



# All About Michigan

## Michigan's State Fossil - the Mastodon

Our State of Michigan State Fossil was adopted and signed by Governor John Engler on April 8, 2002. Mastodon fossils have been found in more than 250 locations in Michigan. In as recent as 2009, a family in Portland, Michigan unearthed mastodon bones while excavating a new pond on their property. They have also been found through out the United States, mostly along the Atlantic coast and south of the Great Lakes. The mastodon preferred a habitat that was cold, open spruce woodland and forest.

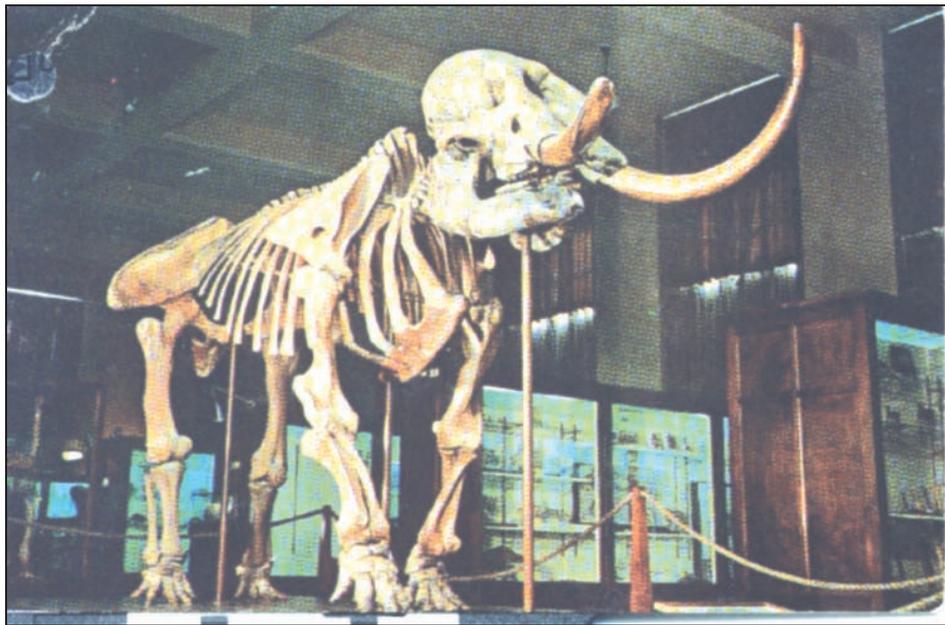


The American Mastodon was a large, elephant like herbivore resembling closely a woolly mammoth in appearance. It browsed on trees, shrubs, and swamp plants. The scientific term for the mastodon is *Mammuth americanum*. The word Mammuth, means "earth burrower" which can be traced back to the Middle Ages. Eastern European farmers found gigantic bones in their fields and they believed they belonged to monstrous burrowing beasts. The word mastodon comes from the Greek mastos which means "beast" and odon which means "tooth." The mastodon became extinct around 10,000 years ago.

The mastodon had a thick coat of shaggy hair. It ranged in height from 7 feet (females) to nearly 10 feet (males). They were up to 15 feet in length and weighed as much as 6 tons! The mastodon's head had a flexible trunk, small ears and tusks. The tusks grew straight forward and curved slightly upward. The tusks could exceed 16 feet in length! They were stockier than elephants with thicker limb bones.

Mastodon remains have been associated with fires, leading to the assumption that early humans hunted and ate them.

Other species of mammals that lived during this time were the Giant Beaver (which weighed around 300 pounds) and the Dire Wolf (which was larger and more powerfully built than the modern day gray wolf). Today, the largest North American land animal is the American Bison.



This Mastodon was found in Rush Township in 1944 and has been called the 'Owosso Mastodon'. The bones are on display at the Exhibit Museum at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan.