

November 2023 Volume 63 Issue 6

SKAGIT GEMS

Official Publication of the Skagit Rock and Gem Club
Serving Skagit County WA Since 1961

Next meeting

November 4th -10am @ the Mount Vernon Senior Center

Gem of the Month: Thunder Eggs

Refreshments: Feel free to bring treats!



It's not too late to sign up for a display case or to volunteer to help out at our upcoming Skagit Rock & Gem Club upcoming 'A Gem, Mineral, Fossil & Jewelry Show'.

Come join in with setting up on Friday, November 10 for the show on Saturday and Sunday, November 11th & 12th at the Sedro-Woolley Community Center!

Skagit Rock & Gem Club Presents

A Gem, Mineral, Fossil & Jewelry Show

Nov. 11th, 9 - 5 & Nov. 12th 10 - 4

Sedro Woolley Comm. Center 703 Pacific St.



Hourly door prizes · Dealers · Demonstrations

FREE ADMISSION ➤

Raffle · children's activities

skagitrockandgem@gmail.com · skagitrockandgem.com

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If you know of a space that would work for our workshop, for little or nothing, let us know!

From the Editor:

We've got a lot going on getting ready for our annual Rock and Gem Show! There is still time to sign up to volunteer to help with the many things that are needed to make this show a success. You can sign up for a display case or to demonstrate your unique skills and talents. Also, we are still in need of donations for our scholarship raffle and if you have extra Halloween candy, that would be a great contribution for the children's activities!

Raffle donations must be turned in the day before the show to be organized and documented, so be sure to show up at our next meeting to get all the details and get involved!

As I am putting this newsletter together, this year's International ShakeOut Day on October 19 at 10:19 a.m is about to happen. It got me thinking about what an active area we live in. I felt the earth shake my chair earlier this month from an earthquake that was centered south of Port Townsend, a 4.3 magnitude. Glad it didn't last any longer.! Make sure you're prepared before one happens! Check out <https://www.ready.gov/earthquakes> for more info.

The excerpt of "Spirit Whales and Sloth Tales" was contributed by Sandy Hansen. It tells of the diversity of the many unique fossils that have been found right in our backyards! Thanks Sandy!

Till next time—Keep Rockin'

Charlene

Welcome New Members!

Kara Adams
Donna Davison
Dale Dewey
Travis Malone
Merlin Poutre
Bill Rinker
Jennifer Ross, and
Tessa Scott

It's that time of year for selecting new Officer's! We are still looking to fill the position of Federation Director.

"The Federation Director shall represent the Society at all functions of the Northwest Federation of Mineralogical Societies and make a full report of any transactions of the Federation that are of interest or concern to the Society."

There are also a couple Committee positions that have openings.

Let us know if you are interested.

Time Again for 2024 Dues!

Club dues will give membership thru August 2023. Please pay dues if you would like to continue your membership and receive the newsletter. Membership dues must be paid to use the club shop.

Membership forms are available at every meeting. Invite your "rockhound" friends to our next one!

Your yearly dues cover membership privileges from September 2023 through August 31st, 2024. Dues are \$15.00 per year for adults and \$5.00 for those under age 16.

Payment can be made by cash or check at a meeting or by mailing the form and payment to address below:

Dave Britten
PO Box 244
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

UPCOMING Mineral Council Field Trips

Updated 10/01/23 (From Washington State Mineral Council)

Next trips:

November 11 – Blanchard Hill for Stilpnomelane (Dalmation stone) and green chert. Contact: Marysville Rock Club-- Ed Lehman wsmced@hotmail.com h# (425) 334-6282 c# (425) 760-2786

Keep updated on <http://www.mineralcouncil.zoho.com> Land management changes, and roads close regularly. There is a area on web page with tool category in pictures and names of tools. Always have proper cloths and gear for conditions. Be prepared with safety, first aid, food and drink. A week before trips I (Ed Lehman) will have a pdf file with map and info for that trip I can send you on request. I will do the same for trip host. Try to be at the meeting site 30 minutes before trip time for details and instructions with a full tank of gas. Use code of ethics, keep our lands open to rockhounding.

