

Possible complete mammoth skeleton found in Idaho (Update)

October 27 2014

A portion of a Columbian mammoth skull and tusks have been uncovered in Idaho, and experts say a rare entire skeleton might be buried there.

Experts estimate the mammoth was about 16 years old and lived about 70,000 to 120,000 years ago in what was a savanna-like country populated with large plant-eaters and predators.

The skeleton was spotted earlier this month by a fossil hunter working as a volunteer for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation near American Falls Reservoir. It was partially excavated by students and instructors from Idaho State University.

But the team had to postpone their work Oct. 18 as the reservoir's water level rose, completing some of their tasks while standing in water. They plan to return next summer when the reservoir drops.

"It gives us a little more time to prepare if this is a complete mammoth, to get the funds together," said Mary Thompson, Idaho Museum of Natural History collections manager and a university instructor. "This is going to be substantial to go out and excavate a complete mammoth."

She said more bones and tusks remained in the bank that couldn't immediately be removed.

"There may be a whole mammoth there, so that is rare," she said.

Workers built a barrier to keep the fossil in place while underwater.

The area, Thompson said, has produced fossils of various extinct species over the decades, ranging from saber-toothed cats, short-nosed bears that were larger than grizzlies, and giant sloths. One of the most often found fossils are from bison latifrons, somewhat similar to modern bison but larger and with giant horns. Their image is part of the museum's logo.

"It's a very important North American Pleistocene site," Thompson said, naming a time period that runs from 1.8 million years ago to 10,000 years ago. "We have researchers from all over the world coming here to study the fossils from American Falls."

Besides fossils, there are also tracks of mammoths, large cats, canines and other animals where they crossed then muddy areas eons ago.

Thompson said she hopes to have the portions of the mammoth the team managed to get out put on display early next year.

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Possible complete mammoth skeleton found in Idaho (Update) (2014, October 27) retrieved 16 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-mammoth-skeleton-idaho.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.