



NEWS RELEASE

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RECENTLY DISCOVERED FOSSIL MAMMOTH BONE ON DISPLAY IN CANON CITY

CANON CITY, Colo. – A fossil mammoth tibia (lower leg bone) was discovered on the San Isabel National Forest in July, 2015. It is currently on display through November 25 in the Canon City BLM/USFS field office.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) soils scientist Steve Sanchez noticed prominent sedimentary rock layers in the area which might contain dinosaur tracks. Bruce Schumacher, a paleontologist for the USFS Rocky Mountain Region followed up on the information and it led to the fossil discovery.

According to Schumacher, “The geology of this area is dominated by Jurassic and Early Cretaceous rock formations (100 – 150 million years old) and so I was expecting to see evidence of dinosaur bones or tracks. When I first spotted the fossil from a long distance, I assumed it was a large dinosaur limb bone, especially since it was exposed in red claystone sediments like the Morrison Formation. Close inspection revealed that the bone was definitely that of a large mammal.”

Schumacher added, “In some respects, the discovery of an ‘elephant’ on the Forest is so much more meaningful than that of a dinosaur. We know that mammoths were around recently enough to share the same landscape that we know today. Imagine a herd of mammoths with Spanish Peaks on the horizon”.

The fossil mammoth bone will be moved to the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center for long-term display this winter. San Carlos District Ranger Paul Crespín said, “I’m very pleased to work with our local Museum to keep this here locally where it was found.”

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The mammoth bone was deposited by stream action on top of the dinosaur-bearing Morrison Formation, and was then covered by Pleistocene flood and rockfall deposits. The bone was found in what are likely Pleistocene aged gravel deposits that can be up to 1 million years or more in age. This time period includes the beginning of the ice age, a time when large mammals commonly referred to as “Megafauna” roamed the earth. A typical mammoth would have stood about nine feet tall at its shoulder, and is most closely related to Asian elephants of today.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Image (courtesy NPS) showing proboscidean tibia location (red) in complete skeleton. Fossil photos are available upon request.

