genome ( $n_w$ ) and the other *Mammuthus* genome ( $n_m$ ), using an assumed divergence time of 5.3 million years<sup>15</sup> to the common ancestor of African savannah elephant and woolly mammoth. Age variance estimates were calculated in windows of 5 Mb and we computed bootstrap confidence intervals as  $1.96 \times s.e.$  around the date estimates (Supplementary Information section 6).

### Nuclear genetic relationships and phylogeny

We reconstructed phylogenetic trees on the basis of the whole-genome identical-by-state matrix for all individuals using the dolBS function in ANGSD. We calculated pairwise genetic distances between individuals using the full dataset, as well as 100 resampling replicates based on 100,000 sites each. Second, we obtained the phylogenetic tree using a balanced minimum evolution method as implemented in FASTME<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 1b, Supplementary Information section 7). Next, we inferred relative population split times using an approach that examines single-nucleotide polymorphic positions that are heterozygous in an individual from one population and measures the fraction of these sites at which a randomly sampled allele from an individual of a second population carries the derived variant, polarized by an outgroup ( $F(A|B)$  statistics)<sup>4</sup>. We ascertained heterozygous sites in three high-coverage genomes—*E. maximus* and *M. primigenius* Oimyakon and Wrangel<sup>5</sup>—using the SAMtools v.1.10<sup>33</sup> mpileup command and bcftools. We only included single-nucleotide polymorphisms with a quality  $\geq 30$ , and filtered out all single-nucleotide polymorphisms in repetitive regions, within 5 bp of insertions and/or deletions, at CpG sites and sites below 1/3 or above 2× the genome-wide average coverage. For each of the *Mammuthus* genomes, we then estimated the proportion of sites for which a randomly drawn allele at the ascertained heterozygous sites matches the derived state.

### D statistics, $f_4$ statistics, AdmixtureGraphs and TreeMix

We first used Admixtools v.5<sup>22</sup> to calculate  $D$  statistics and  $f_4$  statistics for all possible quadruple combinations of samples iterating through the three different groups ( $P_1, P_2$  and  $P_3$ ) on the basis of randomly sampled alleles, conditioning on all sites that are polymorphic among the six Asian elephant genomes<sup>22</sup>. The mastodon was used as an outgroup in all comparisons (Supplementary Tables 6, 7). Direct estimates of genomic ancestries using  $f_4$  ratios were additionally calculated for specific pairs in AdmixTools<sup>22</sup> (Supplementary Information section 9). Second, we used the admixturegraph R package<sup>23</sup> to assess the genetic relationship among the *Mammuthus* genomes using admixture graph models, fitting graphs to all possible  $f_4$  statistics involving a given set of genomes. To resolve the relationships of the Adycha, Krestovka and Chukochya individuals within the population history of mammoths, we exhaustively tested all 135,285 possible admixture graphs

(with up to 2 admixture events) relating these 3 individuals, 1 woolly mammoth (Wrangel), 1 Columbian mammoth and 1 Asian elephant, setting the latter as outgroup (Supplementary Information section 8). We repeated the admixturegraph analysis using the above-described  $f_4$  statistic with qpBrute<sup>46</sup>, which in addition enabled us to estimate shared genetic drift and branch lengths using  $f_2$  and  $f_3$  statistics. At each step, insertion of a new node was tested at all branches of the graph, except the outgroup branch. In cases in which a node could not be inserted without producing  $f_4$  outliers (that is,  $|Z| \geq 3$ ), all possible admixture combinations were also attempted. The resulting list of all fitted graphs was then passed to the MCMC algorithm implemented in the admixturegraph R package, to compute the marginal likelihood of the models and their Bayes factors. Finally, we estimated genetic relationships and admixture among the *Mammuthus* samples using TreeMix v.1.12<sup>21</sup>. We first estimated the allele frequencies among the randomly sampled alleles and subsequently ran the TreeMix model accounting for linkage disequilibrium by grouping sites in blocks of 1,000 single-nucleotide polymorphisms ( $\sim 1,000$ ) setting the *E. maximus* samples as root. Standard errors ( $-SE$ ) and bootstrap replicates ( $-bootstrap$ ) were used to evaluate the confidence in the inferred tree topology. After constructing a maximum-likelihood tree, migration events were added ( $-m$ ) and iterated 10 times for each value of  $m$  (1–10) to check for convergence in the likelihood of the model as well as the explained variance following each addition of a migration event. The inferred maximum-likelihood trees were visualized with the in-built TreeMix R script plotting functions.

