

New Easter Island theory presented

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A University of Hawaii anthropologist and colleagues are blaming rats and Dutch traders for the mysterious abandonment of Easter Island.

Nearly all Polynesians on the South Pacific island, who built hundreds of 10-ton stone statues, inexplicably vanished. Conjecture has included the natives deforested the island to transport the statues, triggering catastrophic erosion, USA Today reported. According to the theory, the remaining inhabitants then were decimated during a cannibalistic civil war in about 1650.

But anthropologist Terry Hunt blames the Polynesian rat for deforesting the 66-square-mile island's 16 million palm trees.

He and his colleagues told USA Today the disappearance of Easter Islanders probably was caused by visiting 18th-century Dutch traders, who took diseases and slave raiding to the island.

Easter Island is located more than 2,000 miles from the nearest population centers, making it one of the most isolated places on Earth.

Hunt presented his findings during an American Anthropological Association meeting last week in Washington.

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