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FOSSIL SEA MONSTER'S BITE MAKES T-REX LOOK FEEBLE



A GIANT FOSSIL SEA MONSTER FOUND IN THE ARCTIC AND KNOWN AS "PREDATOR X" HAD A BITE THAT WOULD MAKE T-REX LOOK FEEBLE, SCIENTISTS SAID ON MONDAY.

THE 50 FT (15 METER) LONG JURASSIC ERA MARINE REPTILE HAD A CRUSHING 33,000 LBS (15 METRIC TONS) PER SQUARE INCH BITE FORCE, THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF OSLO UNIVERSITY SAID OF THE NEW FIND ON THE NORWEGIAN ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO OF SVALBARD.

"WITH A SKULL THAT'S MORE THAN 10 FEET LONG YOU'D EXPECT THE BITE TO BE POWERFUL BUT THIS IS OFF THE SCALE," SAID JOERN HURUM, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY AT THE MUSEUM WHO LED THE INTERNATIONAL EXCAVATION IN 2008.

"IT'S MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN T-REX," HE SAID OF THE PLIOSAUR REPTILE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A TOP MARINE PREDATOR. TYRANNOSAURUS REX WAS A TOP LAND CARNIVORE AMONG DINOSAURS.

THE SCIENTISTS RECONSTRUCTED THE PREDATOR'S HEAD AND ESTIMATED THE FORCE BY COMPARING IT WITH THE SIMILARLY-SHAPED JAWS OF ALLIGATORS IN A PARK IN FLORIDA.

"THE CALCULATION IS ONE OF THE LARGEST BITE FORCES EVER CALCULATED FOR ANY CREATURE," THE MUSEUM SAID OF THE BITE, ESTIMATED WITH THE HELP OF EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGIST GREG ERICKSON FROM FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY.

PREDATOR X'S BITE WAS MORE THAN 10 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY MODERN ANIMAL AND FOUR TIMES THE BITE OF A T-REX, IT SAID OF THE FOSSIL, RECKONED AT 147 MILLION YEARS OLD. ALLIGATORS, CROCODILES AND SHARKS ALL NOW HAVE FEARSOME BITES.

THE TEETH OF THE PLIOSAUR, BELONGING TO A NEW SPECIES, WERE A FOOT (30 CMS) LONG. THE SCIENTISTS RECONSTRUCTED THE REPTILE FROM A PARTIAL SKULL AND 20,000 FRAGMENTS OF SKELETON.

THE PLIOSAUR, ESTIMATED TO HAVE WEIGHED 45 METRIC TONS, WAS SIMILAR TO BUT HAD MORE MASSIVE BONES THAN ANOTHER FOSSIL SEA MONSTER FOUND ON SVALBARD IN 2007, ALSO ESTIMATED AT 50 FEET LONG AND THE LARGEST PLIOSAUR TO DATE.

"IT'S NOT COMPLETE ENOUGH TO SAY IT'S REALLY BIGGER THAN 15 METERS," HURUM SAID OF THE NEW FOSSIL.

HURUM HAD SAID OF THE FIRST FOSSIL PLIOSAUR THAT IT WAS BIG ENOUGH TO CHOMP ON A SMALL CAR. HE SAID THE BITE ESTIMATES FOR THE LATEST FOSSIL FORCED A RETHINK.

"THIS ONE IS MORE LIKE IT COULD CRUSH A HUMMER," HE SAID. REFERRING TO GENERAL MOTORS' LARGE SPORT UTILITY VEHICLE.

AMONG OTHER FINDINGS WERE THAT THE PLIOSAUR HAD A SMALL THIN BRAIN SHAPED LIKE THAT OF A GREAT WHITE SHARK, ACCORDING TO SCANS BY PATRICK DRUCKENMILLER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA.

PLIOSAURS PREYED UPON SQUID-LIKE ANIMALS, FISH, AND OTHER MARINE REPTILES. PREDATOR X HAD FOUR HUGE FLIPPERS TO PROPEL ITSELF ALONG, PERHAPS USING JUST TWO AT CRUISING SPEEDS AND THE OTHERS FOR A BURST OF SPEED.

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MAMMOTH GENOME DECODED -- CLONES ON THE WAY?