### Introgression in the Columbian mammoth

We further tested for admixture in the Columbian and Scotland mammoths using a hidden Markov model<sup>24</sup>. This method identifies genomic regions within a given individual that possibly came from an admixture event with a distant lineage not present in the dataset, on the basis of on the distribution of private sites. In brief, we estimated the number of callable sites, the single-nucleotide polymorphism density (as a proxy for per-window mutation rate) and the number of private variants with respect to all other elephant genomes except Krestovka in 1-kb windows. We applied settings without gene flow, or with one gene flow event with starting probabilities and decoding described in Supplementary Information section 9. We tested for ghost admixture in the Columbian mammoth using sites private to the Columbian mammoth with respect to all other genomes in this study except Krestovka. We subsequently obtained fasta alignments for those autosomal regions identified as ‘unadmixed’ and ‘ghost-admixed’ in the Columbian mammoths by calling a random base at each covered position using ANGSD. Minimal evolution phylogenies were then obtained for both alignments as described in ‘Nuclear genetic relationships and phylogeny’.

### Genetic adaptations of the woolly mammoth

To investigate the timing of genetic adaptations in the woolly mammoth lineage, we used last v.1170<sup>47</sup> to build a chain file to lift over our sampled allele dataset mapped to LoxAfr4 to the annotated LoxAfr3 reference genome. Following construction of a reference index using lastdb ( $-P0 -uNEAR -R01$ ), we aligned the two references using lastal ( $-m50 -E0.05 -C2$ ). The alignment was converted to MAF format (last-split -m1) and finally to a chain file with the maf-convert tool (<http://last.cbrc.jp/>). The Picard Liftover tool (<https://broadinstitute.github.io/picard/>) was then used to lift over the identified variants to the LoxAfr3 reference. Using the African savannah elephant genome annotation (LoxAfr3.gff), we identified all amino acid changes in which all Late Pleistocene woolly mammoth genomes carry the derived state and all other elephantid genomes carry the ancestral allele using VariantEffectPredictor<sup>48</sup>. For all identified amino acid changes, we assessed the state (derived or ancestral) among the three oldest samples (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya) and the Columbian mammoth (Supplementary Tables 8–10). In addition, we conducted a Gene Ontology enrichment on all genes

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for which the woolly mammoth genomes (including Chukochya and Adycha) are derived, using GORilla<sup>49</sup>. Finally, we used PAML v.1.3.1<sup>50</sup> to identify genes that have potentially been under positive selection in Late Pleistocene woolly mammoths (Supplementary Table 11, Supplementary Information section 10).

## Reporting summary

Further information on research design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this paper.

## Data availability

All sequence data (in .fastq format) for samples sequenced in this study are available through the European Nucleotide Archive under accession number PRJEB42269. Previously published data used in this study are available under accession numbers PRJEB24361 and PRJEB7929.

## Code availability

The custom code used in this study to evaluate read length cut-offs is available from GitHub (<https://github.com/stefaniehartmann/readLengthCutoff>).

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**Author contributions** L.D., A.M.L., B.S., M.H. and I.B. conceived the project. L.D., A.G., P.P. and D.D.-d.-M. designed the study together with P.N. and A.M.L. Laboratory work on Early and Middle Pleistocene samples was done by P.P., L.D., A.G. and M.D., and G.X. and J.A.T. conducted laboratory work on Late Pleistocene samples. P.P., T.v.d.V. and D.D.-d.-M. processed and mapped sequence data. T.v.d.V., S.H. and P.D.H. performed tests on DNA authenticity. T.v.d.V., J.O. and S.L. conducted phylogenetic and Treemix analyses. J.O. and T.v.d.V. computed genomic age estimates. T.v.d.V., A.B. and D.D.-d.-M. performed analyses on *D* statistics and *f<sub>i</sub>* statistics and admixture graph models. T.v.d.V. performed analyses on population structure, and ghost admixture. T.v.d.V., E.S., F.R.F. and M.S. performed analysis on selection. L.D., P.D.H., M.H., B.S., A.G., M.S., P.S., P.N. and A.M.L. provided advice on the bioinformatic analyses and/or helped to interpret the results. P.N. and A.M.L. provided morphological analyses as well as palaeontological and geological information. The manuscript was written by T.v.d.V., P.P., D.D.-d.-M., P.N. and L.D., with contributions from all co-authors.

