



SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM of natural history

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Response Results In Recovery of Missing Mastodon Tooth

SANTA CRUZ, CA — May 30, 2023 — As Memorial Day weekend ramped up last Friday, a tourist with ties to the area spotted an unusual object on Rio Del Mar beach. Uncertain of what she was seeing, she photographed her unusual find and shared it on social media in the hopes that it would be identified. That's when Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History Paleontology Collections Advisor, Wayne Thompson, posted online to clarify the significance of the discovery.

"This is (a) ... molar tooth of the Pacific Mastodon *Mammuthus pacificus*, and an extremely important find. Give me a call when you get a chance..." Thompson wrote in response to the post.

When Thompson arrived at the location where the tooth was originally discovered, it was gone. A public call to find the tooth went out across multiple platforms, with local and international news outlets joining the Museum's efforts to recover and protect the important specimen. On the morning of May 30, Jim Smith, a local man who had seen the news about the tooth, called the Museum.

"I was so excited to get that call," said Liz Broughton, Visitor Experience Manager at the Museum. "Jim told us that he had stumbled upon it during one of his regular jogs along the beach, but wasn't sure of what he had found until he saw a picture of the tooth on the news. He was so excited to hear it was a mastodon tooth and was eager to share it with the Museum."

The Museum has a long history with local mastodons. In 1980, 16-year-old Jim Stanton found a mastodon skull in Aptos Creek, which Thompson excavated and spent years meticulously repairing. Visitors can explore this skull and the only other locally recorded specimen (another tooth) at the Museum of Natural History where they are on permanent exhibit.

"We are thrilled about this exciting discovery and the implications it holds for our understanding of ancient life in our region," said Executive Director Felicia B. Van Stolk. "We are grateful that our community has rallied behind the search for the tooth so that we may help protect and share this significant specimen with the public."

The Museum is excited to support the curation and care of this specimen, including making it available for scientific study and exhibit. Follow the Museum on social media and sign-up for our email newsletter to receive updates about this story.

About The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting people with nature and science to inspire stewardship of the natural world. Founded in 1905 with the collection of Santa Cruz lightkeeper and naturalist Laura Hecox, it is the oldest public museum in Santa Cruz County. The Museum features hands-on educational exhibits and events for people of all ages to discover and learn about science and the natural history of this region. The life-size gray whale model outside the Museum, created in 1982, is a cherished Santa Cruz landmark, often observed with children climbing on and playing around it.

Learn more about the Museum and plan your visit at santacruzmuseum.org. We invite you to follow us on social media to see updates on current events, fun facts about nature, science, and local nature sightings.

Fast Facts

- A mastodon tooth was photographed at Rio Del Mar Beach on Friday, May 26, 2023 and posted on social media.
- Once identified on social media, a search to recover the tooth began, but it was no longer at the location where it was first photographed.
- Saturday, May 27, a public call to find the tooth began on social media, leading to international news coverage.
- Tuesday, May 30, the individual who recovered the tooth contacted the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History and transferred the specimen to the Museum that same day.

Images

1: Museum Staff Liz Broughton ([download png](#))

2: Liz Broughton and Jim Smith ([download png](#))

3: JimSmith ([download png](#))

4: Tooth ([download png](#))