

Lifelike again after 34,000 years, the world's only baby woolly rhino

By Anna Liesowska, Siberian Times

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First chance to see the appearance of a calf from this extinct hairy species, complete with its strawberry blond curls.



Sasha the world's only woolly rhino. Picture: Anastasia Loginova

Called Sasha after a man who discovered it, these unique remains were dug from the permafrost in 2014 in the Siberian region of Yakutia, officially called the Sakha Republic.

Now embalmed to show the creature's real appearance in Paleolithic times, the ancient mammal went briefly on display in Moscow.

Scientists have been busy studying the animal - and have unearthed some surprises.

One is the colour of Sasha's thick hairy curls, described by one expert as 'strawberry blond', and definitely very different from the familiar slate grey of today white rhinos in Africa.

Initially when it was found, scientists said the colour was 'light grey' but after cleaning up the animal, they found an altogether different hue.







The baby rhino at an exhibition in Moscow and earlier in Yakutsk.

Pictures: Anastasia Loginova, Sakha Academy of Sciences

Another surprise is the size.

This baby rhinoceros was some seven months old when it died, according to analyses of its teeth.

Yet it is the same size as an 18 month old modern animal; in other words, the long-gone Siberian rhinos were far larger than those now living, for example, in Africa.

The stubs of the horns of the ancient beast are clearly visible, too.

It is not known whether the remains belong to a male or female as the internal organs of the animal did not survive.

In Russia, Sasha is a name for either a girl or boy.







The woolly rhino soon after it was discovered and at an exhibition in Moscow.

Pictures: Anastasia Loginova, Sakha Academy of Sciences

Scientist Valery Plotnikov said: 'Thanks to this find, we have learned that the woolly rhinoceroses were covered with very thick hair'.

'Previously, we could judge this only from rock paintings discovered in France'.

'Now, judging by the thick coat with the undercoat, we can conclude that the rhinoceroses were fully adapted to the cold climate very much from a young age.'

One theory is that the little rhino drowned in a muddy pool before its body was frozen for posterity. Its hair had molted before death, say experts.









'Thanks to this find, we have learned that the woolly rhinoceroses were covered with very thick hair. Pictures: Sakha Academy of Sciences, Anastasia Loginova

How did these creatures survive in ancient Siberia?

Senior Researcher of the Paleontological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yevgeny Maschenko, said: 'We can only guess how mammoths and the woolly rhinoceros lived by the plants that were around then, by minerals, which can be determined in the composition of animal bones, and in the isotopes of oxygen and carbon, which also can be extracted from the bones.

'We see that the conditions of life of these animals differed strongly from those that we now see in Yakutia'.

'At that time, 35-50,000 years ago, the climate was colder and drier, and there were no climatic zones that now exist'.

'The site of the find is now in the tundra zone'.

'Back then such a zone simply did not exist'.

'There was no tundra vegetation, and these were very good conditions for such herbivores, with a lot of grass and cereals. This is how all these giant animals could live there - because there was enough food'.

'Today there would be nothing to eat for the mammoth or woolly rhinoceros in the tundra.'

Taxidermist Innokenty Pavlov turned the once frozen remains back into their real life appearance by embalming the animal.

The world's only woolly mammoth.

Pictures: Anastasia Loginova, Sakha Republic Academy of Sciences, YSIA







Фото Марии Васильевой



