

# Owner lets museum to dig up Seattle mammoth tusk

February 14 2014, by Donna Gordon Blankinship

---



Workers build forms Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2014, around the area at a construction site in Seattle where what is believed to be an ice age mammoth tusk was discovered on Tuesday. Work pouring cement at the site was continuing, but workers blocked off the area where the tusk was found. Paleontologists from the University of Washington hope to move the tusk to a museum on campus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

The fate of the mammoth tusk found at a construction site in downtown Seattle this week was entirely up to the landowner, a national expert said

Thursday.

Washington state has no laws governing finds of this type. And Jack Horner of the Museum of the Rockies and Montana State University said that is true anywhere in the United States.

The landowner decided to donate the tusk to the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture at the University of Washington, just as Horner hoped would happen.

It's a relatively rare find and should be preserved for educational reasons, so children will know mammoth elephants once lived in Seattle, he said.

"A lot of times, people think these things are worth a lot of money," Horner said. Their true value is educational, not what someone can sell a tusk for on eBay, he said.

As paleontologists and graduate students began carefully digging away the dirt around the tusk on Thursday afternoon, Julie Stein, executive director of the museum, said AMLI Residential has been wonderful to work with.

Scott Koppelman, [senior vice president](#) of AMLI Residential, said that after contractors found the fossil buried about 30 feet (nine meters) below street level, the company turned quickly to the Burke museum for assistance.



Workers remove a plastic tarp Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2014, over the area at a construction site in Seattle where what is believed to be an ice age mammoth tusk was discovered on Tuesday. Work pouring cement at the site was continuing, but workers blocked off the area where the tusk was found. Paleontologists from the University of Washington hope to move the tusk to a museum on campus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Mammoth elephants lived all over the United States and Europe in ancient times, but finding a tusk or any part of those animals is rare, Horner and other experts said.

"We don't find them every year or even every five years," he said. In most cases, artifacts found at construction sites are destroyed by a big machine before anyone even notices them, Horner said.



This image provided by Transit Plumbing and taken on Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2014, shows plumber apprentice Joe Wells touching what Burke Museum officials believe is mammoth tusk that was uncovered by construction workers in the south Lake Union area of Seattle. According to the museum, the ancient elephant relatives lived in Washington until approximately 10,000 years ago and their fossils have been found throughout western Washington. (AP Photo/Transit Plumbing)

Discoveries of animal remains from the Ice Age are less common than human remains in western Washington. Preservation of bone and [tusks](#) depends on the environmental conditions, such as the water table, the acidity of the soil and how deeply the object was buried, Brooks said.

"A lot of time, teeth preserve better than other bones," she said, likening tusks to teeth. Teeth and tusks are what she and the scientists she works with consider "biological rock," Brooks said.



The construction site in Seattle where workers discovered what is believed to be an ice age mammoth tusk is shown Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2014. Work pouring cement at the site was continuing, but workers blocked off the area at the center of the photo where the tusk was found. Paleontologists from the University of Washington hope to move the tusk to a museum on campus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

The last big find of an ancient animal of this sort in western Washington happened in 1977, when a Mastodon tusk was found near Sequim, Washington, on the Olympic Peninsula.

Mammoths and Mastodons are related and probably roamed the Earth around the same time. Both were very large and hairy. Mammoths and modern-day elephants are members of the same biological family.



This image provided by the Burke Museum and taken on Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2014, Bruce Crowley, the museum's Preparator for the Paleontology Division, examines what museum officials believe is mammoth tusk that was uncovered by construction workers in the south Lake Union area of Seattle. According to the museum, the ancient elephant relatives lived in Washington until approximately 10,000 years ago and their fossils have been found throughout western Washington. (AP Photo/Burke Museum)

Scientists at the Burke believe this tusk came from a Columbian mammoth, which is the Washington state fossil. The tusk, which could be as large as 8 feet long, is expected to be the largest and most intact [mammoth tusk](#) ever found in the Seattle area.



Workers smooth freshly poured cement near a fenced off area at a Seattle construction site, Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2014, where what is believed to be an ice age mammoth tusk was discovered on Tuesday. Work pouring cement at the site was continuing, but workers blocked off the area where the tusk was found. Paleontologists from the University of Washington hope to move the tusk to a museum on campus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Owner lets museum to dig up Seattle mammoth tusk (2014, February 14) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-owner-museum-seattle-mammoth-tusk.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.