

A Mammoth Discovery

Scientists dig up the bones of a giant extinct animal in Michigan.

In September, a farmer in Michigan got a big surprise. While digging a hole in his field, James Bristle and a friend uncovered a large object buried in the mud. It turned out to be a bone from the skeleton of a mammoth.

Mammoths were prehistoric elephant-like creatures that once roamed North America and other parts of the world. They died out about 10,000 years ago.

The Big Dig

When Bristle realized that what he had found was a bone, he contacted Daniel Fisher, a **paleontologist** at the University of Michigan. Fisher and his team used shovels and other tools to carefully remove the bones from the mud. They found the mammoth's tusks, skull, jaw, and other bones. It was one of the most complete mammoth skeletons ever found in the state.



The skull and tusks of a recently discovered mammoth skeleton are loaded onto a truck.

Fisher believes the creature was a hybrid, or combination, of two different species of mammoth. The bones are likely from an animal that was part Columbian mammoth and part woolly mammoth. Both species roamed North America about 150,000 to 10,000 years ago.

Fisher estimates that when the animal was alive, it stood more than 11 feet tall. He thinks it likely weighed about 12,000 to 14,000 pounds. That's about the size of a large modern African elephant.



More to Find

Bristle decided to donate the bones to the University of Michigan. Fisher is looking forward to seeing what else his team can learn by examining the skeleton.

Fisher thinks it won't be the last mammoth found in the area.

"Oh, I think there's no question that there are others. Absolutely," he says. "You know, the trick is to find them, of course! And that's easier said than done."



A woolly mammoth (left) had longer, shaggier hair than a Columbian mammoth (right).

Word to Know

paleontologist (pay-lee-uhn-TAHL-oh-jist) *noun*. a scientist who studies fossils and ancient life-forms

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