

NEWS

Florida Fossil Hunters



Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
dba/ Florida Fossil Hunters
Volume 35, Number 3

MAY/JUN 2025

From Ye Olde President.....

Hello and welcome all FFH Members. It's May and the hot springtime weather is here for fossil hunting.

Paleontology for Kids programs will be active at all meetings from 2pm to 3pm. I would like to thank Laura and Francesca for their hard work and dedication with making Paleontology for Kids a success.

The guest speaker for May's Meeting will be Dr. Robert W. Sinibaldi and the topic will be Ice Age Mammals. He will also be selling his books for a 25% discount to FFH members.

June's meeting has been changed There will be No FFH June meeting held at The Orlando Science Center.

Real Cash Fossil Auction and June's Meeting will be held Saturday June 28th at Dave & Melissa Dunaway's house. 600 Ferne Dr, Longwood, FL 32779

We ask all FFH members to bring a covered dish and the cookout will be from 3pm to 8pm. We will furnish hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill for everyone. Please call or text Melissa at 407-461-8507 to RSVP. Bring your swimsuit to swim in the pool! We will have a great time with good food and fantastic fossils to bid on. *I hope to see everyone participate.*

Thank you
Salvatore Sansone,
FFH President



In recognition of her years of service at the Science Center and as Fossil Fair Chair, we proudly name **Valerie First a Life Member.**

FOSSIL SWAP
at each Meeting!

Support your club, buy fossil t-shirts. Different shirts will be available for adults and kids at each meeting. Cost of shirts for kids are \$20 and adults are \$25.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Saturday, May 17th

2pm Paleontology for Kids

3pm Meeting

FFH meeting at OSC

Saturday, June 28th

**Real Cash Fossil Auction,
June Meeting & Summer Picnic**

Dave & Melissa Dunaway's house

↔ Location | 3pm- 8pm

Saturday, August 16th

2pm Paleontology for Kids

3pm Meeting

FFH meeting at OSC

2025 Schedule

Now Available pg 8

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www.floridafossilhunters.com

MEETINGS & MORE

Our Upcoming Meetings

At EVERY meeting!

- Support your club with the purchase of vintage fossil fair t-shirts! Variety of sizes available at meetings while they last. \$25/Adults and Kids/\$20.
- "Fossil swap": every member brings in fossils to talk about and swap with other members.
- Paleontology for Kids has been a success and will be held before the general meetings at 2:00pm.

Regular Meetings held at the Orlando Science Center. Unless otherwise noted. Admission and parking is FREE to attending members. At the garage & ticket counter inform them you are there for the meeting.

PALEONTOLOGY FOR KIDS

Every OSC Meeting; 2:00-3:00pm

Kids' Fossil Blast is an informal, hands-on experience aimed at kids ages 5 to 14.

APRIL FIELD TRIP

Saturday, April 12th FFH Field Trip: Chris Delory's Fossil Workshop and warehouse. FFH members meet at Chris's workshop at 4015 Pine Industrial Ave, Rockledge, FL 32955 at 10am. Chris has an amazing fossil collection with items for sale. He always gives FFH members great deals.

Fossil Lab is about fossil preparation and preserving.

- Learn the techniques and tools used for fossil preparations.
- Learn how to make a fossil jacket to protect fossils being transported.
- Learn how to use paleo and wood glues to stabilize and fix broken fossils.

REGISTER/RENEW

Membership options

Family memberships cost \$25
Individual membership will cost \$20

3 OPTIONS RENEW NOW ONLINE!

<https://floridafossilhunters.com/membership>

Mail in the form on pg 7 or renew at the meeting.

