

PREHISTORIC ELEPHANTS & SABER-TOOTHED TIGERS

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During the Yukon Gold Rush, eager miners churned through tons of earth in search of the elusive yellow nuggets. A few diggers hit the mineral mother lode but some unearthed a different kind of treasure altogether—the bones of ancient giants. During the process the process of digging through the muck to the bedrock the miners often found themselves having to dig through permafrost that was sometimes a hundred or more feet in depth. This permafrost had been frozen for many thousands of years and in it they were surprised to discover the tusks or fossilized ivory of prehistoric Woolly Mammoths.

Woolly Mammoths were a prehistoric elephant that lived during the Pleistocene or Ice Age between 4,000 and 300,000 years ago and the fossilized ivory was from the animal's tusk. Thousands of years ago most of Canada was covered by ice—in some places over 1,000 feet thick. However, vast areas of Alaska and Yukon escaped glaciation and remained ice free. With immense quantities of the world's water locked up in ice over the northern continents, depressed sea levels exposed the Bering Land Bridge which connected North America with Siberia. Herds of ancient animals moved back and forth across the land bridge in an environment scientists call the "mammoth steppe" which was rich in grasses and vegetation. The woolly mammoths used their tusks to sweep away snow in order to reach the grass beneath. In the area near Dawson City gold miners unearth thousands of ancient bones which had been frozen in nature's deep freeze since the Ice Age. Some of the other animals that inhabited the region 20,000 years ago were Steppe Bison, horses, Scimitar Cats, Short-faced Bears and Woolly Mammoths.

An article with a great deal of misinformation appeared in the 30 November 1901 Tacoma newspaper called the Sun. The clipping reported in part: 'SILVER SHOE NAILS FOUND IN ALASKA; Discoverer Believes They were made by Prehistoric Man' "F.X. Beudet of Tacoma has brought from the Klondike evidence that prehistoric man used solid-silver nails in his shoes. He exhibits nine shoe nails exactly similar to the modern product, except that these were made of pure silver. These were taken out of a claim on

A MASTODON IVORY & GOLD NUGGET BRACELET CREATED BY RICHARD DIMENT OF DAWSON CITY, 1943.

The bracelet features 14 individual slices of ancient Woolly Mammoth ivory with every other slice having been stained a darker brown colour. The alternating slices have been left in their natural colour. Each of the natural slices feature natural gold nuggets in a variety of sizes and shapes. The bracelet was commissioned by the late husband of the donor for his first wife. The bracelet was made of the nuggets and ivory that he found was spending time in Dawson City. He was in the Canadian military but was attached to an American unit of engineers and was stationed in Alaska but preferred to spend his free time in the Yukon, specifically in Dawson City.

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THREE YUKON MINERS POSE WITH A WOOLLY MAMMOTH TUSK AND TWO MOOSE RACKS,

These specimens were probably taken from Hunker or Gold Run Creeks, circa 1898.

YUKON ARCHIVES PHOTO# #4714 - HARRIE C. BARLEY FONDS

Hunker Creek, where they were found on the bedrock at a depth of 110 feet under the surface. Several dozen of the nails had been thrown away before it was found that they were worth saving. The nails appear to have been made by machinery, the sides being covered with little irregular indentations as if the nails had been grasped in a vise. In the same claim the owners also found on the bedrock piece of cast iron that seemed to have been used as a hinge. The hole bored through it was very roughly done, and the appearance indicated that it had been in use for a long time. The depth at which these relics were found, and the fact that in the same place bones of the mastodon are frequently

discovered, gives some idea of the years that have elapsed since the makers went to and fro upon the earth. On Bonanza Creek was made the important discovery that the district had been worked before, for a drift thirty feet long and four feet high was found in the solid rock....

A beautiful curving tusk, between seven and eight feet long, he regards as the chief of his treasures. The ivory in this tusk is perfect, and Mr. Beaudet considers it to be the best-preserved piece in the Klondike. The outer casing of the tusk was destroyed by fire, so that it measures now less than five inches in diameter and weighs forty-eight pounds. This was found at Hunker

THE WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER'S GAVEL HAS BEEN USED AS A PROP FOR THE PORTRAITS OF EVERY BRITISH COLUMBIA & YUKON GRAND MASTER SINCE 1871.

Carved from the fossilized ivory of a Woolly Mammoth tusk discovered in the gold fields of the Yukon, the City of Vancouver's Grand Master's gavel is now displayed in the Grand Lodge Museum. The only reference available to Trevor W. McKeown, Grand Lodge Historian, is: "Much legend has grown around this beautiful 'symbol of authority', but there is little doubt that it came from the fossilized ivory of a Woolly Mammoth found in the Arctic area of Canada."—John T. Marshall, "History of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1871-1970. Victoria: Grand Lodge, 1971. page 279.

GRAND MASONIC LODGE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA & YUKON, VANCOUVER



Creek on Claim 54 below, and from No. 55 comes a solid piece of ivory weighing twenty-eight pounds.

The most striking object of the collection, however, is a small portion of a gigantic tusk found on Gold Bottom, where gold was first discovered in the Klondike. The thickest part of the broken piece measures no less than eight and a half inches through, although the root end of the tusk is missing. The piece is about four feet eight inches long and weighs more than a hundred pounds. It gives a vivid idea of the enormous size attained by an animal that could carry such ponderous head ornaments. Even this is a bagatelle to a pair of tusks Mr. Beaudet has at Kalispell, Montana. Each of these weighs 300 pounds, and is twelve and a half feet long. These and a perfect head of a woolly mammoth are the most valuable objects of Mr. Beaudet's treasure trove.

In his house on Tacoma Avenue, Mr. Beaudet has several interesting mammoth bones. There are two fragments of a skull from the Last Chance, a tributary of Hunker Creek; there is an enormous leg bone, far exceeding anything and elephant could produce in the way of bones; there is a part of a rib that measures nine inches across. The hipbone from Hunker Creek has a socket over six inches in diameter to receive the leg bone.

Mr. Beaudet has also a perfect skull and horns of some smaller animals, perhaps a steppe bison, from bedrock on Gold Run. The horns measure forty inches from tip to tip, although nothing but the cores of the horns remain, the outer shells having been lost."

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The best evidence indicates that humans moved from Siberia to Alaska across the Bering Land Bridge was around 15,000 years ago. At this time the Woolly Mammoth still inhabited northern North America but were one their way to extinction.

In 2010 a backhoe driver at a mine site near Dawson City unearthed an intact Mammoth skull and tusks. The ancient bones were radiocarbon dated to approximately 20,000 years old.