

Mastodon History

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Recent fossil discoveries in Solano County have brought the interest of paleontologists to this area. We've always known that our Coast Range mountains—particularly the Mount Diablo region—were productive of fossils.

The members of Vallejo's Gem and Mineral Society can cite many cases. When the southern extension of Sonoma Boulevard was graded through South Vallejo, hundreds of fossilized clams were unearthed.

But we are talking now of prehistoric animals, written (but seldom pronounced) as the extinct *Machaerodus*, or *Smilodon californicus*, and the *Pliomastodon*.

The latest find was announced at the February meeting of Solano County's Historical Society in Suisun City.

It was exhibited by G. W. Niles, of Suisun Valley, and consisted of the fossilized teeth and a leg bone of a Mastodon, determined by a Carbon-14 test to be about 20,000 years old. He unearthed them in the Putah Creek area, near the Monticello Dam.

EARLIER ANIMALS

On April 2, 1959, positive evidence of living creatures, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years earlier, was uncovered upcounty.

A bulldozer working on the Andrew C. Anderson ranch in the Montezuma Hills area uncovered two ivory tusks some 18 feet below the surface. Dr. D. E. Savage of the U.C. Department of Paleontology investigated the find. The upper portion of a skull was also found undamaged, but the skeleton was missing. The university spokesman has pronounced it a species of Mastodon known as *Pliomastodon*.

Ivory tusks and teeth have been found on the Leo Lewis Ranch on Putah Creek about 5 miles east of Winters.

In the same area a six-inch sabre-toothed tiger's tusk has been found. Many skeletons of this species (*Smilodon californicus*) have been found in the La Brea asphalt pits in Los Angeles.

Mastodon fossils were also found on April 16, 1962, on Bennett Hill adjacent to the City of Vacaville, when certain road excavation was being done.

Fossilized camel teeth were found on the Guy Stewart Ranch about a mile south of Denverton in 1959.

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