

THE WEST RUNTON MAMMOTH - NOT A WOOLLY STORY

The world's largest mammoth skeleton - only missing bones eaten by hyaenas

Dated around 600,000 years ago is the West Runton Mammoth (it wasn't a woolly one); the most complete specimen of the species to have been found in the world and the oldest mammoth skeleton to have been found in the UK.

The pelvic bone of this large elephant was found at the bottom of cliffs by West Runton couple Harold and Margaret Hems in December 1990 after a weather-ravaged night.

A year later, another storm revealed more bones and in January 1992 an exploratory dig was carried out, followed by a three-month excavation in 1995. It unearthed the most complete skeleton of a mammoth, from the species *Mammuthus trogontherii* - the Steppe Mammoth.

Eighty five per cent of it was there – with the only missing bits having been nibbled off by scavenging hyaenas (some of the bones have hyaena bitemarks and fossilised hyaena poo has been dissected and found to contain mammoth bone!). At 4m tall at the shoulder, and weighing 10 tonnes, it is the biggest elephant skeleton ever found, and twice as large as anything found on the Jurassic Coast.

You can now see some of it in Cromer Museum, Norwich Castle Museum and the mighty skull, tusks and more bones are in The Norfolk Collections Centre at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

Rhino teeth and bones have also been found in the West Runton Freshwater Bed.

The remains of a Woolly Mammoth butchery have been found in Lynford in the Brecks, and at nearby West Tofts, a 250,000-year old flint handaxe was found that features a fossil scallop shell in its centre. The artefact's maker had carefully chipped around the fossil so it sat undamaged in the centre of the axe - an early example of artistic awareness.