**Competing interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

## Additional information

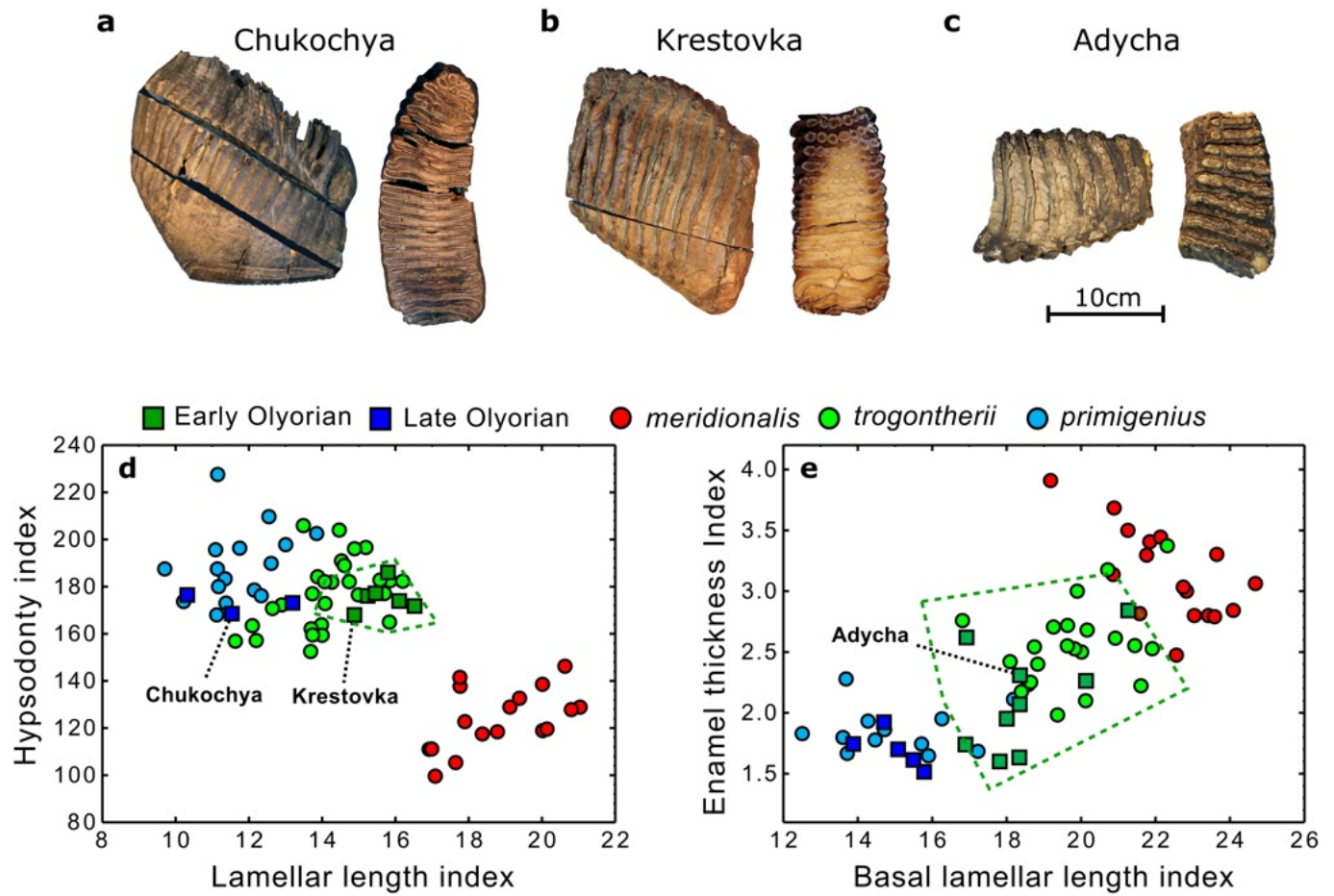
**Supplementary information** The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03224-9>.

**Correspondence and requests for materials** should be addressed to T.v.d.V. or L.D.

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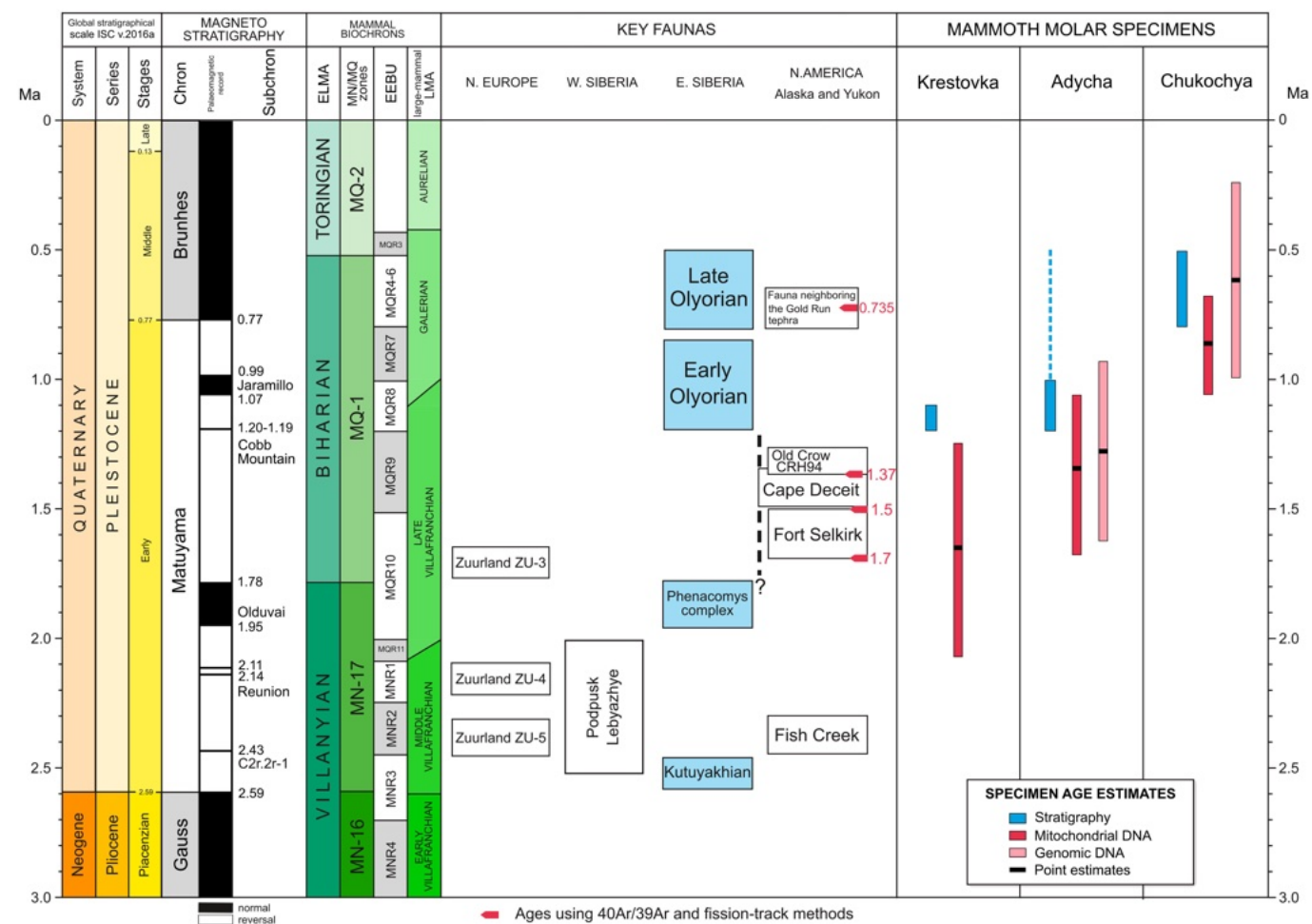




