

Press release
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A mammoth and Neandertals on the banks of the Marne

A nearly complete mammoth skeleton has just been uncovered at Changis-sur-Marne in the Seine-et-Marne department. This type of discovery, in its original context, is exceptional in France since only three specimens have been found in 150 years: the first such discovery, known as “the mammoth of Choulans”, was discovered in Sainte-Foy-lès-Lyon in 1859.

Mammuthus primigenius

This mammoth is probably a *Mammuthus primigenius*, a woolly mammoth with long tusks that were used to expose edible vegetation under the snow. These animals could attain 2.8 to 3.4 meters high at their withers and were covered with fur and a thick layer of fat. They usually lived in grassy steppe environments. This species lived in Eurasia and North America.

The mammoth of Changis-sur-Marne lived between 200,000 and 50,000 years ago, at the same time as Neandertals. Mammoths were well adapted to cold climates and thus disappeared from western Europe 10,000 years ago when the climate became warmer. The most recent specimen died off the coast of the Bering Strait, 3700 years ago.

Mammoths and humans

The current excavation will enable archaeologists to clarify the age of the proboscidean and perhaps the circumstances of its death: did it drown, or was it trapped in mud? Was it hunted or scavenged by predators? A usewear analysis of the flint flake will be performed to determine its function and a zooarchaeological study will detect possible cut marks on the bones.

The discovery at Changis-sur-Marne is exceptional since humans and mammoths have been found together at only two Middle Paleolithic sites in western Europe: Lehringen and Gröbern in Germany. There is also the site of Ranville, in the Calvados region, where an ancient elephant (*Elephas antiquus*) was scavenged approximately 220,000 years ago. Finally, the excavation at Tourville-la-Rivière, in the Seine-Maritime department, recently uncovered aurochs, horses, bears, lions and panthers that were transported by the Seine, 200,000 years ago. Neandertals, who were fine connoisseurs of their territory, recovered several resources (meat, tendons, hide, etc.) from this natural jackpot.

In the near future, archaeologists and paleontologists should be able to determine whether the mammoth of Changis was killed by Neandertals, or whether they scavenged the animal after its natural death. This discovery will contribute to the debate among scientists concerning the predatory skills of Neandertals. The ultimate challenge is to determine the precise date of the event, using radiometric and chrono-stratigraphic methods.

The excavation of Changis-sur-Marne

The animal was discovered in a quarry in Changis-sur-Marne during the preventive excavation of a Gallo-Roman site, which is itself remarkable. The first bones appeared in the front cut of the quarry. Due to the interest of this discovery, the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs (Drac) of Île-de-France organized a preventive operation, realized conjointly by the Drac and the Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives (Inrap), with the collaboration of the



Muséum
national
d'Histoire
naturelle

Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, the physical geography laboratory of the CNRS in Meudon and the CEMEX, who is exploiting the quarry. This is the first excavation of its kind in France. It will be completed in early November.

The Regional Archaeology Service (Direction of Cultural Affairs of Ile-de-France)

In association with its partners (local governments and developers), the Regional Archaeology Service ensures the application of legislation and laws pertaining to archaeological discoveries and excavations. It prescribes and supervises preventive archaeology operations (diagnostic operations and excavations). It also oversees research excavations and annual surveys in concordance with national recommendations. Finally, it supervises archaeological storehouses. It participates in the publication of research results and organizes public outreach operations. It possesses regularly updated documentation that is accessible to all.

Inrap

With nearly 2000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap is the largest archaeological research structure in France and one of the most important in Europe. Each year, this public research institution realizes approximately 1500 diagnostic archaeological operations and 250 excavations in partnership with private and public developers in mainland France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the scientific exploitation of the results and the diffusion of archaeological knowledge to the public.

The Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle

For more than 300 years, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle has played an essential role in the preservation of nature. It is one of the few institutions that specializes in biodiversity and, drawing on its five missions – research, collections, teaching, expertise and public outreach – understanding naturalist and environmental issues in both a multidisciplinary and highly specialized manner. The Muséum draws upon field and laboratory research, multidisciplinary, exceptional collections – one of the three largest in the world – and its unique expertise.

CEMEX

CEMEX is a major actor in the industry of construction materials. It is the world leader in ready-to-use concrete, number 4 in granules and number 6 in cement. CEMEX is present in nearly 50 countries. In France, CEMEX is one of the leaders in ready-to-use concrete and granules, with 330 locations across the territory, allowing it to remain close to its professional and individual clients. In coherence with its mission to satisfy the construction material needs of its clients, CEMEX melds its economic imperatives with its environmental and social ambitions, achieved through its policies favoring sustainable development.

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