



Which of these was the real avocado enthusiast must remain a mystery. The last survivors died out about nine thousand years ago, victims of competition from North American species, or overspecialization, or changes in climate, or the weapons of early man. Until someone finds fossil avocado pits in the remains of giant sloths or glyptodonts, their role in the avocado tree's evolution can't be determined. All that we can say, looking at the avocado pit, is that whatever swallowed it must have been big. As big as those fossil skeletons staring out at us from behind the dusty glass of museum cases.

With the extinction of the large animals in Central America, it is a wonder that the avocado trees didn't become extinct as well. Might they have been rescued by early man? We can imagine some primitive hunter-gatherer picking up fallen avocados. He moves quickly, glancing fearfully over his shoulder, listening for the slightest noise. He has heard that this tree is where dragons come. But he can relax now; the dragons are gone. The riches of the avocado are all his—and have been ever since.

—Swain, Roger, *Field Days: Journal of an Itinerant Biologist*.  
New York, Scribners, 1980