Many trips need Discover Pass, Trailhead Pass & Forest Pass. Ask when you inquire about trip

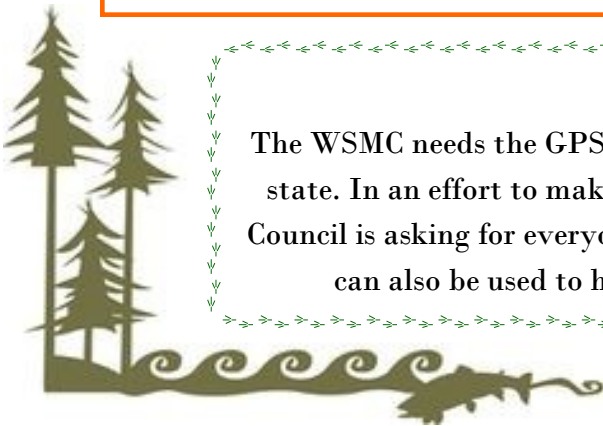
**Don't forget--Check out the WA State Mineral Council webpage
for all the gem shows and field trips this fall.
<https://mineralcouncil.wordpress.com/>**

We are in the process of collecting names for membership pins/nametags. The cost for a single badge has gone up to \$25.00 (!!!) plus tax, and two to ten are \$12.50 (plus tax ~ totals \$13.60 each). Members pay upfront, and when we have several requests, the club will order them to get the lower pricing. Please let Dave know if you are interested in ordering one before or at our next meeting.



GPS Co-ordinates Needed

The WSMC needs the GPS co-ordinates of any and all of the collecting sites in the state. In an effort to make the map booklets as accurate as possible the Mineral Council is asking for everyone to record GPS readings while on field trips The data can also be used to help in our fight to keep our collecting areas open.



SKAGIT ROCK & GEM CLUB MEETING MINUTES

Skagit Rock & Gem Club Board Meeting 7 October 2023

Board Members present: Eric Self - President, Peggy Peterson – Vice President, Wes Frank – Past President, Charlene Rhodes – Bulletin Editor, David Britten - Treasurer

(Norma MacDonald – Secretary - out of town)

President Eric opened the Board Meeting at 9:35am.

Old Business: The ongoing discussion of a lease with the City of Mount Vernon for a building the City offered us on Barker Street to replace our current Shop Building at the Ballfields by the Fairgrounds.

David, as Treasurer, brought forth the conclusion that we cannot afford the offered facility. The Board discussed this further.

Wes Frank made a motion that we abandon the lease on the replacement building offered by the City of Mount Vernon and vacate the Ballpark Building. Seconded by Peggy Peterson. Voted and passed with all "I's".

There was discussion of actions moving forward with this decision: A Club member has offered a temporary place to store the larger equipment until we find another venue. Eric mentioned that the Box Truck the Club used before we bought our current trailer for storing our Show Cases and Show Supplies could be used for storing the rock that needs to be moved from the Fairgrounds. Plans for moving our equipment and rocks will continue to be made.

New Business: Election of Officers: All officers present today have agreed to continue in their roles for next year.

Meeting adjourned at 9:53 am.

General Meeting Minutes October 7, 2023

Meeting called to order by Eric at 10:10 a.m.

Officers present: Eric Self - President, Peggy Peterson - Vice President, Wes Frank - Past President, David Britten— Treasurer

Guests: Bill Rinker, Travis Malone, Jennifer Ross, Merlin Poutre, Tessa Scott, Donna Davison, Dale Dewey, Kara Adams

Minutes from September accepted as read

Treasurer's report: Dave read statement from Banner Bank dated 9-15-23 approved and 2nd

Program: Dave gave a presentation on Septarian nodules.

Show and Tell: Orange stones

Old Business: The club will not be getting the building offered by the city/county. The club's equipment will be put into storage. Eric will be speaking with other clubs to see if we can share space.

New Business: Sign up sheets for 2 hour slots for the November Show were available to sign. We need donations for the raffle and silent auction! Please bring Friday - set up day. Also donations for hourly door prizes are needed!

Break - Thank you for all the yummy treats!

Dave gave a talk with examples of Septarians

Next meeting will be November 4. Our Rock and Gem Show will be November 11-12

Meeting adjourned 11:15

Respectively submitted by Kim Kellems

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



Meetings are on the FIRST Saturday of the month
(except for Jan, July and Dec)
10:00 am at the
Mount Vernon Community (Senior) Center
1401 Cleveland St.
Mount Vernon WA 98273

The purpose of this non-profit earth society shall be to stimulate interest in the study of geology, lapidary, and the collection of geological specimens.

We are a member of the Northwest Federation of Mineralogical Societies and the Washington State Mineral Council. We are affiliated with the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies.

