

Rare whale fossil pulled from California backyard (Update)

August 1 2014, by Matt Hamilton



Members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team stand around a 16-17-million-year-old fossil lodged in a rock weighing about 2,000-pounds after it was lifted out of a hole in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. on Friday, Aug. 1, 2014. The Palos Verdes Peninsula was once an ocean bottom that over eons has risen hundreds of feet above the Pacific. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

A rare whale fossil has been pulled from a Southern California backyard with some unusual help—a sheriff's search-and-rescue team.

Paleontologist Howell Thomas of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County says the 16- to 17-million-year-old baleen whale fossil is one of about 20 baleen fossils known to exist. Baleen is a filter made of soft tissue used to sift out prey, like krill, from seawater.

The fossil, lodged in a 1,000-pound rock, was hoisted from a ravine. Using pulleys and a steel trolley, crews pulled the fossil up a steep backyard slope and into a truck bound for the museum.

The fossil was discovered by 53-year-old Gary Johnson when he was a teen exploring the creek behind his family's home. Johnson called Thomas after a whale fossil was recovered in January at a nearby school.



Members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team roll a 16-17-million-year-old fossil lodged in a rock weighing about 2,000 pounds up a steep hillside on a customized cart in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. on Friday,

Aug. 1, 2014. The Palos Verdes Peninsula was once an ocean bottom that over eons has risen hundreds of feet above the Pacific. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)



Members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team John Camphouse, left, and Janet Henderson, help move a 16-17-million-year-old fossil lodged in a rock weighing about 2,000 pounds out of a hole in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. on Friday, Aug. 1, 2014. The Palos Verdes Peninsula was once an ocean bottom that over eons has risen hundreds of feet above the

Pacific. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)



Members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team, Mike Leum, left, John McKently, center, and Janet Henderson, right, help to roll a 16-17-million-year-old fossil lodged in a rock weighing about 2,000 pounds up a steep hillside on a customized cart in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. on Friday, Aug. 1, 2014. The Palos Verdes Peninsula was once an ocean bottom that over eons has risen hundreds of feet above the Pacific. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

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