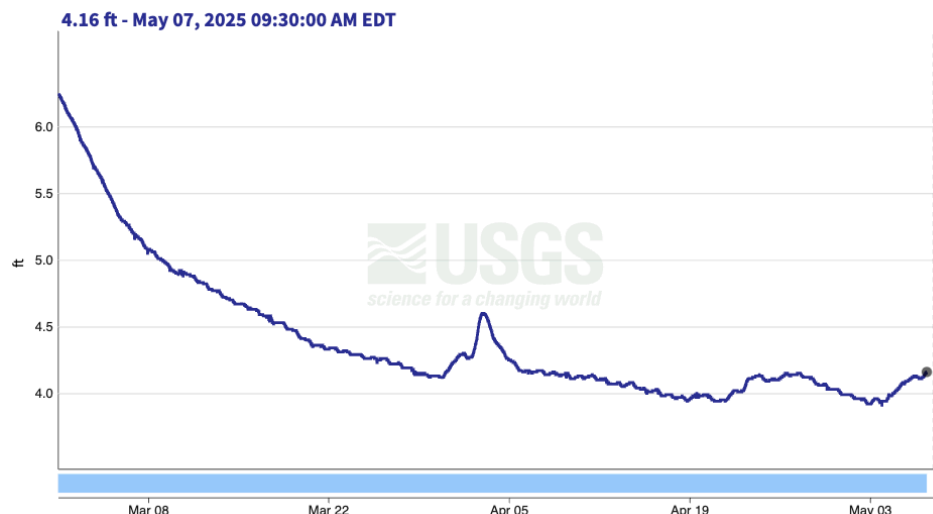
PIECE ON THE PEACE

Want the most current height? Visit floridafossilhunters.com and click on the easy Peace River Gauge button in the sidebar or under the Resources tab for the latest water level data or visit the USGS website directly.
PEACE RIVER AT US 17 AT ZOLFO SPRINGS, FL

Peace River at US 17 at Zolfo Springs, FL - 02295637

[Subscribe to WaterAlert](#)

- using custom time span
March 1, 2025 - May 7, 2025
Gage height, feet





This Bizarre Fossil Isn't a Plant, Animal, or Fungus — Turns Out It's a Whole New Form of Life

By Elizabeth Rayne | Mar 26, 2025 | RICHARD JONES/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

Prototaxites formed tall structures like tree trunks, shown in this illustration of a landscape from the Silurian Period

This strange organism is in a class all its own.

Prototaxites, an extinct organism from the Devonian period, has been thought to be a fungus since its first fossil was unearthed.

Analysis of one Prototaxites species showed that its physical and chemical characteristics were not only different from those of any existing fungus — the didn't match any existing organism at all.

Prototaxites is now thought to belong to an extinct group of eukaryotes, but what exactly that group was remains a mystery.

430 million years ago, towering life-forms known as Prototaxites emerged from the ground, reaching

heights of up to 26 feet and growing trunks up to 3 feet wide. When the first Prototaxites fossil was unearthed in 1843, it was mistaken for an ancient rotting conifer. But trees didn't yet exist during the Silurian period, so what was this thing taking over the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana?

When paleobiologist Corentin Loron and his colleagues examined Prototaxites fossils from what is now Aberdeenshire, Scotland, they found evidence that it was anatomically and chemically differed from fungi in too many ways to be considered fungal. The problem—it also belonged with nothing else. It was apparently not a plant, animal, or fungus.

“Having found no support for the most widely held view that Prototaxites was fungal, we next reviewed possible placement in other higher taxonomic groups. No extant group was found to exhibit all the defining features of Prototaxites.”

The specimens that Loron studied were of the species *Prototaxites taiti*—smaller than the behemoths found elsewhere, but still preserved well enough to take a closer look at their external and internal structures. Tubes on the side of one of the specimens had been previously determined to be sacs filled with spores, which is why that group of researchers placed the species at the base of the extinct fungal group Ascomycota. Loron’s team found, however, that this supposedly fertile part has no organic connection to the rest of the organism.

Petrified slices of *P. taiti* had a light brown exterior and dark brown medullary spots on the inside. Existing fungi do not have medullary spots. Its innards were also made up of all sorts of tubes, including thin tubes that bent and branched, larger curving tubes with thicker walls but no branches, and even larger unbranched tubes with faint

structures similar to growth rings. No extant fungi have tubes like this inside them—let alone with strange rings. The only place rings are found in fungi are in spore sacs known as elaters.

Prototaxites only got weirder after its chemical analysis. If it really was a fungus, then the cell walls of *P. taiti* should show remains of certain sugars that resulted from the taphonomic breakdown of chitin—a strong, fibrous substance also found in the shells of crustaceans and exoskeletons of insects. However, there were no traces of these sugars found in *P. taiti*.

“No extant group was found to exhibit all the defining features of Prototaxites,” Loron said in the study, suggesting that “it is best considered a member of a previously undescribed, entirely extinct group of eukaryotes.”

Maybe Prototaxites was a fun guy if you got to know him, but he just didn’t fit in with the fungi.

Read the full article at:

<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/environment/a64294567/prototaxite-fossil-family/>

Giant crocodile-like carnivore fossils found in the Caribbean

by Brooke Bowser • April 30, 2025

Imagine a crocodile built like a greyhound — that’s a sebecid. Standing tall, with some species reaching 20 feet in length, they dominated South American landscapes after the extinction of dinosaurs until about 11 million years ago. Or at least, that’s what paleontologists thought, until they began finding strange, fossilized teeth in the Caribbean.

