News release

21 January 2016

Jurassic sea monster found in quarry is donated to Oxford University Museum of Natural History

A rare 165 million-year-old plesiosaur skeleton has made its way to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History after being discovered in a quarry near Peterborough. The 5.5 metre long marine reptile, nicknamed 'Eve', was found by palaeontologists from the Oxford Clay Working Group in November 2014. It is now being studied at the Museum and may prove to be a previously unknown species of plesiosaur.

Plesiosaurs were long-necked sea creatures that lived during the time of the dinosaurs. They died out 66 million years ago.

The specimen, discovered at a site owned by building product manufacturer Forterra, was first spotted by Oxford Clay Working Group member Carl Harrington who noticed a tiny fragment of bone sticking out of the clay. Over the course of four days, Carl and eight others dug up more than 600 pieces of fossilised bone. Carl then spent over 400 hours cleaning and repairing the specimen.

Carl Harrington said: "I'd never seen so much bone in one spot in a quarry. As I was digging amongst the wet clay, the snout of a plesiosaur started to appear in front of me. It was one of those absolute 'wow' moments – I was the first human to come face to face with this reptile."

The remains have now been generously donated to the Museum by Forterra. Brian Chapman, Head of Land and Mineral Resources at Forterra, said: "We are thrilled that such a rare and important prehistoric specimen was unearthed at our Must Farm quarry, and we're happy to be able to donate it to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, where it will be studied by leading palaeontologists."

The newly-discovered plesiosaur had a 2.5 metre long neck, a barrel-shaped body, four flippers and a short tail. Its skull is still preserved inside a block of clay, and the painstaking task of removing it will now be undertaken at the Museum. Dr James Neenan, a research fellow at the Museum, and

News release

Professor John Hutchinson from the Royal Veterinary College have CT-scanned the block to reveal the location of the bones inside. This will aid the removal of the skull from the clay.

On 27 January, visiting secondary school pupils will get the chance to see the plesiosaur find for themselves and to ask our Earth Collections manager Dr Hilary Ketchum about it.

“We are so excited that the plesiosaur has come to the Museum where it will be used for research, education and display,” says Dr Ketchum. “We are very grateful to Forterra for their donation, and of course to the Oxford Clay Working Group who have dedicated a great deal of time, energy and passion to the discovery and excavation of this fantastic fossil.”

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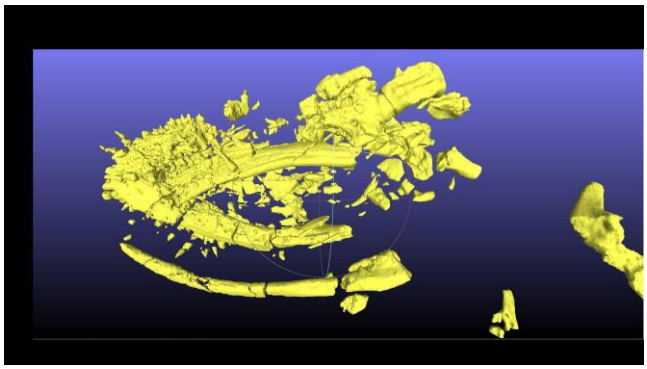
Vertebrae from the plesiosaur skeleton

News release

Artist's impression of *Muraenosaurus leedsii*, a similar plesiosaur from the Middle Jurassic of Europe. Image by Nobumichi Tamura.



CT scan of the plesiosaur's skull, created by Dr James Neenan and Professor John Hutchinson

Excavating the material at Must Farm quarry, near Peterborough

Notes to editors

About the Museum of Natural History

Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the Museum of Natural History now holds the University's internationally significant collections of entomological, geological and

News release

zoological specimens. Housed in a stunning example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

www.oum.ox.ac.uk

www.morethanadodo.com

About Oxford Clay Working Group

The Oxford Clay Working Group was formed with the aim of preserving a unique scientific heritage and provide a foundation for Oxford Clay education and conservation. This is to the benefit of students, scientists and academics (both professional and amateur) and is ultimately of national and international importance to science. The OCWG primary objective is to extract, prepare and preserve important vertebrate fossils from the Oxford Clay and ensure that they are deposited into the correct accredited institutions.

About Forterra

Forterra is a leading manufacturer of a diverse and trusted range of clay and concrete building products used extensively within the construction sector, employing over 1,600 people across 18 UK based manufacturing facilities. Please visit forterra.co.uk for more information.