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During the Cretaceous Period (65.5 to 145.5 million years ago), the giant southern land mass known as Gondwana breaks up into Africa, South America, Australia, India, and Antarctica. South America drifts west and becomes isolated from other land masses. This isolation continues throughout much of the Cenozoic Era.

65.5 million years ago marks the end of the Mesozoic Era and the beginning of the Cenozoic. The extinction of dinosaurs occurs over a relatively short period of time (geologically speaking); mammals diversify and flourish during the Cenozoic.

During the Oligocene epoch (23 to 33.9 million years ago), three families of giant ground sloths emerge.

Ground sloths and other ancient xenarthrans make their way into North America beginning around 9 million years ago.

Ancient lines of sloths, anteaters, and armadillos diverged about 75 to 80 million years ago.

At the beginning of the Cenozoic Era, the global climate was much warmer than it is today. From 45 to 65 million years ago, tropical rainforests covered much of our planet.

Ground sloths continue to exist well into the Holocene (10,000 years ago to present), perhaps as recently as 600 years ago.

Oldest xenarthran fossils found in South America date back between 60 to 65 million years ago.

A global cooling trend over a period of several tens of millions of years results in our current ice age. Global ice caps appear, and tropical rainforests are pushed to equatorial locations.

