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A mammoth find at Las Positas College in Livermore

By Stefani Sobers
Correspondent
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LIVERMORE — Workers at Las Positas College unearthed a real history lesson there — the bones of what is believed to be an ancient mammoth.

The fossils were found in December during construction of a new stormwater retention basin on campus, said Jeff Kingston, vice chancellor of facilities, planning and management for the Chabot-Las Positas College District.

Among the findings were a 44-inch femur, part of a rib cage and a possible lower limb from the animal. Kingston said construction work was put on hold for about four weeks but has since resumed.

A mammoth is any of a number of an extinct genus of elephant. Often with long curved tusks and, in northern species, a covering of long hair, mammoths lived during the Pleistocene epoch from 1.6 million to about 10,000 years ago.

The Las Positas fossils are currently being evaluated by PaleoResource Consultants in Auburn to determine the age, species and other information.

"Archeologists and paleontologists were at the site, but I have not seen the final report," said Kingston. "We won't know a lot until that has been completed."

Davis Haasl, senior paleontologist at PaleoResource, said that once the report is done a decision can be made about a future location for the fossils.

As fossils and other historical findings are protected under state and federal laws, they will then be shipped to UC Berkeley, which is the closest repository — a recognized

library of fossils where federal law requires they be recorded and evaluated.

Kingston said he hopes that after proper analysis and preservation, the bones can be loaned back to Las Positas for display.

The discovery was a unique find according to others at the scene.

"It was really exciting. The size of the bones we found was fun for our entire team," said Bruce Rich, the Measure B project planner/manager at Las Positas.

"Fossils belong to everyone," said Mark Goodwin, assistant director for research and collection for the UC Berkeley Paleontology Department. "After they are cataloged and recorded, we may loan them back so that they

can be displayed there. I think that would be great."

While the large, hairy woolly mammoth is widely recognized by the public, Goodwin said it is more likely the bones came from a Columbian mammoth, which was more prevalent in the California area. This animal is very similar, but is far less hairy than its woolly counterpart because of climate adaptation.

Goodwin said the finding is not too unusual because the Bay Area is rich in the sediment that holds fossils. He said this type of discovery happens about once a year in this area.

Most mammoths died out at the end of the last Ice Age. A definitive explanation for their mass extinction is yet to be agreed upon.

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