

Elephant Teeth Found at Sea

by Barbara Tufty

Scientists have been amassing a hoard of ancient elephant bones and teeth from the Atlantic Continental Shelf, sometimes under 270 feet of ocean water.

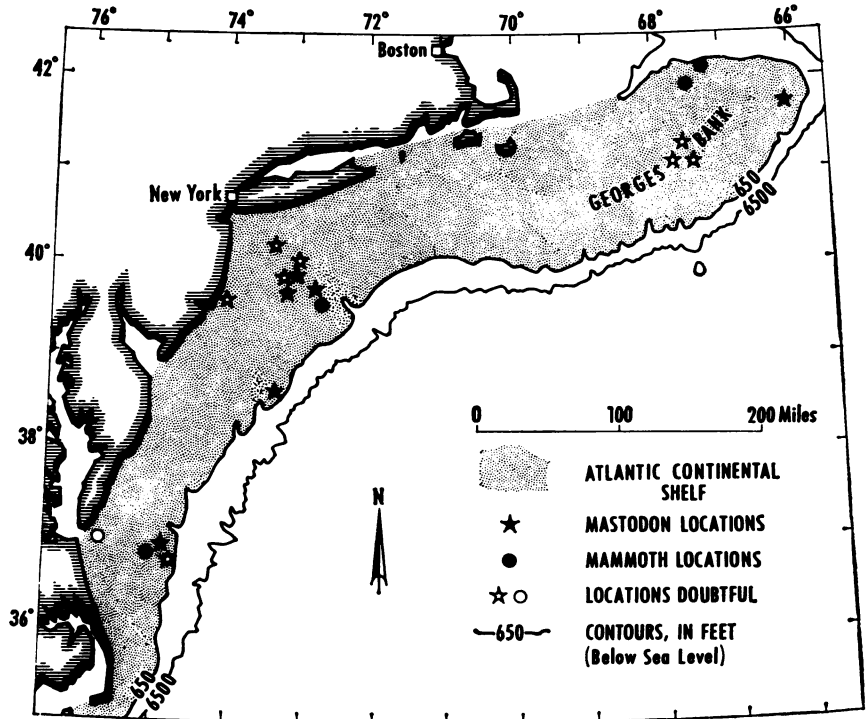
Valuable mammoth and mastodon teeth as well as other kinds of Ice Age bones have been discovered along the 300,000 square mile shelf extending 80 miles into the sea, and ranging 450 miles long from Georges Bank east of Cape Cod to the coast off Virginia. The find is a by-product of a five-year search for mineral deposits and other valuable resources, undertaken by scientists of the U.S. Geological Survey and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Records of the rare bones indicate that the Shelf was once dry land, said Dr. Frank C. Whitmore, paleontologist with the Survey. Mastodons and mammoths, forebears of today's elephants, must have roamed these areas some 11,000 to 25,000 years ago, he said.

Both the extinct elephant species, as well as today's elephants, are members of the order Proboscidea, comprising six families, five of which are now extinct.

During the Pleistocene ages, which included the Ice Age period, the vegetarian proboscideans ranged through every continent except Australia. They are now greatly reduced in range and species, with only one family surviving—the Elephantidae with its only two remaining species, the African and the Asian elephant.

The extinct family of mammoths



Where the finds were made

Interior

left their remains in the Northern Hemisphere of Europe, Asia and North America. Tusks of these mammoths varied in shape but tended to spiral first downward and outward, then upward and inward. The grinding teeth had numerous ridges of enamel.

The mammoth teeth recently discovered resemble those of the woolly mammoth, which once was covered with a dense coat of woolly hair and long coarse outer hair as protection against cold. Members of this species have been found in the frozen ground of Alaska and Siberia.

Mastodons were about the same size as mammoths, with a low crown and fairly small grinding teeth. Several teeth of this family have been brought up from the Continental Shelf, said Dr. Whitmore.

Scientists have found that tusks of the American mastodon species were directed nearly straight forward and were almost parallel with each other.

Mastodons became extinct in Europe and Asia before the end of the Ice Age, but the American species probably persisted until the coming of man to the North American continent.

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