



NEWS RELEASE

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District: District 10 - Stockton
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FREEWAY PROJECT UNEARTHES MAMMOTH FOSSILS

MERCED COUNTY – Paleontologists on Wednesday finished removing mammoth bones dating back to the ice age which were unearthed as part of a highway construction project on State Route 99 in Merced County.

“Caltrans is committed to preserving these historical artifacts,” said District Director, Carrie Bowen. “We are using the proper protocols to maintain their integrity for future study.”

In the event the department comes upon historical artifacts, construction is paused in the area of the discovery until the fossilized remains can be reviewed. In the case of this area, the potential for fossilized remains was already identified and a trained paleontologist was already on site monitoring construction activities when crews found the prehistoric remains. Scientists were then called in to document, catalog and remove the fossils for storage and study.

Along with mammoth bones, paleontologists also identified the partial remains of dogs, horses, bison, camels and antelope. Scientists said it was relatively unusual to find so many ice age fossils in Merced County.

Scientists were given time to encase the bones in plaster and remove them from the site before resuming work on the \$128 million project to build a new interchange at SR-99 and Arboleda Road. A paleontologist will continue to monitor work on-site until this project is completed.

Caltrans is also actively working with the University of California at Merced to locate a Central Valley depository for the fossils.

When completed, the project will upgrade SR-99 from a four-lane expressway to a six-lane freeway on a seven-mile section just south of Merced between Buchanan Hollow Road and the Miles Creek Overflow.

The project received approximately \$92 million from Proposition 1B, a 2006 voter-approved transportation bond. To date, nearly \$14.6 billion in Proposition 1B funds have been distributed statewide.