

Tribute to the Man Who Gave Me Deep-Time Eyes: Paul S. Martin

Eulogy by [Connie Barlow](#), 15 September, 2010

Pleistocene ecologist **Paul S. Martin** died on September 13, 2010 at the ripe old age of 80. His memetic legacy lives on through me and many others of my generation (and the next), whom he mentored.

Paul published his first paper in 1957, when I was in kindergarten, and he coauthored an essay with me in 2004. That essay, "**Bring *Torreya taxifolia* North—Now**" was published in the final issue of *Wild Earth* journal, and it served as the scientific grounding for the first citizen action (in 2008) to pro-actively move an endangered plant hundreds of kilometers northward in this time of rapid climate change. (Visit the [Torreya Guardians website](#) to learn more.)

Foremost, Paul S. Martin gave me "**deep-time eyes**". In his writings, in our conversations, and in the field, he helped me experience today's wild landscapes in ways that bring ghosts into focus: animals (mostly Pleistocene mammals, but a few nonavian dinosaurs, too) that **still haunt the botanical world**. These were the animals that had, for millions of years, nudged plants to evolve big, alluring fruits to gain the muscle power they needed to get their progeny out into the world (in boluses of nutrient-rich dung). "Anachronistic" features of plants also include the obverse: thorns and poisons to protect essential body parts that they preferred their dispersers and other herbivores to leave alone.

Paul's influence on me began when I was interviewing scientists and naturalists for my 1997 book, *Green Space Green Time: The Way of Science*. There he appears in just a chapter or two. But my 2001 book, *The Ghosts of Evolution*, is entirely based on a classic paper he co-authored with ecologist Dan Janzen, published in *Science* in 1982: "Neotropical Anachronisms: the Fruits the Gomphotheres Ate." (The subtitle of my book is "Nonsensical Fruit, Missing Partners, and Other Ecological Anachronisms.")

Paul Martin's influence on me was far more than content and perspective. He was a premier example of a distinguished scientist and field naturalist who had the courage and confidence to stretch into advocacy (even radical advocacy), as well as a kind of thoroughly evidential mysticism.

Paul Martin and Radical Ecological Advocacy

Paul's and my joint advocacy in 2004 of **assisted migration** for America's most endangered conifer (*Torreya taxifolia*) pales in comparison to an idea he had been promoting in various forums since the 1970s: bringing back the extinct Pleistocene beasts of North America — or at least their congeners or other close proxies. The scientific rationale was strong: North America lost its big browsers 13,000 years ago, and so America's arid West is now overrun by ungrazable shrubs. Bring back the big browsing herbivores to save the grasslands! There was also a compelling moral

argument that would distinguish a Pleistocene Park from a Jurassic Park: our species had played a big role in their demise, according to Paul's widely acknowledged "**overkill theory**." Thus we owe it to these lineages to give their kind a second chance.

In the 1970s it was *Natural History Magazine* that served as Paul's advocacy outlet. He first advocated for the return of camels to the very continent in which they had, in fact, evolved. In the 1990s he twice published in *Wild Earth* journal the arguments for what has since come to be called "**Pleistocene Rewilding**". I remember when Paul sent me his draft of an essay he titled, "Bring Back the Elephants!" I thought it was a crazy idea, and I told him so. But after a week that meme had infected my mind, too, so I sent Paul's draft to the editor of *Wild Earth*, with a cover letter explaining why I felt the essay was important for conservation biologists to consider. Paul's radical essay, along with my expanded cover letter (titled, "**Rewilding for Evolution**") appeared in a 1999 issue of *Wild Earth*. Note: My personal correspondence with Paul on "Bring Back the Elephants" has been archived in the library of the next younger generation of conservation biologists, **Josh Donlan**, who was so inspired by Paul Martin, too, that he served as instigator and lead author of two now-classic papers on **Pleistocene Rewilding**, on which the grandfather of it all, Paul Martin, is also a coauthor.)

