

Mastodon bones unearthed by Michigan work crew go on display in museum

May 19 2023, by Mike Householder



Mastodon bones are displayed at the Grand Rapids Public Museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. The bones are part of an exhibit and were unearthed last year during a drainage dig in western Michigan and belonged to a juvenile mastodon that lived 13,000 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Mike Householder

A selection of bones belonging to a juvenile mastodon who roamed the woods of Michigan 13,000 years ago is now on display at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, after workers unearthed it by chance last year.

Excited [museum](#) officials showed off some of the long-extinct pachyderm's remains on Thursday, although much of the [skeleton](#) still is going through the drying process.

Mastodons might seem similar to [woolly mammoths](#), but they were shorter and stockier—imagine a mix between a woolly mammoth and modern elephant—and their tusks were shorter and less curved.

The Michigan skeleton was discovered by Kent County drain commission workers digging about 30 miles north of Grand Rapids. Museum CEO Dale Robertson called the discovery "amazing."

"It's probably an understatement," he said during a news conference Thursday before officials toured the new exhibit.

It's not unusual to find mastodon bones, especially in the Midwest. But what's special about this discovery is that as much as 80% of the [mastodon](#)'s bones are intact, "which is really, really impressive," said Cory Redman, the museum's science curator.

"Anything over 20 you're super excited about, so 75 to 80% is absolutely fantastic," Redman said.

Unfortunately, no tusks were found and only a [partial skull](#), which is displayed under glass near a large photo of the excavation site. The skeleton was discovered last August on private property belonging to the Clapp family, who decided to donate it to the museum.



Cory Redman, science curator at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, stands near a mastodon display at the museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Mastodon bones being shown at GRPM were unearthed last year during a drainage dig in western Michigan and belonged to a juvenile mastodon that lived 13,000 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Mike Householder



Grand Rapids Public Museum president and CEO Dale Robertson talks about mastodon bones found last summer in Newaygo County at the museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Some of the mastodon bones will be unveiled as part of museum's "Ice Age: Michigan's Frozen Secrets" exhibit, which opens to the public on May 20. Credit: Cory Morse/MLive.com/The Grand Rapids Press via AP



Bryan Kolk, from left, Chair of the Newaygo County Board of Commissioners, Jenn Merchant, Kent County Commissioner, and Dale Twing, Newaygo County Drain Commissioner, hold mastodon bones at the Grand Rapids Public Museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Some of the mastodon bones, found last summer in Newaygo County, will be unveiled as part of museum's "Ice Age: Michigan's Frozen Secrets" exhibit, which opens to the public on May 20. Credit: Cory Morse/MLive.com/The Grand Rapids Press via AP



Mastodon bones are displayed at the Grand Rapids Public Museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Some of the mastodon bones, found last summer in Newaygo County, will be unveiled as part of museum's "Ice Age: Michigan's Frozen Secrets" exhibit, which opens to the public on May 20. Credit: Cory Morse/MLive.com/The Grand Rapids Press via AP



Cory Redman, foreground, science curator at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, discusses the anatomy of a mastodon while speaking with officials at the museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Mastodon bones on display at GRPM were unearthed last year during a drainage dig in western Michigan and belonged to a juvenile mastodon that lived 13,000 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Mike Householder



Local and county officials hold mastodon bones at the Grand Rapids Public Museum on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Some of the mastodon bones, found last summer in Newaygo County, will be unveiled as part of museum's "Ice Age: Michigan's Frozen Secrets" exhibit, which opens to the public on May 20. Credit: Cory Morse/MLive.com/The Grand Rapids Press via AP

A selection of the bones, now known as the "Clapp Family Mastodon," will be publicly displayed as part of the museum's exhibition "Ice Age: Michigan's Frozen Secrets," which opens Saturday. The exhibit also features an array of creatures from the Pleistocene period. The museum acquired 63 new fossils and casts, allowing visitors to touch real fossilized bones and teeth.

But the Clapp Family Mastodon is the star of the show.

The juvenile was between 10 and 20 years old when it died, said Redman, which [radiocarbon dating](#) puts at around 13,210 years ago.

"What makes this specimen unique and so exciting is it's a juvenile. It's a young animal. Typically, when you find them, they're adults. And also, the degree of completeness," Redman said.

© 2023 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Mastodon bones unearthed by Michigan work crew go on display in museum (2023, May 19) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-mastodon-bones-unearthed-michigan-crew.html>

<p>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.</p>
--