

Megalonyx jeffersonii

Common Name:

Jefferson's ground sloth

Classification:

Class: Mammalia

Order: Xenarthra

Family: Megalonychidae



This claw is the first fossil found of *Megalonyx* in North Dakota. It was discovered by Linda and Doug Vannurden of Mandan on U. S. Army Corps of Engineers administered land south of Bismarck. Thomas Jefferson gave Meriwether Lewis a specific directive to look for fossils during the Corps of Discovery expedition so it is ironic that almost 200 years later this specimen was found along the shore passed by the expedition. This claw is on display at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck. Claw length is 165 mm. North Dakota State Fossil Collection ND00-0.1.

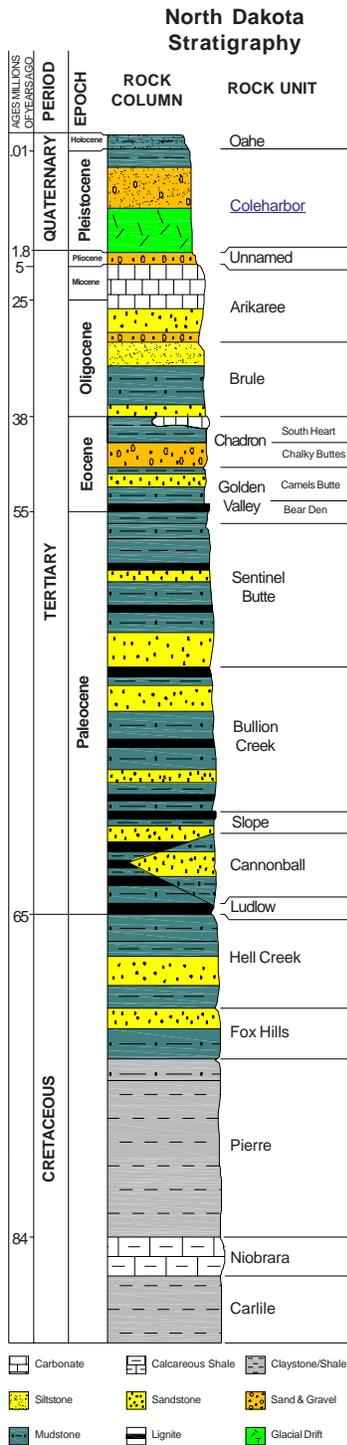
Description:

The scientific name of the giant ground sloth or Jefferson's ground sloth, *Megalonyx jeffersonii*, is derived from the Greek language and refers to the large claw on the third digit of each of the sloths hind feet. Thomas Jefferson, a paleontologist amongst other things, gave the name *Megalonyx* to these giant ground sloths in a 1797 presentation to the American Philosophical Society. It was later given the name *Megalonyx jeffersonii* in honor of Thomas Jefferson.

Megalonyx jeffersonii was a bear-sized, some over 2 meters tall, ground sloth. It lived in North Dakota during the last Ice Age about 12,000 years ago and became extinct at the end of the Ice Age. It was widespread in North America during the last Ice Age.



The Ice Age sloth, *Megalonyx*. Painting by Betsy Thorsteinson from the book "The Natural History of Manitoba, legacy of the Ice Age" courtesy of the Manitoba Museum.



Locations where fossils have been found