Paul Martin and Evidential Mysticism

The mainstream science on which "deep-time eyes" depends does not diminish one's communion with the powers of this Earth and the particulars of this continent. It enriches them exponentially. Before meeting Paul, I assumed my Euro-American heritage was a life-long handicap that would forever leave me wistful of Native American ways of experiencing the life and landscapes in the wild places I love. His contributions on "Overkill Theory" (which began in the 1960s), along with his work on ecological anachronisms, launched me on a path of becoming quite a Pleistocene mystic in my own right. I was exhilarated to discover that Paul and I had grown into shamans of a sort: possessing esoteric knowledge that brought us into communion with America's ecological heritage — and, importantly, in ways that had been inaccessible to the first peoples here. We had something truly new and powerful to offer others, like ourselves, who wished to become native to this land. (See **two short online VIDEOS** that show my work, and which refer to Paul, on the path of using deep-time eyes to mystically commune with our surrounds: "**Mammoths, Overkill, and a Deep-Time Perspective on Pleistocene Extinctions**" (8 minutes) and "**Ghosts of Evolution**" (5 minutes).)

It was Paul's idea to stage a "**Mammoth Memorial Service**" at the **Mammoth Site in South Dakota**. He considered this paleontological splendor to be one of the "sacred sites" of North America. I report on our collaboration for that event in the final chapter of my *Ghosts of Evolution* book, and in my online essay, "**An Immense Journey: Religious Naturalism and the Great Story**". A few years later I launched a webpage, "**Sacred Sites of the Epic of Evolution**" to encourage identification of and pilgrimages to the grounds that deep-time eyes perceive as meriting our deepest respect, indeed reverence. (The **Mammoth Site** is included.) I led by example, posting photo-essays of my own pilgrimages and encouraging others to contribute theirs.

A Deep-Time Perspective on Death

I began writing this eulogy this morning intending to share a few paragraphs on how Paul S. Martin shaped my work and my perspective these past 15 years. I am stunned by how much of my own writings and multi-media work exemplify his legacy. Time and again I google a phrase or concept I attribute to Paul and up pops my own work instead. Most of Paul's great work is still confined to paper or the neuronal connections of many still alive. But I made sure mine also uploaded into cyberspace.

Many, many conservation biologists and evolutionary ecologists will continue to engage with, evolve, and pass forward the great work that Paul S. Martin began in the 1950s. As I reflect on where I have already carried his influence forward, I think that the place where my contributions will be greatest — certainly in the wider culture — will be the ways in which deep-time eyes compel us to overhaul our understanding of death.

(See [my main webpage on this topic](#), with links to my video programs as well as text.) For all of us who value evidence over dogma, acquiring deep-time eyes is a terrific "spiritual" practice for attaining the kind of equanimity and pragmatism that Paul himself exemplified.

Yesterday I received email notice of Paul's death from his wife, Mary Kay O'Rourke. I laughed when I read this portion:

In true Paul fashion he wanted it very clear that he will 'die' and then be 'dead.' He will not pass-on, go gently, meet his maker, or go over to the other side."

Paul's secular pragmatism is complemented by the evidential mysticism that I experienced time and again in his presence. More than once he mentioned that he would love to have his "carcass" tossed off the rim of the Grand Canyon, as food for the newly rewilded "California" condors that had, not long ago, patrolled its cliffs in search of ground sloth carrion — and which were now sadly dependent on imported still-born calves. (The [Shasta Ground Sloth](#) was Paul's "totem animal.") Perhaps my generation will be able to pull off that part of Paul's hopeful vision; or maybe it will be Josh Donlan's generation.

In the meanwhile, Paul S. Martin lives on far more securely than he would have, had he been a true-believer in an otherworldly heaven or a this-worldly reincarnation. His scientific contributions will continue to ripple outward in their effects. And those of us lucky enough to have overlapped in space and time with him can now have a cyber-party of our own sharing Paul Martin stories.

To behold the Grand Canyon without thoughts of its ancient condors, sloths, and goats is to be half blind." — Paul S. Martin, 1992

NOTE: In February 2010, Connie Barlow posted a 5-minute video onto YouTube titled, "[Ghosts of Evolution](#)". It ends with a dedication to (and photos of) Grandfather Paul. BTW: Yes, that is Shasta Ground Sloth shit he is holding reverentially. :-)