USING HAIRS FROM WOOLLY MAMMOTHS, SCIENTISTS HAVE SEQUENCED AN EXTENSIVE GENOME OF THESE ELEPHANT COUSINS, A NEW REPORT SAYS.

THE DEVELOPMENT BRINGS RESEARCHERS A STEP CLOSER TO "RESURRECTING" THE EXTINCT SPECIES VIA CLONING, THOUGH SO MANY TECHNICAL OBSTACLES STAND IN THE WAY THAT SOME EXPERTS DOUBT IT COULD EVER HAPPEN.

THE STUDY IS SAID TO BE THE FIRST EVER DECODING OF AN EXTINCT SPECIES' NUCLEAR DNA, WHICH CONTAINS VAST AMOUNTS INFORMATION.

ONCE INTERPRETED, THE GENETIC DATA WILL GIVE RESEARCHERS UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO THE BIOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF WOOLLY MAMMOTHS, WHICH BEGAN DYING OUT AFTER THE END OF THE LAST ICE AGE, ABOUT 10,000 YEARS AGO.

TECHNOLOGICAL LEAP

"WHAT OUR PAPER SHOWS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, IS THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO SEQUENCE THE GENOME OF AN EXTINCT ANIMAL ALMOST AS WELL AND AS EFFICIENTLY AS A MODERN GENOME," SAID STEPHAN SCHUSTER OF PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, ONE OF THE TWO PROJECT LEADERS.

THE TECHNIQUE COULD BE USED TO SEQUENCE THE GENOMES OF NEANDERTHALS, AND EARLY HUMANS—BUT NOT DINOSAURS, WHICH WENT EXTINCT TOO LONG AGO FOR THEIR DNA TO BE VIABLE TODAY, ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCHERS.

NUCLEAR DNA RESIDES IN CELL NUCLEI AND IS DIFFICULT TO SALVAGE FROM ANCIENT BONES. FOR ONE THING, IT'S FAR LESS PLENTIFUL THAN MITOCHONDRIAL DNA, WHICH IS PASSED DOWN ONLY BY MOTHERS. THE MITOCHONDRIAL GENOME OF THE WOOLLY MAMMOTH WAS COMPLETELY SEQUENCED IN 2006.

NUCLEAR DNA, HOWEVER, CARRIES MUCH MORE GENETIC DATA, INCLUDING JUST ABOUT ALL INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICULAR TRAITS AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SMALLEST MEAT-EATING DINOSAUR IN NORTH AMERICA DISCOVERED

NORTH AMERICA'S NEWEST DINOSAUR HAD THE MAKINGS OF A MONSTER: RAZOR-SHARP CLAWS, A RUNNER'S BODY, AND SIMILARITIES WITH THE VELOCIRAPTOR OF JURASSIC PARK INFAMY.

IF ONLY IT'D BEEN BIGGER THAN A CHICKEN.

AT 19 INCHES (50 CENTIMETERS) TALL, 75-MILLION-YEAR-OLD HESPERONYCHUS ELIZABETHAE IS NORTH AMERICA'S SMALLEST KNOWN CARNIVOROUS DINOSAUR, A NEW STUDY SAYS.

IN MANY WAYS THE NEW DINOSAUR SPECIES, FOUND IN ALBERTA, CANADA, LOOKS TO HAVE BEEN A MINIATURE OF ITS DISTANT COUSIN VELOCIRAPTOR.

BUT CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF HESPERONYCHUS'S FEATURES SUGGESTS THAT THE NEW SPECIES WAS MORE CLOSELY RELATED TO MORE OBVIOUSLY BIRDLIKE DINOSAURS: FOUR-WINGED MICRORAPTOR (MICRORAPTOR PICTURE) AND FEATHERED SINORNITHOSAURUS.

WHY TINY DINOSAURS ARE A BIG DEAL

TO PALEONTOLOGISTS, SMALL, RARE FINDS ARE OFTEN BETTER THAN BIG.

WHEN AN ANIMAL DIES, ITS REMAINS CAN BE UTTERLY DESTROYED ANY NUMBER OF WAYS.