Dues are \$15.00 per year for adults and \$5.00 for those under age 16.

Visit our website: skagitrockandgem.com

Email: skagitrockandgem@gmail.com

Mailing address: PO BOX 244

Mount Vernon WA 98273



2023 Officers

President	· Eric Self 360-366-6118
Vice President	· Peggy Peterson 425-299-4123
Treasurer	· David Britten 360-755-0741
Secretary	· Norma McDonald 206-612-3113
Fed. Director	· Open
Past President	· Wes Frank 360-757-6276
Bulletin Editor	· Charlene Rhodes 360-333-2156



Committees

Annual Show Chair-Eric Self
Facilities/Field Trips- Dave Britten
Greeter-Peggy Peterson
Scholarship-Peggy Peterson, Kim Kellems
Publicity-Open
Sunshine-Open
Swap-Vandenberg's

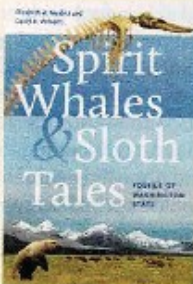
THE TERROR BIRD AND THE SWIMMING SLOTH

Go back deep in time to meet *Gastornis giganteus* and *Megalonyx jeffersonii*, two massive creatures whose fossils have a lot to teach us all

BY ELIZABETH A. NESBITT
AND DAVID B. WILLIAMS

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following is an edited excerpt from "Spirit Whales & Sloth Tales," a new book about Washington fossils written by Elizabeth A. Nesbitt and David B. Williams. The book will be published in October by the University of Washington Press in association with the Burke Museum, and will be available at local bookstores. The authors will hold an event at 7 p.m. Nov. 8 at the Burke Museum.



WITH MORE THAN a half-billion years of history, Washington state has an enviable diversity of fossils. Each is unique. Each is interesting. Each tells a story of natural and human history. Here are two such stories.

Tracking the Terrifying Birds

WASHINGTON STATE HAS no dinosaur tracks, but it does have the footprints of birds that could have made most large predators think twice about attacking. These footprints come from the flightless bird *Gastornis giganteus*, a species often called terror birds.

The 6-to-10-inch-wide tracks come from an animal that strode across muddy swamps 54 million years ago. Standing more than 6 feet tall, *Gastornis* had a massive skull and beak; a strong, relatively short neck; thick-



