

Paleontologists Unearth Mammoth Tusk Fossil on MTA Property

PHOTO BY DAVE SOTERO

- Discovery is 10,000 to 70,000 years old
- Fossil is donated to Museum of Natural History

By DAVE SOTERO

(May 21, 2003) Paleontologists working on MTA property have unearthed a small section of a mammoth tusk approximately 10,000 to 70,000 years old.

MTA has donated the fossil, which is believed to date to the late Pleistocene era, to the Museum of Natural History of Los Angeles County for study and preservation. The fossil fragment is just less than a foot long and about eight inches in diameter.

John Alderman, a local resident and retired geologist, found the fossil earlier this month protruding from the soft dirt of a hillside in West Los Angeles. To protect fossil sites from trespassing and vandalism, MTA does not release the exact location of discoveries.

"Any fossil found in Los Angeles County is going to provide a significant amount of new information to science," said museum paleontologist Howell Thomas. "Even though we know mammoths lived in the area, we don't know the extent of their range, either geologically or geographically. This find gives us another point on the map."

The agency has worked with the museum in preserving artifacts discovered in Chinatown and North Hollywood during Metro Red Line construction. Construction workers helped paleontologists collect scores of these fossils and artifacts found within the subway tunnels.

Thousands of artifacts

Items recovered include seven million year-old sea life fossils, 46,000 year-old incense tree fossils, and thousands of artifacts such as tooth brushes, bottles, bowls and spoons from the first Chinatown from 1880 to 1933.

"MTA has a long history of working with the museum to preserve Los



Paleontologists prepare fossil site for removal and transport to the Museum of Natural History in Los Angeles. Below, drawing of mammoth illustrates the giant, elephant-like creature that roamed the earth as late as 10,000 years ago. Remains have been found in Siberia, northern Europe, northern Eurasia, and North America.

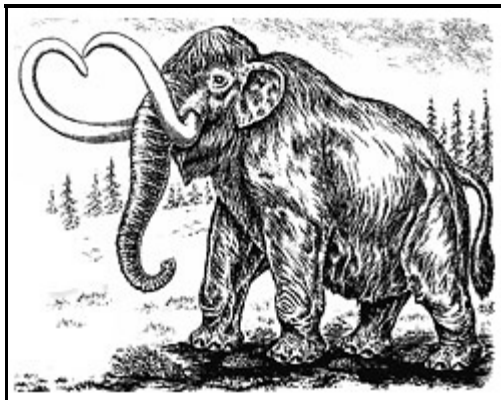


Image: Museum Victoria. Artist: Caroll L. Fenton. Source and copyright Patricia Vickers-Rich.

Angeles' legacy," said Steve Brye, MTA transportation planning manager. "We have been actively involved in doing the right thing in making sure fossils are preserved for posterity. It's something MTA really believes in."

All of MTA's construction projects include mitigation measures for paleontology and archeology to protect fossils and other artifacts where possible.

The agency will even halt construction until all discoveries are safely removed, often going above and beyond what is required by law. Discoveries are often donated to museums for research and display.

"I wish everyone who finds a fossil would work as hard as the MTA did to make sure the fossil was collected and preserved correctly," Thomas said.

MTA's web site highlights the fossils it has helped preserve. Called "Los Angeles Underground," the site is available at www.mta.net under "Other MTA Information, LA Underground."
[Click here to go directly to "Los Angeles Underground" site.](#)

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