**Extended Data Fig. 1 | Mammoth molars and morphometric comparisons.**

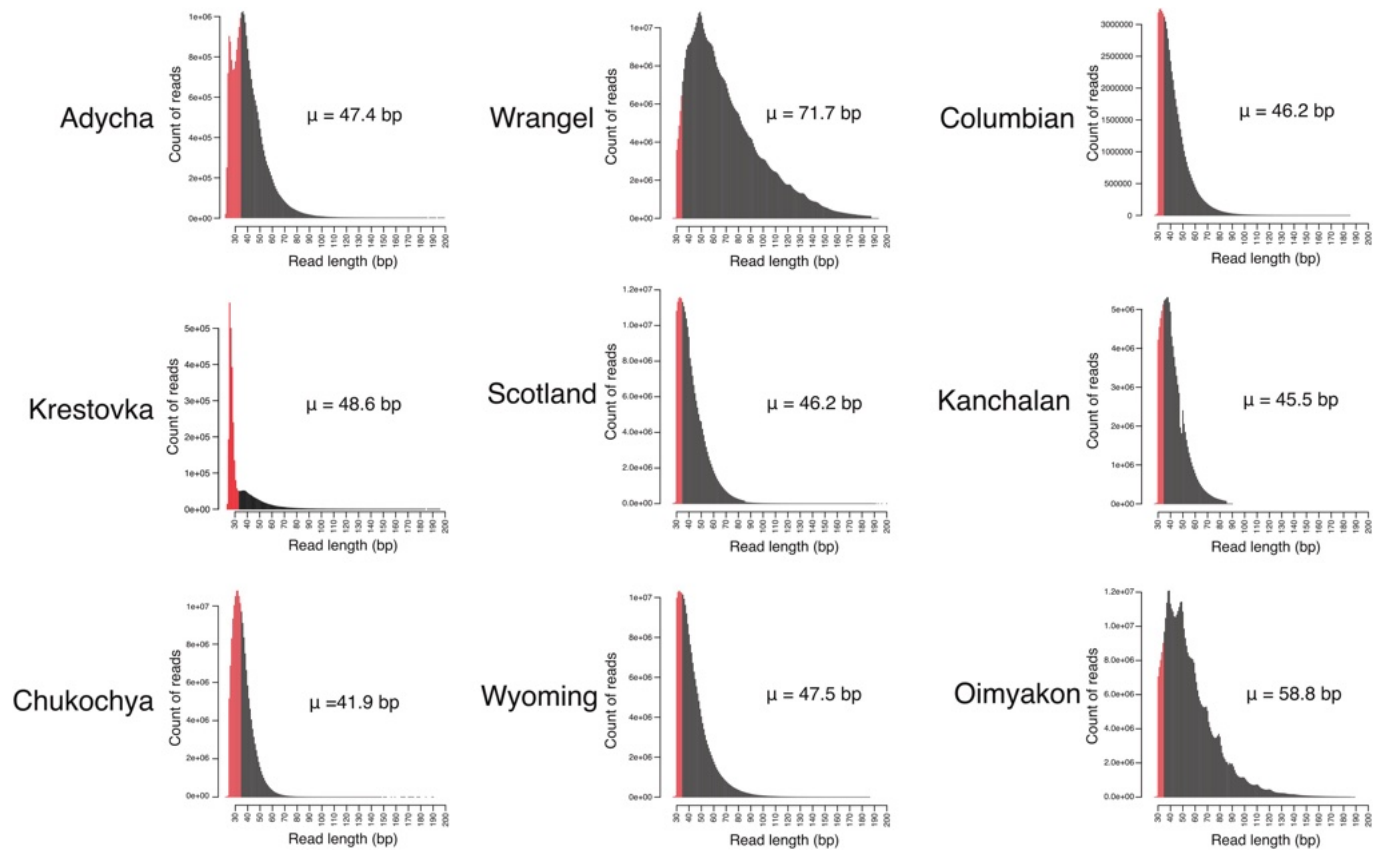
**a, b**, Upper third molars in lateral and cross-sectional views. **c**, Partial lower third molar in lateral and occlusal views. **a**, Chukochya (accession number PIN 3341-737). **b**, Krestovka (accession number PIN 3491-3) flipped horizontally. **c**, Adycha (accession number PIN 3723-511), occlusal view flipped horizontally. The lamellae are more closely spaced, and the enamel is thinner, in **a** (*M. primigenius*-like) than in **b, c** (*M. trogontherii*-like). **d**, Hypsodonty index versus lamellar length index of upper  $M^3$ . **e**, Enamel thickness index versus basal lamellar length index of lower  $M_3$ . Olyorian specimens that yielded DNA are labelled by site name. Green dashed line, convex hull summarizing Early to