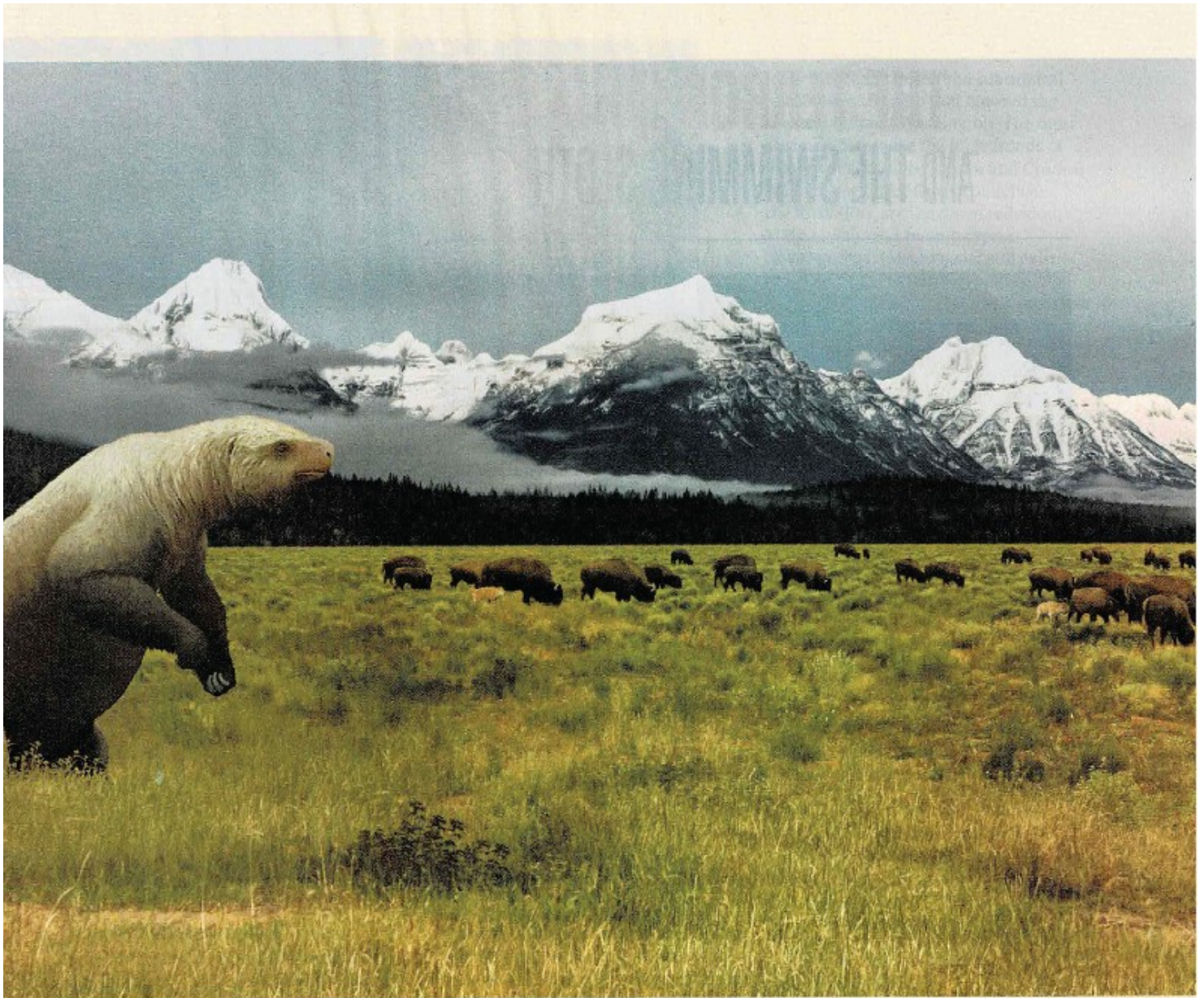


ILLUSTRATION BY JULIO LACERDA / FROM "SPIRIT WHALES & SLOTH TALES"

ABOVE: Reconstruction of a ground sloth, *Megalonyx jeffersonii*, foraging in the tundra grasslands with a herd of bison.

LEFT: This is a reconstruction of a *Gastornis giganteus* leaving its footprints on the mudflats. *Gastornis* resembled giant, flightless turkeys and roamed through muddy swamps 54 million years ago.

ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL UGJETO / FROM "SPIRIT WHALES & SLOTH TALES"

boned, long legs; vestigial short wings; and a body that resembled that of a giant flightless turkey. For many decades, paleontologists depicted *Gastornis* as a predator on small mammals. They originally considered the huge beak suitable for a predatory carnivore, but now paleontologists conclude that *Gastornis* was herbivorous and used the beak for cracking nuts and seeds. The better understanding comes from chemical analyses of *Gastornis* fossil bones that showed that the birds fed entirely on plant material.

Gastornis tracks closely resembled carnivorous dinosaur tracks, with three elongated forward-facing toes bearing tiny triangular claws and a deep oval heel pad. (The name honors Gaston Planté, who was the first scientist to find fossil bones of the bird, in 1855, in Paris; they came from sediments that contained broken eggshells, long attributed to *Gastornis* because they are much larger than any other bird's eggs.)

As happens in the world of fossilized tracks where no bones exist, paleontologists gave the trackways a ▶

THE TERROR BIRD AND THE SWIMMING SLOTH



MICHAEL RICH / FROM "SPIRIT: WHALES & SLOTH TALES"

These are fossil footprints of *Gastornis giganteus* and a heron on a slab cast from rock on Slide Mountain, Whatcom County. The single large *Gastornis* footprint measures 10 inches from heel to tip of middle claw. On this slab, the prints were colored gray for better visibility.

specific trace fossil name, *Rivavipes giganteus*, meaning “the footprint of a giant bird on the river.” The big birds’ fossil bones are found in Europe and North America (so far, only in Wyoming and New Mexico). These bones originally were referred to as *Diatryma steini*, but paleontologists have found that this name is not valid. Researchers also assigned to crocodile tracks a trace fossil genus and species, *Anticusuchipes amnis*, which roughly translates as “ancient river crocodile footprint.”

Also fossilized with *Gastornis* in the Slide Mountain section of the Chuckanut Formation, near Bellingham, were footprints of other birds and a mammal very unlike those of modern Washington. These include heron tracks, each about the same size as a modern great blue heron, or around 4 inches long and wide. Additional tracks have been attributed to a duck and smaller shorebirds that trotted along the water’s edge.