PREDATORS OR SCAVENGERS CAN EAT THE BODY AND CHEW UP THE BONES. WIND, RAIN, RIVERS, AND SURF CAN BREAK AND WEAR AWAY AT A CARCASS. EVEN BURIED BONES BARELY STAND A CHANCE, THANKS TO HEAT, EROSION, AND UNDERGROUND PRESSURE.

BESET BY SUCH FORCES, SMALL BONES HARDLY STAND A CHANCE, WHICH EXPLAINS WHY PALEONTOLOGISTS ARE SO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT FINDING A PINT-SIZED PREDATOR IN 75-MILLION-YEAR-OLD CANADIAN ROCK.

"IT'S NEAT TO FIND SUCH A SMALL CRITTER," SAID KEVIN PADIAN, A PALEONTOLOGIST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, WHO WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE STUDY, TO BE PUBLISHED TOMORROW IN THE JOURNAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

NEAR MISS

THE ENORMITY OF THE TINY FIND WAS NEARLY MISSED BY THE DINOSAUR'S DISCOVERER.

"WHEN THE SPECIMEN WAS FIRST COLLECTED, IT WAS SO SMALL THAT IT NEVER EVEN OCCURRED TO THE COLLECTOR THAT THIS WAS A DINOSAUR, EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD COLLECTED LOTS OF DINOSAURS BEFORE," SAID STUDY CO-AUTHOR PHILLIP CURRIE, A UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA PALEONTOLOGIST.

CLOSER EXAMINATION REVEALED THAT THE HIP BONES OF THE LITTLE PREDATOR WERE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF VELOCIRAPTOR—ESTABLISHING THE NEW SPECIMEN AS A DINOSAUR.

THE HIP BONES WERE ALSO FUSED, A CONDITION USUALLY SEEN ONLY IN ADULTS—SUGGESTING THE SPECIMEN WAS NOT A BABY.

WITH ONLY DIGITS AND A PELVIC GIRDLE TO GO BY, THAT'S ONE OF THE FEW THINGS RESEARCHERS CURRENTLY UNDERSTAND ABOUT HESPERONYCHUS.

WITHOUT MORE BONES, BERKELEY'S PADIAN SAID, "WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE REST OF THIS NEW ANIMAL LOOKED LIKE."

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

INVISIBILITY CLOAK EDGES CLOSER

SCIENTISTS HAVE RENDERED OBJECTS INVISIBLE UNDER NEAR-INFRARED LIGHT.

UNLIKE PREVIOUS SUCH "CLOAKS", THE NEW WORK DOES NOT EMPLOY METALS, WHICH INTRODUCE LOSSES OF LIGHT AND RESULT IN IMPERFECT CLOAKING.

BECAUSE THE APPROACH CAN BE SCALED DOWN FURTHER IN SIZE, RESEARCHERS SAY THIS IS A MAJOR STEP TOWARDS A CLOAK THAT WOULD WORK FOR VISIBLE LIGHT.

ONE OF THE RESEARCH TEAMS DESCRIBES ITS MINIATURE "CARPET CLOAK" IN THE JOURNAL NATURE MATERIALS.

THIS "CARPET" DESIGN WAS BASED ON A THEORY FIRST DESCRIBED BY JOHN PENDRY, FROM IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON, IN 2008.

MICHAL LIPSON AND HER TEAM AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY DEMONSTRATED A CLOAK BASED ON THE CONCEPT.

XIANG ZHANG, PROFESSOR OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, LED THE OTHER TEAM.

"ESSENTIALLY, WE ARE TRANSFORMING A STRAIGHT LINE OF LIGHT INTO A CURVED LINE AROUND THE CLOAK, SO YOU DON'T PERCEIVE ANY CHANGE IN ITS PATHWAY," HE EXPLAINED.

THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME AN INVISIBILITY CLOAK HAS BEEN MADE, BUT PREVIOUS DESIGNS HAVE USED METALS, WHEREAS THE CARPET CLOAK IS BUILT USING A DIELECTRIC - OR INSULATING MATERIAL - WHICH ABSORBS FAR LESS LIGHT.

"METALS INTRODUCE A LOT OF LOSS, OR REDUCE THE LIGHT INTENSITY," SAID PROFESSOR ZHANG. THIS LOSS CAN LEAVE A DARKENED SPOT IN THE PLACE OF THE CLOAKED OBJECT.