early Middle Pleistocene (about 1.5–0.5 Ma) North American *Mammuthus* samples (data points not shown). Green and blue squares, Early and Late Olyorian northeastern Siberian samples, respectively. Red and green circles, European *M. meridionalis* and *M. trogontherii*, respectively. Blue circles, *M. primigenius* from northeastern Siberia and Alaska. Note (i) the similarity of Krestovka and Adycha to other molars from the Early Olyorian, and to European steppe mammoths (*M. trogontherii*); (ii) the similarity of early North American mammoths to these (to molars of the Early Olyorian, in particular); and (iii) the similarity of Chukochya to *M. primigenius*. For site details, measurement definitions and data, see Supplementary Information section 1.



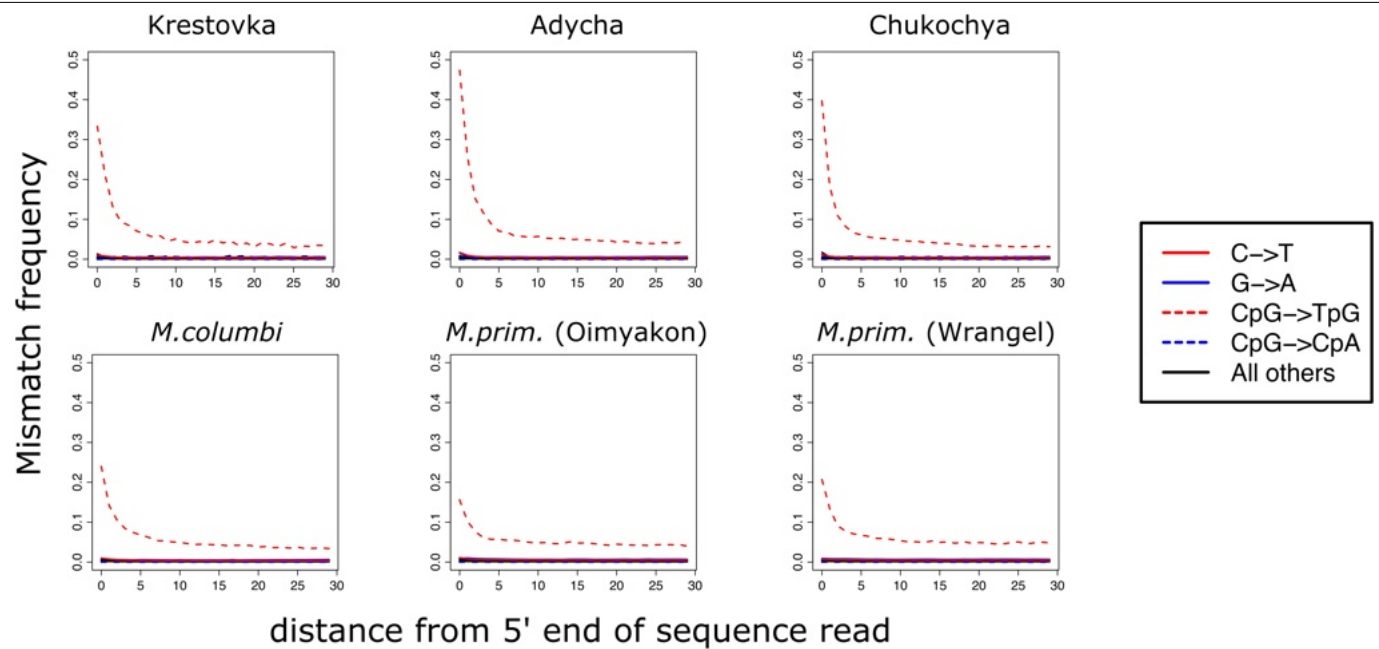
**Extended Data Fig. 2 | Sample age on the basis of biostratigraphy, palaeomagnetic reversals and genomic data.** Chart shows the stratigraphic position of the Kutuyakhian fauna, *Phenacomys* complex, and Early Olyorian and Late Olyorian faunas in relation to important European, northwest Asian and northern North American stratigraphic benchmarks. ELMA, European land

