

# Columbian Mammoth

## An Exceptional Mammoth

Scientific Name: *Mammuthus columbi*

Pronunciation: Mam-muth-us coal-um-buy

Time Period: Middle to late Pleistocene (1 million to 10,000 years ago)

Length: Approximately 16 feet

Height: Up to 13 feet tall at the shoulder

Weight: 8 tons

Diet: the grinding teeth show that they ate grass and similar plants

Places Found: Widespread throughout North America

Named By: Hugh Falconer - 1857

### One of the world's finest Ice Age animals

The large bull Columbian Mammoth was discovered at the Huntington Reservoir, due west of Price at about 9,000 feet. At over 12 feet tall, it was the largest animal of any Utah Ice Age landscape.

The huge molars show extensive wear, indicating this was a very mature individual, past the prime of its life.

Evidence of injury and disease to several bones show that it lived through times of hardship.

## UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY EASTERN PREHISTORIC MUSEUM

155 East Main Street  
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435-613-5060 or 800 817-9949  
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Columbian Mammoth taken from the museum's Ice Age Mural painted by artist Joseph Venus

### Utah Mammoths

The Columbian Mammoth, *Mammuthus columbi*, is one of several species known from North America. Like its near relative the woolly mammoth, (*Mammuthus primigenius*), it was a very successful species with a wide distribution. Numerous individuals have been discovered across North America, but this specimen is one of the the most complete and spectacular of any yet found. Cast replicas of the exquisite skeleton now stand in numerous museums around the world.

### Diet

A mammoth this size would need to spend much of its day eating. Its enormous molar teeth were very well adapted for chewing tough plants such as grasses.

Amazingly, stomach contents were preserved in the body cavity of this specimen, consisting of poor food such as fir needles. This was probably not the main fodder for the mammoth, suggesting that it may have been sick or undernourished.

### Preservation

The cause of death for this mammoth is a mystery that might never be solved. But its preservation in a cool, high lake is a textbook case. The calm, icy waters acted like a refrigerator for many years after the animal's death, helping to make it one of the best specimens ever unearthed.

The remains removed from this watery grave represent some of the best-preserved mammoth material in the country. Preservation is so good that the DNA showed interbreeding between the Columbian and Woolly mammoth had occurred in its ancestry.

### In Search of a Refuge

No one knows why a grassland mammoth found its way up into the mountains, but with climatic warming throughout the region, the Huntington Mammoth may have been driven to higher altitudes in search of the last refuge of moderate temperatures.

Glacial landforms in this vicinity point to the persistence of ice on mountain slopes. Many animals and plants were displaced from their original habitats towards ever-shrinking areas with comparable climates.

This canyon may have become an ecological refuge, remaining cool and habitable for the mammoth long after lower elevations lost their lushness.