

Hidden mysteries lie in wait inside Kenya's fossil treasury

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The 23-million-year-old bones of the newly-discovered giant, *Simbakubwa kutokaafrika*, had been left for nearly 40 years in a drawer

The only hint that something extraordinary lay inside the plain wooden drawer in an unassuming office behind Nairobi National Museum was a

handwritten note stuck to the front: "Pull Carefully".

Inside, a monstrous jawbone with colossal fangs grinned from a bed of tattered foam—the only known remains of a prehistoric mega-carnivore, larger than a polar bear, that researchers only this year declared a new species.

"This is one-of-a-kind," said Kenyan paleontologist Job Kibii, holding up the 23-million-year-old bones of the newly-discovered giant, *Simbakubwa kutokaafrika*, whose unveiling made headlines around the world.

But the remarkable fossils were not unearthed this year, or even this decade. They weren't even found this century.

For nearly 40 years, the specimens—proof of the existence of Africa's largest-ever predator, a 1,500 kilogram (3,300-pound) meat eater that dwarfed later hunters like lions—lived in a nondescript drawer in downtown Nairobi.

Museum staff knew the bones were something special—they just didn't know what exactly. A source of intrigue, dusted off on occasion for guests, *Simbakubwa* lay in wait, largely forgotten.

How did these fossils, first excavated on a dig in western Kenya in the early 1980s, go unrecognised for so long?

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