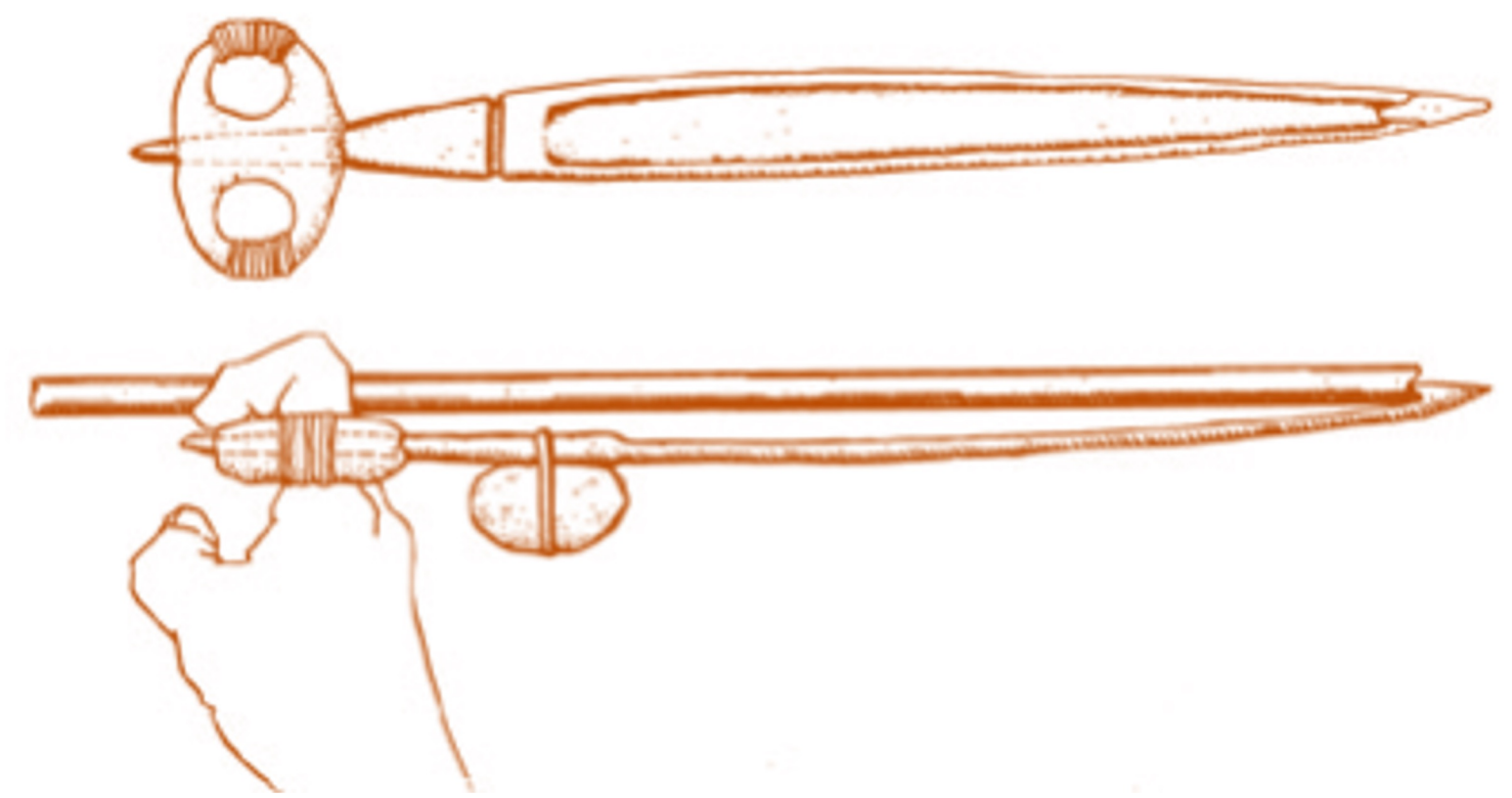


ATLATLS

The Ancient Hunting Tools that Felled the Mammoths

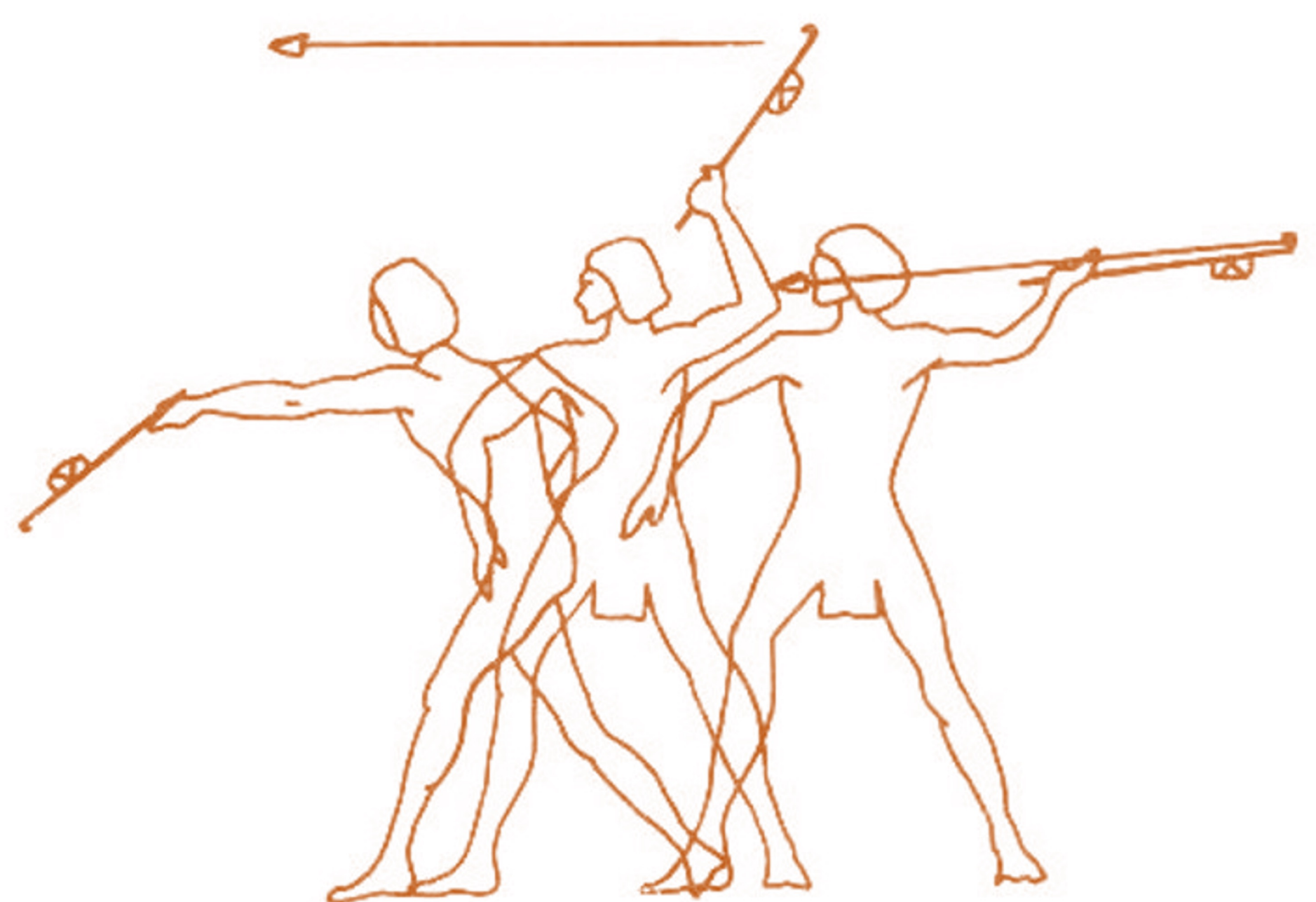
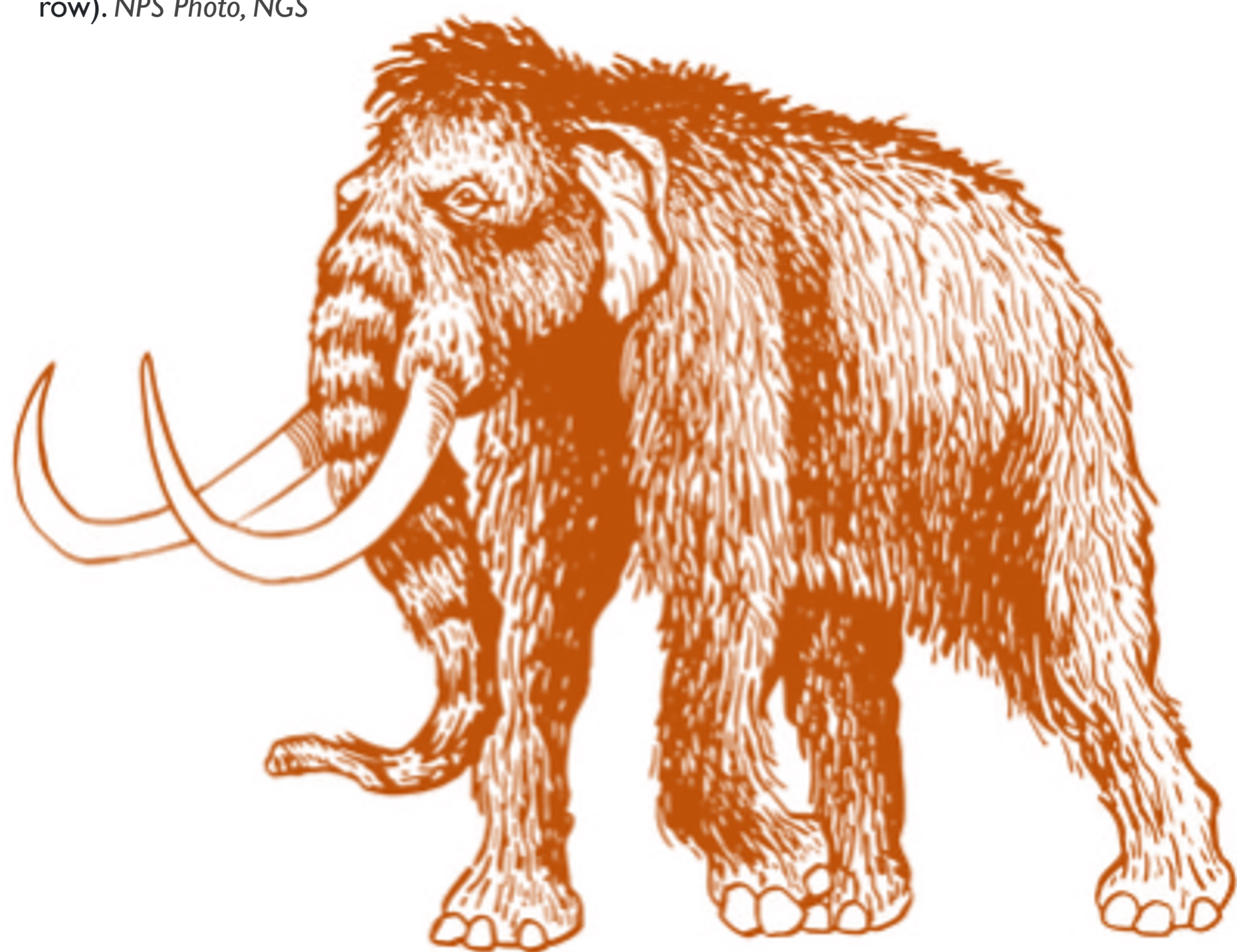
The word *atlatl* (**aht-lath-l**) comes from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. When the Spanish came into contact with the Aztecs in the 1500s, they were still using this tool for warfare and hunting purposes.

Atlatls were used to propel darts with greater force and accuracy than could be achieved by hand alone. The tools developed during the Upper Paleolithic 50,000 years ago, before the bow and arrow.



Components of an Archaic atlatl found at Russell Cave (top row), a recreation of an atlatl (2nd row), an illustration of an atlatl loaded with a spear (3rd row), and various Archaic projectile and spear points (bottom row). NPS Photo, NGS

Atlatls were crafted from wood, antler, and bone and ranged from 30 cm to 1 m in length. Their use has been documented at archaeological sites throughout Europe, North America, and South America.



Stone weights attached to the center of the atlatl provided extra leverage, and also had symbolic meaning. This tool made it possible for ancient hunters to kill megafauna, like mammoths and mastodons. Some darts were even poison-tipped!