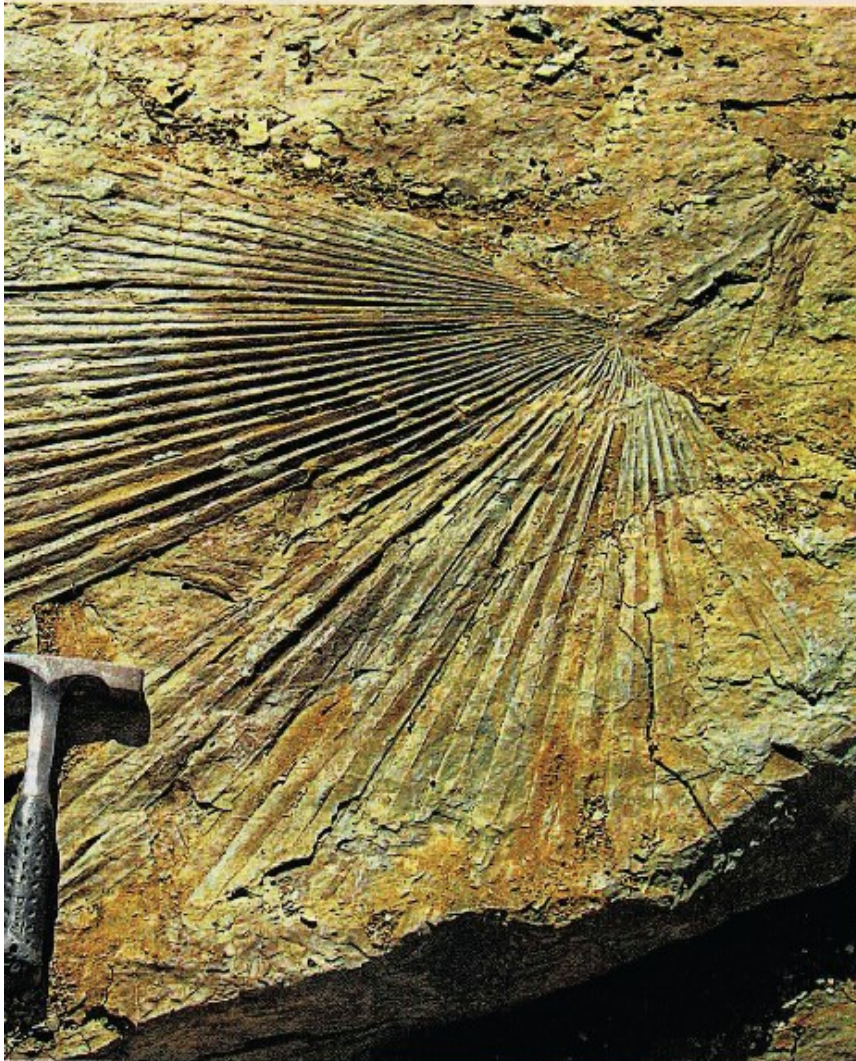
Unlike the massive *Gastornis*, these birds probably had to be aware of a carnivore that left behind clawed footprints. These tracks might have been made by a creodont, a predatory mammal about the size of a house cat, which flourished in the Paleocene and Eocene in Europe, Africa and North America. Creodont fossils have long, narrow skulls similar in shape to a coyote’s, and carnassial molars, which cut through meat and bone like a pair of sharp scissors. Some modern carnivores also have carnassial teeth; evolution resulted in teeth adapted to do the same task for both groups, although they are not related. Creodonts became extinct in the Miocene.

Also walking in the wet mud was a species that produced abundant large squalch tracks. Most likely made by extinct Eocene grazers — either coryphodonts (large herbivorous mammals) or titanotheres — the big



round hippolike tracks show that the animals traveled together. Titanotheres belong in the order *Perissodactyla*, along with rhinoceroses, tapirs and horses. Bones of these large grazing animals found in Oregon’s John Day area and in southern British Columbia confirm that titanotheres were in this region in the early Eocene.

Another set of tracks shows fore and hind footprints on either side of a sinuous line made by a tail dragging along the mud through very shallow water. Each footprint is between 2 and 4 inches long. This was a small crocodile, a testament to the warm and wet early Eocene climate, like central Africa today. They shared the water with an animal whose tracks suggest that it might have been afloat and punting across a mudflat.



