

Unearthing the past: Florida scientists find fossils of ancient elephants, sabretooth cats, **rhinos**

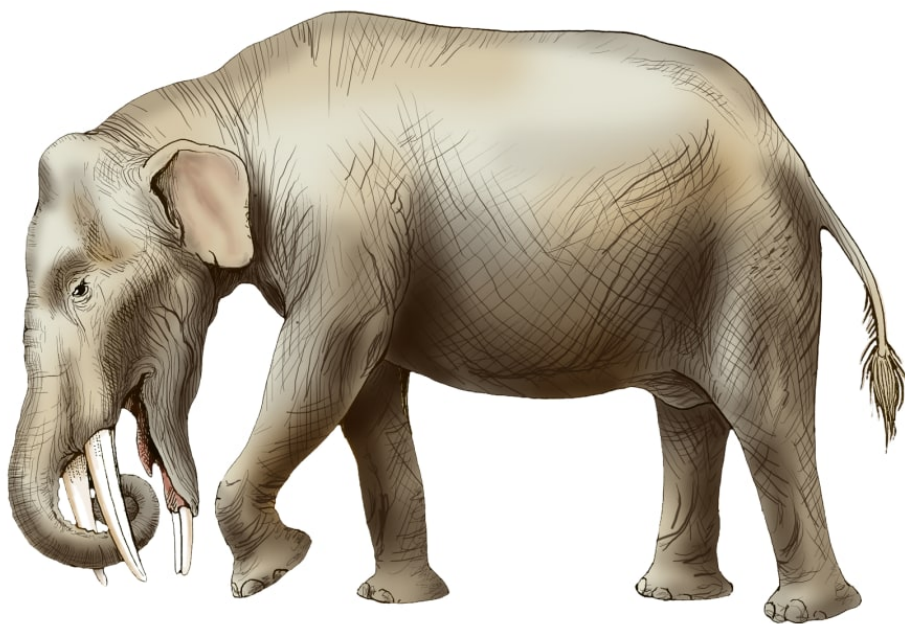
[Vic Micolucci](#), I-Team reporter, anchor.

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Fossil hunters in Florida are unearthing incredible finds, including prehistoric creatures such as rhinos, sabretooth cats and ancient relatives of elephants. Florida is one of the richest states when it comes to paleontology, and new discoveries are being made every day.

[University of Florida](#) researchers recently discovered the incredibly intact remains of a giant gomphothere, a 10,000-pound, four-tusk relative of an elephant that roamed the area before humans, [according to News 6 partner WJXT](#).



A giant gomphothere, a 10,000-pound, four-tusk relative of an elephant that roamed Florida before humans (University of Florida).

The discovery was made on a piece of private property about 45 minutes southwest of Gainesville, on a site known as Montbrook.

For seven years now, paleontologists, UF students, and hundreds of volunteers have been hand-digging the site.

“It’s an incredibly special place,” said Dr. Jonathan Bloch, a UF paleontology professor who runs the Bloch Lab. “We have a skull of a giant elephant relative where its lower jaw is articulated with its upper jaws.”

The discovery was made after a 5-year-old girl, Timber, found some bones while walking with her mom and grandmother on family land. They turned the bones over to UF, and Bloch and his team began studying them.

“I just told Jonathan (Bloch) you’ll take care of it and whatever he says goes,” said Eddie Hodge, the landowner. “I just send people to him. I’m just glad to be part of it. My whole family is.”

At the same site, researchers have found bones from sabretooth cats, **rhinos**, lynx, alligators, turtles and fish.

The specimens are being preserved in the lab at Dickinson Hall at UF, where volunteers use screwdrivers and dental tools to carefully clean them.

“If you want to be a fossil preparer, or if you think sitting in your front lawn and clipping the grass with a pair of toenail clippers sounds perfectly sensible, then you’ve got the right mentality,” said volunteer Ken Marks. “Nothing here happens fast.”

The biggest gomphothere fossils at Montbrook will soon need a crane and tow truck to get them back to the university. Each step is piecing together a never-before-seen puzzle.

“This looks like it’s part of the pelvis, but there’s so many bones clumped together,” said Bloch as he looked at partially unearthed gomphothere remains. “The big mystery has been, where is its head? That’s what we really wanted to know.”

Some of the best specimens are on display at the Florida Museum of Natural History’s Florida Fossils display on UF’s campus.

There guests can see other giant creatures that once roamed, or swam, Florida.

Those include megalodon sharks, giant ground sloths, and the terror bird.

There are no records, however, of actual dinosaurs roaming Florida.

Researchers said Florida was underwater during the time dinosaurs existed on Earth.

LINKS:

- [Learn how to volunteer in the lab or in the field](#)
- [Details about the Montbrook Fossil site](#)