mammal ages (small mammals); LMA, land mammal ages (large mammals); MN and MQ, European small mammal biozones; EEBU, East European biochronological units. Biostratigraphic- and palaeomagnetic-based chronological constraints for the specimens are provided, in comparison with the DNA-based age estimations.



**Extended Data Fig. 3 | DNA-fragment length distributions for nine mammoths.** Reads are aligned to the *Lox Afr4* autosomes. For the three Early and Middle Pleistocene samples (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya), reads of 25–200-bp length are shown; 30–200-bp reads are shown for the remaining

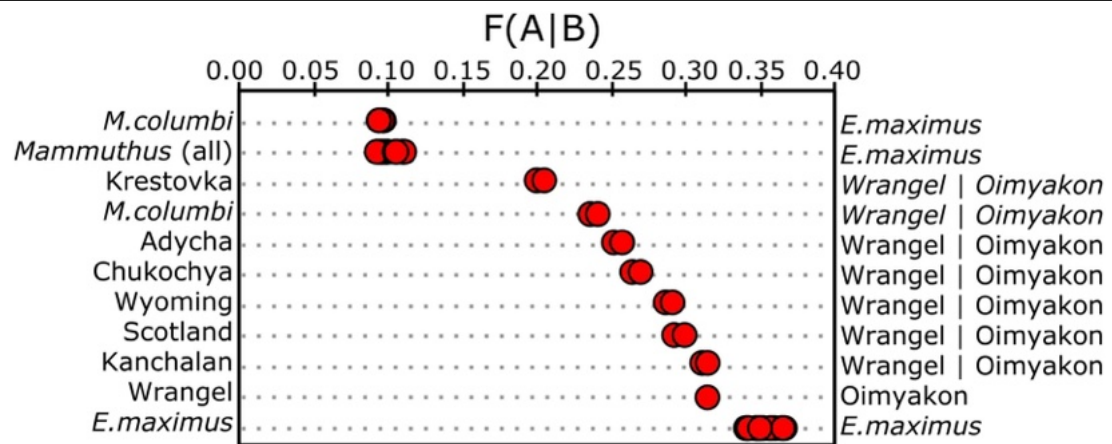
samples. Ultrashort reads (<35 bp) are denoted in red; these were shown to be enriched for spurious alignments, and therefore excluded from downstream analyses (Supplementary Information section 4). The mean read lengths ( $\mu$ ) were calculated using only the retained reads ( $\geq 35$  bp).



**Extended Data Fig. 4 | Post-mortem cytosine deamination damage profiles at CpG sites.** The most ancient samples (Krestovka, Adycha and Chukochya) carry a greater frequency of cytosine deamination compared to younger