COURTESY GEORGE MUSTOE / FROM "SPIRIT WHALES & SLOTH TALES"

This large frond of an Eocene fan palm, *Sabalites campbelli*, including the radial fan of leaves, was exposed in a massive rockslide in the Chuckanut Formation, Whatcom County. The geological rock hammer, set on the slab for scale, is 13 inches long.

What makes these trackways particularly interesting is that paleontologists have found only a single vertebrate body fossil in the Chuckanut rocks. It came from a soft-shelled turtle, or trionychid, which researchers think was the animal responsible for the punting tracks. None of the other animals described above left behind other evidence — either teeth or bone — of their lives. But clearly they lived in and trod across the broad coastal floodplain of meandering rivers and back swamps now preserved in stone.

Trace fossils such as these tracks illustrate another wonderful aspect of

geology in that they record a single instant in an animal's life or death. Geology is known as the scientific discipline of millions and billions of years, yet within that deep time of the Earth's story, single moments — a dead rhinoceros covered in lava, an insect chewing a leaf, a mammoth defecating, a snail drilling a hole in a clam to get the meat within — are preserved, providing an unexpected and intimate insight into the past.

Further information about the Eocene ecosystem comes from the abundant leaf fossils. Plant remains in the Chuckanut sedimentary rocks near the

fossil trackways reflect the subtropical rainforest ecosystem that covered the coastal region of Washington. The most common plants are the huge fronds of the *Sabalites campbelli* palm and *Cyathea pinnata* tree ferns. Other conifers in the fossil flora are the dawn redwood, *Metasequoia*, and swamp cypress *Glyptostrobus*. (*Metasequoia* still exist in the subtropical areas of China and Vietnam and have been transplanted around the world; numerous specimens are found across the state, including at the Seattle Art Museum's Olympic Sculpture Park and the John A. Finch Arboretum in Spokane.)

Among the high diversity of flowering plants are fossils leaves and seeds of hydrangea, birch and plane tree (*Platanus*), as well as the huge leaves of the fossil sycamore genus *Macginitiea*. The name honors Harry MacGinitie, who collaborated with Estella Leopold on establishing the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Colorado.

The Sea Tac Sloth (*Megalonyx jeffersonii*)

THE WASHINGTON CONNECTION to *Megalonyx* began Feb. 14, 1961, at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport with the first known discovery of giant sloths in the state. Workers excavating a hole for a lighting tower saw bones in the bottom of their work pit. Alerted to the discovery, the Burke Museum sent a paleontologist and an archaeologist to investigate. Although flooding and collapsing walls made the dig difficult, the construction crew and scientists extracted the skeleton, which rested in a peat layer 13 feet thick, representing what was once a marshy wetland.

Most of the skeleton was intact, except for the skull, which was crushed and mostly missing. Based on the shape of the pelvis, which was 45 inches wide, as well as the limb bones and claws, the Burke paleontologist determined that the bones came from the extinct giant sloth, *Megalonyx jeffersonii*, or Jefferson's ground sloth. Since the initial discovery, other isolated bones and claws of *Megalonyx* have been found in Eastern Washington Scablands' megaflood deposits and dated at 12,100 years before present. Bones and teeth of a considerably older sloth, ▶

THE TERROR BIRD AND THE SWIMMING SLOTH

Megalonyx leptostomus, also have been found in Pliocene sediments in Eastern Washington, dated around 4.9 million years old.

Megalonyx is one of four ground sloth genera that inhabited North America during the Quaternary, 10,000 to 2.5 million years ago. In contrast to other large Quaternary mammals, such as mastodons and mammoths, which evolved in Europe or Asia and then traveled east, *Megalonyx* arrived from South America. They came after the Isthmus of Panama linked the two continents north to south, joining a northward migration that included opossum, armadillo and porcupine.

With their thick leg bones attached to wide-spreading hip bones and a sturdy tail, giant ground sloths could have stood upright on their hind legs to reach leaves high in trees. There is evidence from Quaternary South American ground sloths that they could stand on their hind feet, but there are no reliable tracks

of them walking upright on two feet. In contrast, fossil trackways preserved in dried lake beds in Nevada and New Mexico show ground sloth footprints with all four feet on the ground. Like modern sloths, the animals placed their weight on the outer edge of their feet so that the top of the foot faced outward and the long claws were held off the ground. At present, the Sea-Tac sloth skeleton is on display at the Burke Museum.

