



Paleontologist Dr. Bruce Lander, pictured on site during subway's excavation, chronicled fossil findings in report released by MTA.

Report Shows Ancient Animals Once Roamed Subway's Route

By GARY WOSK

(Dec 6) Tens of thousands of years ago, the climate of Los Angeles was much cooler and wetter than it is today and its landscape teemed with ground sloths, horses, elephants and camels – a virtual kingdom of prehistoric creatures. There were even redwood trees.

These are among numerous fascinating revelations chronicled in a recently released MTA-funded report authored by paleontologist Bruce Lander. Working with a team of 28 scientists, he discovered more than 2,000 fossils, many of them rare, during construction of the Metro Red Line.

There is even evidence of a great flood in the San Fernando Valley 9,000 years ago that swept away trees, although weather conditions were drier and more extreme than today.

"This is one of the most important projects we've had in terms of providing new information and data to the scientific community," Lander said. "Our data will lead to a number of new publications."

Experts are in the process of reviewing the significant findings described in the report, entitled: "Paleontologic Resource Impact Mitigation Program Final Technical Report of Findings." A copy of the report is available in the MTA Library.

Advances our knowledge

"This extensive body of work advances our knowledge about our world," said MTA Environmental Compliance Manager Jim Sowell.

Fossil finds discussed in the report include:

- 64 extinct species of marine fish, including 39 new to science,
- The tusk of an Ice Age elephant (possibly a Columbian mammoth),
- Bones and teeth of a towering American mastodon, western camel and ancient longhorn bison,
- Bones of Harlan's ground sloth,

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Wood and pollen of land plants including incense cedar and coast redwood trees, and

- Birds, shrews, cottontail rabbits, gophers, mice and kangaroo rats.

"Scholars will find this to be an invaluable, complete reference tool," said Sowell. "The MTA went the extra mile in uncovering these materials. The report also demonstrates how many disciplines are involved in a modern paleontological exploration."

Colorful photos and maps

The 300-page report contains colorful fossil photos and maps pinpointing where the fossils were found. It describes the more than 2,000 fossils found primarily at the 11 stations that comprise Segments 2 and 3 of the Metro Red Line.

The report covers a period from about 16.5 million years ago to about 10,000 years ago. Segments 2 and 3 stretch 10.9 miles from Wilshire and Vermont to Lankershim and Chandler in North Hollywood.

"This report summarizes the results of a multi-year mitigation program supported by the MTA since 1987," Lander said. "It demonstrates the benefits of a major construction project to the science of paleontology. Many of the fossil discoveries are scientifically highly important because they represent the first or oldest fossil record of their respective species."

The fossils can be viewed on the MTA's "Los Angeles Underground" website at www.mta.net. They also are periodically displayed in the MTA library.

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