“The first question that we had when these teeth were found in the Dominican Republic and on other islands in the Caribbean was: What are they?” said Jonathan Bloch, curator of vertebrate paleontology at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Three decades ago, researchers uncovered two roughly 18 million-year-old teeth in Cuba. With a tapered shape and small, sharp serrations specialized for tearing into meat, they unmistakably



belonged to a predator at the top of the food chain. But for the longest time, scientists didn't think such large, land-based predators ever existed in the Caribbean. The mystery deepened when another tooth turned up in Puerto Rico, this one 29 million years old. The teeth alone weren't enough to identify a specific animal, and the matter went unresolved.

That changed in early 2023, when a research team unearthed another fossilized tooth in the Dominican Republic, but this time, it was accompanied by two vertebrae. The fossils belonged to a sebecid, and the Caribbean was a refuge for the last sebecids at least 5 million yrs after they went extinct everywhere else.

Sebecids were the last surviving members of the Notosuchia, a large and diverse group of extinct crocodylians with a fossil record that extends back into the age of dinosaurs. They varied widely in their size, diet and habitat preferences and were notably different from their crocodile relatives.

The sebecids acted like carnivorous dinosaurs, sprinting after prey on their four long, agile limbs and tearing through flesh with their notorious teeth. Many had protective armor made of bony plates embedded in their skin. The mass extinction event 66 million years ago that wiped out nonavian dinosaurs nearly destroyed notosuchians as well. In South America, only the sebecids endured, and with the dinosaurs gone, they quickly rose to be the apex predator.

The open sea separating the Caribbean islands and mainland South America would have posed a serious challenge for a terrestrial sebecid to swim across. This is possible evidence in support of the GAARlandia hypothesis, which suggests a temporary pathway once allowed land animals to travel from South America to the Caribbean.

Historically, many paleontologists in the Caribbean have excavated fossils from caves and blue holes, where large accumulations of remains are often found. Blue holes preserve fossils exceptionally well, as they lack the oxygen that fuels decay.

But these locations only provide a narrow snapshot of past biodiversity because most of the fossils are relatively young. While these sites provide valuable insight into recent history, they

have their limitations when it comes to older, less well-known fossils.

Today, Caribbean paleontologists are taking a new approach. Finding deep-time fossils often requires more effort and fortunate circumstances, but they're willing to face the obstacles. "This is like a renaissance," said Viñola-Lopez, describing the renewed interest and excitement in the region.

Finding sebecid fossils in the Dominican Republic site was possible because local work crews happened to be cutting a road directly through it. Elson Core, a graduate student from the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez at the time, came across the fossil beds while conducting stratigraphy research and alerted his colleagues. Viñola-Lopez learned about the site through fellow paleontologists and was eager to plan a visit for fieldwork.

Jorge Vélez-Juarbe of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Philippe Münch of Géosciences Montpellier, Juan N. Almonte Milan of Museo Nacional de Historia Natural 'Prof. Eugenio de Jesús Marcano', Pierre-Olivier Antoine and Laurent Marivaux of Institut des Sciences de l'Evolution de Montpellier and Osvaldo Jimenez-Vasquez of La Oficina del Historiador de La Habana are also co-authors of the paper.

Funding for the study was provided in part by the Florida Museum of Natural History.

To read the entire article, visit:

<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/science/giant-croc-like-carnivore-fossils-found-in-the-caribbean/>



Underwater fossil bed discovered by collectors preserves rare slice of Florida's past

by Jiayu Liang • February 12, 2025

About half a million years ago, several horses, sloths and armadillos fell into a sinkhole in Florida's Big Bend region and died. The sinkhole filled in with sediment over time, preserving the animals where they lay until fossil collectors Robert Sinibaldi and Joseph Branin discovered them in 2022.

They were on their usual fossil hunting trip in June of 2022 and weren't having much luck. They were preparing to move on when Branin looked down and happened to see horse teeth. Soon, they uncovered a hoof core, and then a tapir skull.

Their good feeling swelled to disbelief as the finds continue to rack up — many in pristine condition. Sinibaldi said. "We knew we had an important site, but we didn't know how important."

The Steinhatchee River likely followed a different course when the fossils were preserved, but as it meandered over the following millennia, the river edged closer to the sinkhole until, very recently, it eroded into the former pit and rinsed the fossils, leaving them exposed along the bed of the river.

"The fossil record everywhere, not just in Florida, is lacking the interval that the site is from — the middle Irvingtonian North American land mammal age," said Rachel Narducci, vertebrate paleontology collections manager at the Florida Museum and coauthor of a new detailed study of the site. Before the discovery, there had only been one other Florida site with fossils from this time period.