Megalonyx jeffersonii holds a unique distinction in the annals of paleontology; Vice President Thomas Jefferson gave the animal its generic epithet in 1797. Jefferson, who had a deep passion for natural history, had received several bones, including the ulna, radius and claws, of an unknown animal. The bones had been dug out of a saltpeter (potassium nitrate, a commonly used fertilizer) mine in Greenbriar County, Va. (now West Virginia). In a March 10, 1797, speech in Philadelphia before the American Philosophical Society,



This is the skeleton of a ground sloth, *Megalonyx jeffersonii*, standing on hind feet to show its 9-foot height. This massive herbivore had a relatively small head, simple elongate teeth, and large claws on each toe to gather leaves and twigs.

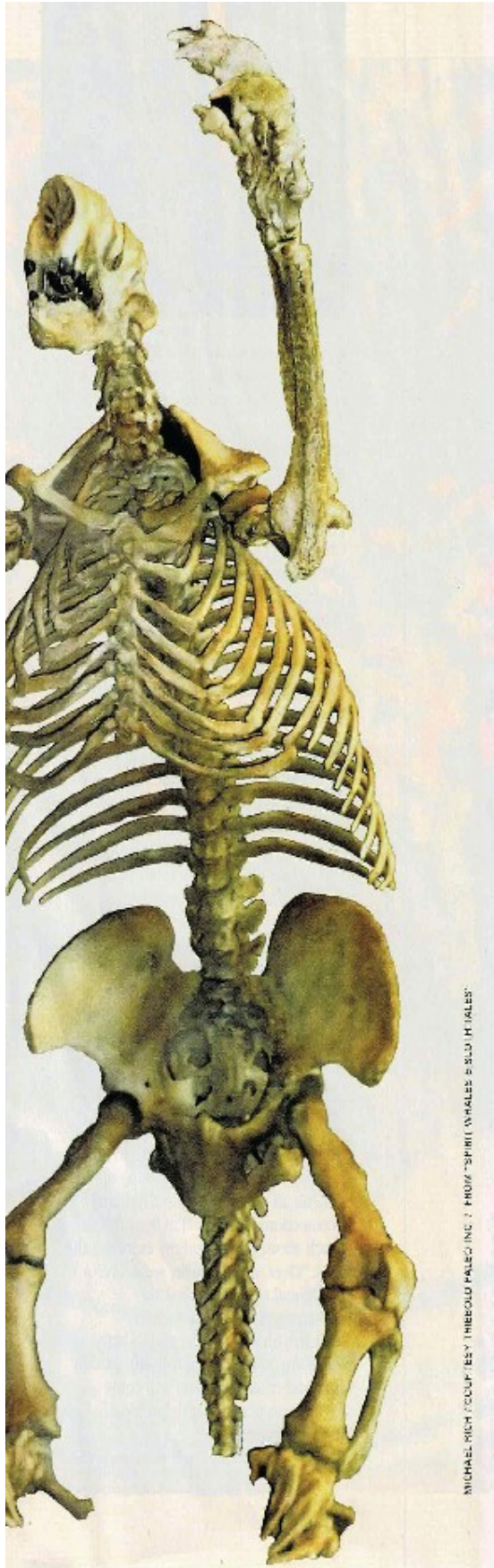


Foot and ankle bones (bottom row) and two teeth (top left) of *Megalonyx jeffersonii* from Orcas Island, near West Sound. The toe bone with claw (top right) measures 8 inches; in life, the claw bone would have been sheathed in a keratin "nail."

MICHAEL RICH / FROM "SPIRIT WHALES & SLOTH TALES"

Jefferson referred to a "large animal of the clawed kind," which he named *Megalonyx*, or "great-claw." He thought the claws belonged to a lion or tiger, though one that was three times larger than a modern variety. Jefferson also suggested that the *Megalonyx* might still have been alive in what was then the vast unexplored part of our continent, and some historians have proposed that Jefferson encouraged Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to look for *Megalonyx* on their expedition.

In the summer of 2002, workers constructing a pond on the western side of Orcas Island unearthed another *Megalonyx jeffersonii* specimen. These bones were found in a peat layer that had accumulated in a wetland, lying directly over a shelly marine clay layer deposited by glaciers melting into the newly formed Puget Sound. The Orcas Island sloth remains consist of an entire hind leg ▶



MICHAEL RICH ZOO/PEERY HERBOLD PALEO INC. / FROM "SPIRIT WHALES & SLOTHS"

THE TERROR BIRD AND THE SWIMMING SLOTH

and a tooth, found with a few bones of two large bison and a mule deer, the shells of pond snails and pine cones. Other *M. jeffersoni* bones were found on Orcas Island, but their precise location is not clear. All of these sloth bones have been examined for evidence of breakage or cuts from human activity, but none was observed.

