

Amateur Paleontologist Finds 500,000-Year-Old Fossil in Argentina



Buenos Aires, October 27 (RHC-EFE) -- An amateur paleontologist found the 500,000-year-old fossil of a giant ground sloth while digging in a well on his property in the southern Argentine coastal city of Mar del Plata, media reports said.

Carlos Manduga accidentally discovered the skull, some vertebrae, ribs and other fossilized remains of the pre-historic creature, a Lorenzo Scaglia Natural History Museum representative said.

"The paleontological remains are about 500,000 years old and are of a (scelidotherium leptcephalum), a giant ground sloth," museum director Analia Veron said.

Manduga told museum representatives that he found the fossil while digging and cleaning the well at his house in Mar del Plata, a resort city located about 400 kilometers (some 249 miles) south of Buenos Aires.

The giant ground sloth had huge claws that it "utilized to dig deep tunnels of more than a meter in diameter and dozens of meters long, creating real underground cities," Veron said.

The species' extinction was linked to "climate change and overhunting by humans about 8,000 years ago," the museum director said.

Fossil finds of this type are common, but this discovery is important because the discovery of a skull with teeth will allow researchers to "learn a lot, almost everything about its DNA," the technical director of the museum's paleontology division, Alejandro Dondas, said.

The first giant ground sloth fossils were found by Charles Darwin in Bahia Blanca, a city in Buenos Aires province, during his 1833 and 1835 trips to southern Argentina on the HMS Beagle.

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