

# Mastodon Tusk May Be Largest Ever Uncovered In NYS

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Research under way at the New York State Museum indicates that a huge mastodon tusk, recently excavated by Museum scientists in Orange County, may be the largest tusk ever found in New York State.

The nearly complete but fragmented tusk, measuring more than 9 feet long, was one of two excavated this past summer in the Black Dirt area of Orange County at the confluence of Tunkamoose Creek and the Wallkill River, on the property of Lester Lain of Westtown. Museum scientists believe that the other less complete tusk, about 5-6 feet long, came from the same mastodon, which has been named the Tunkamoose mastodon.

Glen Keeton of Mount Hope, N.Y. and Chris Connallon of Hampton, N.J. came across the tusks in November 2008 as they were canoeing down the Wallkill River. Keeton contacted the Orange County chapter of the New York State Archeological Association, which then contacted the State Museum. Weather conditions delayed the [excavation](#) until this past summer.

Since then, Dr. Robert Feranec, the Museum's curator of vertebrate [paleontology](#), has been researching other mastodon excavations in New York State. Feranec believes that the Warren Mastodon tusk, which is 8 feet, 8 inches long, is the longest one uncovered to date. It was discovered in New York State in the 1800s and is on exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The tusk of

the Cohoes Mastodon, on display at the State Museum, is about 4-5 feet long.

Based on the age of similar fossils, Feranec suspects that the tusks are about 13,000 years old. However, carbon dating results to determine the exact age, will not be available until later this year. In the meantime, the tusks have been taken apart to be cleaned and conserved for their long-term survival. It is hoped that eventually the tusks can be made available for scientific research and exhibits at the State Museum and at a museum in the area where the tusks were found.

Abundant mastodon fossils have been found in Orange County, especially in the rich Black Dirt area which Keeton calls “a gold mine for these fossils.” Other fossils have also been found including those of giant beavers, stag moose, ground sloths, peccaries and reindeer.

Several Museum scientists will be involved in an integrative research project in the Black Dirt area where they will investigate the ancient environment in which the mastodon lived, as well as how that environment changed over the last 13,000 years.

“From my perspective, this is a significant find,” said Feranec. “These fossils will tell us more about the ancient history of New York. We hope to be able to reconstruct the environment in which the mastodon lived, as well as to try to understand why they went extinct.”

In 2007, Feranec oversaw the relocation of the Cohoes Mastodon from the State Museum lobby window to its new location in the Museum’s Exhibition Hall, where temperature and humidity levels are more stable and more conducive to the skeleton’s long-term preservation. The iconic Museum treasure is now the centerpiece of an expanded exhibition. Discovered in 1866 near Cohoes Falls, the Mastodon once stood about 8 ½ feet tall, was about 15 feet long, and weighed between 8-10,000

pounds. Its tusk weighs 50 pounds.

Provided by New York State Museum

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