



Photo courtesy Library of Congress

Mastodon bones

Farmer Uncovers Precious Bones of Mastodon

Scientists estimated the prehistoric creature was probably 14 feet high as it stood upright on the Iowa landscape near Welton. When it roamed the Iowa countryside was an unsolved mystery. The bones of the mammoth animal were unearthed in 1874 by a farmer as he walked near the track of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. Strolling along a stream, he spotted something protruding from the bank. Curious, the farmer went to his home to get a spade. As he dug, the huge object emerged. It was obviously a bone of some kind.

Somehow Professor H.T. Woodman of Dubuque heard about the discovery and negotiated with the farmer to acquire the bone and permission to dig for more specimens on the farmer's land. At one point the professor had accumulated nearly 70 bones and was continuing the search for more. All the bones were found within 30-35 feet of each other.

He uncovered a shoulder blade described as so perfect that it looked as though it had come off the animal only recently, despite being thousands of years old. The three-and-a-half foot long, three-foot wide piece was long enough for an ordinary sized family to dine on, according to a report.

A lower bone of a hind leg measured 33 inches long and 32 inches around at its largest end. Parts of the backbone formed joints from 10 to 12 inches across. A bone belonging to a foot was 28 inches around. The head cavity was nearly a foot across.

Everyone who saw the bones was surprised at their condition. Found only about four feet below the surface, they were embedded in fine sand which helped to preserve them according to the professor. He believed the body of the mastodon may have been crushed between masses of floating ice during a glacier period. The professor believed the bones belonged to a very young animal.

The bones ended up at the museum of the State Normal School in Winona, Minn. The museum staff couldn't believe their luck and were greatly surprised that the state of Iowa ever allowed the valuable find to leave its borders.

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Sources

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