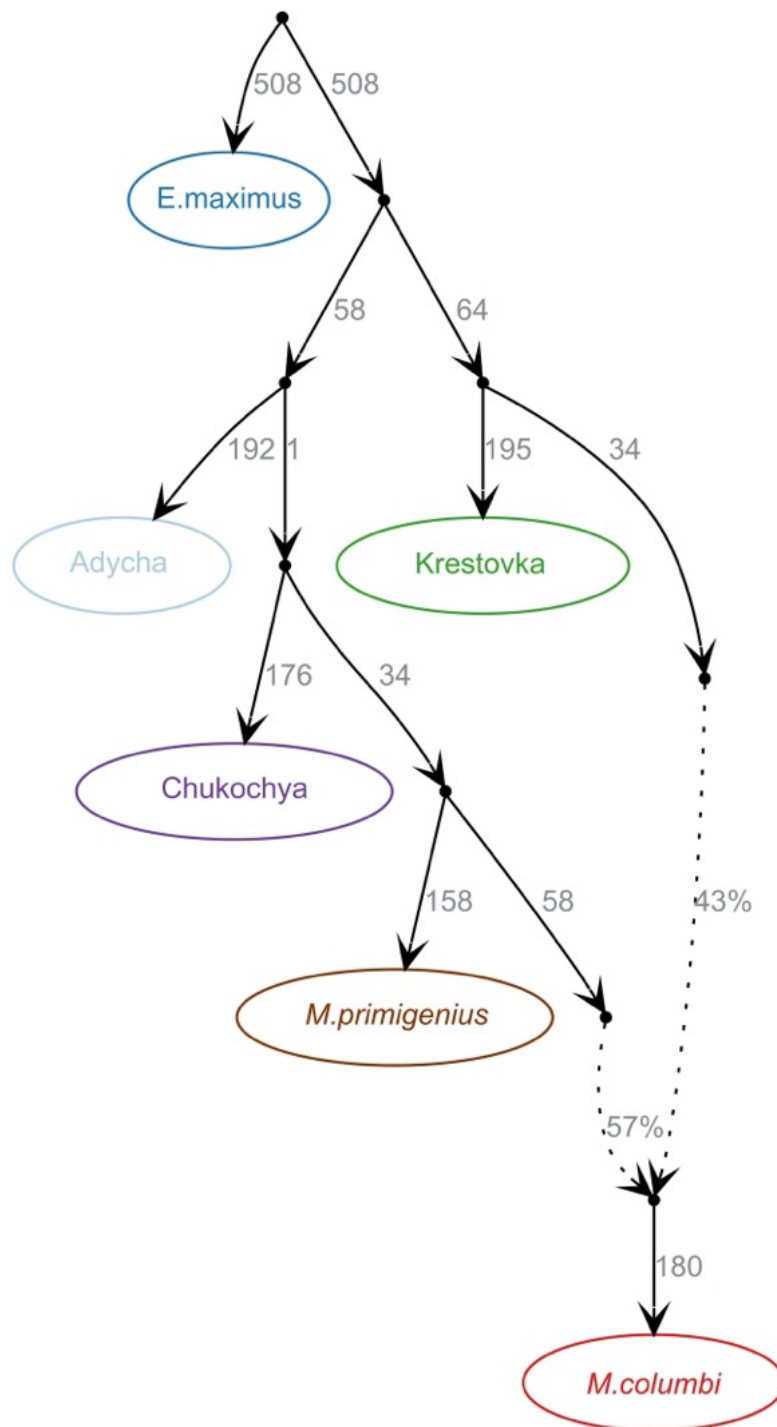
permafrost-preserved woolly mammoth samples (Oimyakon and Wrangel) and the Columbian mammoth (*M. columbi*) specimen.





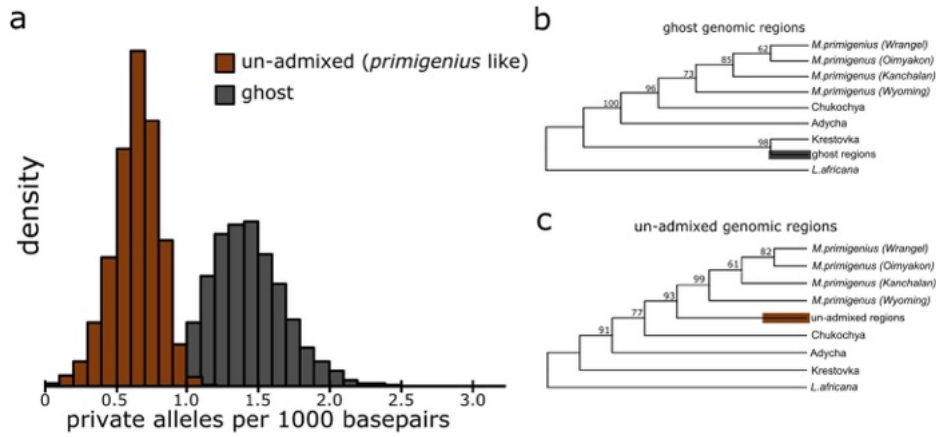
**Extended Data Fig. 5 |  $F(A|B)$  statistics.** The statistics reflect relative divergence between the genomes on the left and the right side. Lower values indicate reduced derived allele-sharing between the sample indicated on the

left and the right of the graph, at sites for which the genome on the right panel is heterozygous. The lower the value, the more drift has occurred between the genomes (and thus the older their genetic divergence).



**Extended Data Fig. 6 | qpGraph model.** The most parsimonious graph model (highest Bayes factor) of the phylogenetic relationships among mammoth lineages augmented with one admixture event. Branch lengths are given in

*f*-statistic units multiplied by 1,000. Discontinuous lines show admixture events between lineages, and percentages represent admixture proportions.



**Extended Data Fig. 7 | Ghost introgression analysis of the Columbian mammoth genome.** **a**, The number of private alleles per 1,000 bp within genomic regions identified as woolly mammoth (*M. primigenius*) ancestry or ghost ancestry. **b**, Maximum-likelihood phylogenies for those genomic regions

identified as ghost ancestry in the Colombian mammoth (*M. columbi*) genome. **c**, Maximum-likelihood phylogenies for regions identified as unadmixed ancestry.

