

A mammoth tusk, dated from 10,000 to 40,000 years ago (give or take a few thousands) was stumbled on by a dental technician from Eugene, Ore., during a Memorial Day weekend hike along Bridge Creek, 3 miles south of the Painted Hills Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. Merle Simmons, who spotted the tusk sticking out of the earthen creek bank, called John Day and contacted Ted Fremd, NPS museum specialist/paleontologist, who helped stabilize the find.

Fremd notified Archeologist Suzanne Crowley-Thomas of the Bureau of Land Management, on whose land the fossil was discovered. NPS had signed in 1987 a cooperative agreement with BLM, under which NPS provides curatorial and paleontological services for

management of fossil resources found on BLM lands within the John Day basin and BLM provides specimen cabinets in which the finds are kept at park headquarters in dedicated storage rooms.

The comparatively recent age of the mammoth tusk (thought to belong to a Columbian mammoth – somewhat larger than the woolly mammoth) makes it of little interest to the John Day collection, but Fremd contacted a Portland State University paleontologist, David Taylor, who is planning to set up a Northwest Museum of Natural History, where the tusk might eventually be displayed. BLM lands – especially those north of the John Day Fossil Beds NM's Sheep Rock Unit – are rich in ancient fossils, and the BLM-NPS agreement is facilitating the handling and disposition of finds in these areas.