Then there are the species that go through changes in body size and shape during that gap. The fossils recovered from the Steinhatchee River site offer a rare look into how this process took place, with ankle and foot bones that match the size of the larger *H. septentrionalis* species while retaining features of the older, smaller *H. floridanus* species.

"This gave us more clues into the fact that the anatomy kind of trailed behind the size increase. So,



they got bigger before the shape of their bones changed," Narducci explained. Only later, it seems, would the animals evolve skeletal features to help support the heavier bodyweight.

Hundreds of horse fossils have been recovered from the Steinhatchee River site, indicating the area was once an open, grassy area.

Three-quarters of the 552 fossils recovered so far from the Steinhatchee River site belong to an early species of the subgroup of living horses that includes the domestic horse and its wild relatives, known as the caballines.

Branin also collected a puzzling tapir skull, with a mix of features that have not been seen together before. Hulbert cautioned against designating it a new species, though. "We need more of the skeleton to firmly figure out what's going on with this tapir," he said. "It might be a new species. Or it always could just be that you picked up the oddball individual of the population."

Hulbert stressed that the Steinhatchee River site, like many of Florida's great vertebrate fossil sites, was not found by professionals. Hobby fossil collectors like Sinibaldi and Branin work with experts like Hulbert and Narducci to expand our collective understanding of Florida's natural history.

Further collection at the site will be a slow process, given the logistical challenges of excavating an ancient sinkhole underwater. The authors are hopeful about the fossils that have yet to be revealed.

Read the full article in the Florida Museum:
<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/science/underwater-fossil-bed-discovered-by-collectors-preserve-rare-slice-of-florida's-past>

FLORIDA FOSSIL HUNTERS

is a fun and educational group whose goal is to further our understanding of the prehistory of Florida. We encourage family participation and welcome explorers of all ages.

Membership options are listed to the right.

Meetings are usually held on the third Saturday of the month but may vary with club activities. Check the website for the date and location of the next meeting or call one of the officers.

Officers:

President	Salvatore Sansone	(321) 278-9294
Vice President	Steve Sharpe	(352) 552-2296
Secretary	Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Treasurer	David Dunaway	(407) 786-8844

Chairs:

Field Trips	OPEN	
Fossil Fair	Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Fossil Auctions	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Bucks	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Lotto	Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Membership	Ken Sellers	
Newsletter	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	
Photography	John Heinsen	(407) 291-7672
Facebook	Salvatore Sansone Ken Sellers	
Webmaster	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	

Board of Directors:

Joyce Bittle	(407) 341-6366
Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Marge Fantozi	(407) 256-5566
Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Ken Sellers	(407) 457-4117

*Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
dba/ Florida Fossil Hunters*

Membership Application

MAIL in this form or Register ONLINE at www.floridafossilhunters.com/membership

Name:			
Associate Members			
Address:			
Phone:			
Email:			
<input type="checkbox"/>	New	<input type="checkbox"/>	Renewal
Please list any interests, experience, talents or just plain enthusiasm, which you would like to offer to the club:			

Family membership: \$25

Individual membership: \$20

Please make your checks payable to:

Florida Fossil Hunters
Post Office Box 540404
Orlando, Florida 32854-0404

Associate members are people in the same household, included at no extra charge, 2 adult votes per household with Family Membership. Per our insurance policy, family membership covers married couples and children. All other individuals must have separate individual membership to be covered by our club insurance.

Membership year runs from January to December.

Newsletter Policy

Articles must be submitted two weeks before publication date. to be considered for an issue. Emailed to: info@floridafossilhunters.com. Articles can be sent either as text in the email, in a google doc, or in Microsoft Word files (.docx). Please note in subject of email 'FFH News: [article or info]

Florida Fossil Hunters Mark Your Calendar

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Meetings 3pm at OSC | Paleontology for Kids at 2pm and alternative time and location noted when applicable.

2025 Meeting Meeting Schedule

Saturday, May 17
Saturday, August 16
Saturday, September 20
Saturday, October 18
Saturday, November 15

Saturday, June 21
June Meeting & Summer Picnic
Dave & Melissa Dunaway's house
3pm- 8pm

Thirty-Fourth Annual Fossils, Rocks, Gems & Minerals

Saturday, October 4, 2025

9:00am - 5:00pm

Sunday, October 5, 2025

10:00 - 4:00pm

Sanford Civic Center

Visit www.floridafossilhunter.com
for the flyer and dealer info.

SEE INSIDE

for more information on events



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