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### Software and code

Policy information about [availability of computer code](#)

Data collection No software was used for data collection

Data analysis

```
SeqPrep 1.1
awk v4.0.2
BWA aln v0.7.8
Samtools 1.10
Python 2.7.15
R v.3.6.1
admixturegraph (R package)
https://github.com/ekirving/qpbrute.git
github.com/stefaniehartmann/readLengthCutoff
github.com/pontussk/PMDtools
mapDamage v.2.0.6
ANGSD v.0.921
RepeatMasker v.4.0.7
https://github.com/mpieva/mapping-iterative-assembler (MIA)
Muscle v3.8.31
jModelTest v2.1.10
BEAST v1.10.4
FASTME v.2.0
MEGAX v.10.1
Picard Toolkit v.2019
```



Admixtools v5  
 TreeMix v.1.12  
 github.com/LauritsSkov/Introgression-detection  
 last v.1170  
 maf-convert v.1170  
 PAML v.1.3.1  
 GOrilla v.2009

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All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	Genetic analysis were performed on DNA data generated from over 1 million year old mammoth molars, as well as from two Late Pleistocene mammoths. Population genetic statistics and phylogenies, primarily focused on genetic relationships and admixture between the samples was assessed using single-nucleotide polymorphisms.
Research sample	Three Early Pleistocene mammoth samples from Siberia, and two Late Pleistocene mammoth samples from Siberia and Scotland respectively. In addition, previously published (Palkopoulou et al. 2015, 2018, Lynch et al. 2015) ancient and modern genomic data from elephants and mammoths was included in our analyses.
Sampling strategy	We sampled five Early to Late Pleistocene mammoth samples. We performed shotgun sequencing to obtain as complete genomes as possible for these samples.
Data collection	DNA from ancient samples was extracted, sequenced, and processed into SNP genotype calls or genotype likelihoods
Timing and spatial scale	Specimens originated from Siberia and Scotland, from mammoths that lived between ~1.2Ma and ~24Ka ago.
Data exclusions	The sequence data obtained was processed according to standard ancient DNA pipelines, excluding reads below 35 basepairs in length and unmerged reads. In addition, reads with low mapping quality (MQ<30) have been excluded. The exclusion of reads that have too low quality, and/or are too short to accurately map are standard practice in the field. We also applied a novel approach to identify how short reads that could be mapped accurately, as outlined in the Supplementary Information.
Reproducibility	All methods used are described in detail, so that the analyses can be reproduced by other researchers by accessing the raw data deposited in ENA (see above). All attempts to reproduce the results and analyses, done by separate co-authors, were successful
Randomization	No randomization was done. Samples were grouped by species for analysis of admixture (f4-stats and admixture graphs)
Blinding	Blinding was not relevant to this study. Analyses were performed either for all individuals separately or grouped by species. Other sample specific features were not relevant to the results.
Did the study involve field work?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

## Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

## Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involved in the study
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Antibodies
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Eukaryotic cell lines
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Palaeontology and archaeology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals and other organisms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Human research participants
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Clinical data
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Dual use research of concern

## Methods

n/a	Involved in the study
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ChIP-seq
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Flow cytometry
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MRI-based neuroimaging

## Palaeontology and Archaeology

### Specimen provenance

The provenance of the specimens is described in detail in the Supplementary information of the manuscript. The specimens are currently held at the Geological Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences, The North-East Interdisciplinary Scientific Research Institute n. a. N. A. Shilo (Far East Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences), and the Hunterian Museum in the UK.

The specimens were sampled with the following permissions:

KRESTOVKA, ADYCHA and CHUKOCHYA

Sample ID: PIN-3491-3, 3723-511, PIN 3341-737

Issuing authority: Paleontological Institute n. a. A.A. Borissiak (Russian Academy of Sciences), Moscow, Russia

Sampled with permission from: E. N. Maschenko

Date: 13th October, 2016

SCOTLAND:

Sample ID: V5123

Issuing authority: The Hunterian museum, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Sampled with permission from: N. Clark

Date: 10th March, 2008

KANCHALAN:

Sample ID: 4-010

Issuing authority: Interdisciplinary Scientific Research Institute n. a. N. A. Shilo (Far East Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences).

Sampled with permission from: A.N. Kotov

Date: 28th November, 2004

### Specimen deposition

The specimens are part of the collections of the Geological Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences, The North-East Interdisciplinary Scientific Research Institute n. a. N. A. Shilo (Far East Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences), and the Hunterian Museum in the UK, and can be accessed following the same procedures as for other specimens in these collections.

### Dating methods

Age estimates for the Late Pleistocene samples had previously been performed using radiocarbon dating (reported in Palkopoulou et al. 2013). The Early and Middle Pleistocene samples were dated using geological methods (see Supplementary Information), and genetic dating following Meyer et. al (2012) as well as using the software BEAST.

☒ Tick this box to confirm that the raw and calibrated dates are available in the paper or in Supplementary Information.

### Ethics oversight

No ethical permits were needed for this study, since all analyses have been done on extinct species.

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.