So how did these large animals reach Orcas Island? It could have to do with the dynamics of glaciation and sea level change. From about 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, sea levels in Puget Sound and around the world were low because of the immense volume of water tied up in the northern continental ice sheets. In addition, the massive glacier — 3,000 feet thick in Seattle and 4,600 feet thick in Bellingham — weighed down the coastal parts of the land. When the ice retreated, or melted, back to the north, the land responded by rising 300 feet surprisingly quickly (initially feet per year, then inches per year) over several thousand years — a process called isostatic rebound, similar to when a submerged bath toy rises after the pressure holding it down is released.

During the time of low sea level — soon after glacial retreat — islands such as Orcas were much larger, and water channels between them and the mainland were much narrower than at present. Alternatively, sloths could have island-hopped from Anacortes or Guemes Island, which at low sea levels would have been the same peninsula, to Cypress to Blakeley to Orcas islands.

Modern large mammals can, and do, swim to find new feeding grounds, new territories and empty spaces; sloths, for example, regularly cross lakes and rivers, albeit rather slowly. Therefore, it makes sense that sloths, bison and deer could have taken to the water and sought out new habitat in the past.

Over the couple of thousand years that the land rebounded, plenty of opportunity existed for large herbivorous mammals to migrate from the mainland and spread across the islands of the Salish Sea. Although we might never know the answer, there is a certain pleasure in simply considering how these large mammals crossed the water.

One reason they might have sought out virgin terrain was the new vegetation emerging on Orcas. In 2016, paleobotanist Estella Leopold published a study of pollen from the late Ice Age lakes on Orcas Island. Her data showed forested areas of pine, spruce and hemlock interspersed with grass-filled meadows and willow and poplar growing on stream banks, all plants that would have attracted large herbivores. ■

*Elizabeth A. Nesbit is curator emerita of invertebrate and micropaleontology at the Burke Museum and associate professor of earth science at the University of Washington. Her distinguished scientific contributions to the paleontology of the Pacific Northwest have earned many awards and honors, including having a whale named for her, the *Msiabaleena nesbitiae*. David B. Williams is an author, naturalist and tour guide whose award-winning books include "Homewaters: A Human and Natural History of Puget Sound" and "Too High and Too Steep: Reshaping Seattle's Topography." He publishes a free weekly newsletter, "Street Smart Naturalist: Explorations of the Urban Wild."*

DATE	CLUB	SHOW	LOCATION
November 2023 4th & 5 th 10am - 5pm	Delta Rockhound Gem & Mineral Club	Annual show	South Delta Rec Centre 1720 - 56 Street (Tsawwassen) Delta, BC
November 2023 11th 9am - 5pm 12th 10am - 4pm	Skagit Rock & Gem Club	Treasures of the Earth	Sedro Woolley Community Center 703 Pacific St Sedro Woolley WA 98284
November 2023 17th 1pm - 6pm 18th 10am - 5pm 19th 10am - 3pm	Abbotsford Rock & Gem Club	Annual show	Matsqui Community Hall, 33676 St. Olaf St. Abbotsford BC
November 2023 18th 9am - 4:30pm 19th 9am - 4:30pm	Parksville & Courtenay Gem & Mineral Clubs	Annual show	Qualicum Beach Civic Centre 747 Jones St. Qualicum Beach, BC
November 2023 18th 10am - 5pm 19th 10am - 5pm	Kitsap Mineral and Gem Society	Fall Festival of Gems	The President's Hall 1200 NW Fairgrounds Road Bremerton, WA
February 2024 10th 9am—5pm 11th 9am—5pm	Whidbey Island Gem Club	Annual Gem Show	Oak Harbor Senior Center 51 SE Jerome St. Oak Harbor WA
April 2024 20th 10am - 5pm 21st 10am - 4pm	Lakeside Gem & Mineral Club	27th Annual Rock & Mineral Show \$5 adults, 12 & under free	Benton Franklin County Fairgrounds Building 2, 1500 S. Oak Kennewick, WA
April 2024 27th 10am - 5pm 28th 10am - 5pm	West Seattle Rock Club	56th Annual Rock Show	Alki Masonic Temple 4736 40th Ave. SW. Seattle, WA



Skagit Rock and Gem Club

PO BOX 244

Mount Vernon, WA 98273