SO USING SILICON, A MATERIAL THAT ABSORBS VERY LITTLE LIGHT, IS A "BIG STEP FORWARD," HE SAYS.

TRANSFORMING LIGHT

THE CLOAK'S DESIGN CANCELS OUT THE DISTORTION PRODUCED BY THE BULGE OF THE OBJECT UNDERNEATH, BENDING LIGHT AROUND IT - LIKE WATER AROUND A ROCK - AND GIVING THE ILLUSION OF A FLATTENED SURFACE.

PROFESSOR ZHANG EXPLAINED THAT THE CLOAK "CHANGES THE LOCAL DENSITY" OF THE OBJECT IT IS COVERING.

"WHEN LIGHT PASSES FROM AIR INTO WATER IT WILL BE BENT, BECAUSE THE OPTICAL DENSITY, OR REFRACTION INDEX, OF THE WATER IS DIFFERENT TO AIR," HE TOLD BBC NEWS.

"SO BY MANIPULATING THE OPTICAL DENSITY OF AN OBJECT, YOU CAN TRANSFORM THE LIGHT PATH FROM A STRAIGHT LINE TO TO ANY PATH YOU WANT."

THE NEW MATERIAL DOES THIS VIA A SERIES OF MINUSCULE HOLES - WHICH ARE STRATEGICALLY "DRILLED" INTO A SHEET OF SILICON.

PROVING PROFESSOR PENDRY'S THEORY, PROFESSOR ZHANG'S TEAM WAS ABLE TO "DECIDE THE PROFILE" OF THE CLOAKED OBJECT - ALTERING THE OPTICAL DENSITY WITH THE HOLES.

"IN SOME AREAS WE DRILL LOTS OF VERY DENSELY PACKED HOLES, AND IN OTHERS THEY ARE MUCH SPARSER. WHERE THE HOLES ARE MORE DENSE, THERE IS MORE AIR THAN SILICON, SO THE OPTICAL DENSITY OF THE OBJECT IS REDUCED," PROFESSOR ZHANG EXPLAINED.

"EACH HOLE IS MUCH SMALLER THAN THE WAVELENGTH OF THE LIGHT. SO OPTICAL LIGHT DOESN'T SEE A HOLE - IT JUST SEES A SORT OF AIR-SILICON MIXTURE. SO AS FAR AS THE LIGHT IS CONCERNED, WE HAVE ADJUSTED THE DENSITY OF THE OBJECT."

HE POINTED OUT THAT HIS DEMONSTRATION CLOAK IS VERY TINY - JUST A FEW THOUSANDTHS OF A MILLIMETRE ACROSS.

BUT THERE ARE APPLICATIONS EVEN FOR A CLOAK OF THIS SIZE.

SUCH A DEVICE COULD BE USED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY, TO HIDE FLAWS ON THE INTRICATE STENCILS OR 'MASKS' THAT ARE USED TO CAST PROCESSOR CHIPS.

"THIS COULD SAVE THE INDUSTRY MILLIONS OF DOLLARS," HE SAID. "IT WOULD ALLOW THEM TO FIX FLAWS RATHER THAN PRODUCE AN ENTIRELY NEW MASK."

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THE ARENA GOES ABROAD

VIET NAM - WORLD’S LARGEST CAVE FOUND

MEASURING MORE THAN 650 FT HIGH AND ALMOST 500 FT WIDE, HANG SON DOONG (MOUNTAIN RIVER CAVE) IS BELIEVED TO BE ALMOST TWICE THE SIZE OF THE CURRENT RECORD HOLDER.

THE BRITISH TEAM, WHICH WAS ASSISTED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HANOI UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE, SAID THAT IT BELIEVES THAT HANG SON DOONG IS LARGER THAN THE DEER CAVE IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA, WHICH AT MORE THAN 270 FT HIGH AND 270 FEET WIDE IS CURRENTLY RECOGNISED AS THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAVE PASSAGE.

THE EXPEDITION INVOLVED FIVE DAYS EXPLORING THE CAVE IN VIETNAM'S PHONG NHA-KE BANG NATIONAL PARK IN MID-APRIL.

"IT IS A TRULY AMAZING SIZED CAVE AND ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERIES BY A BRITISH CAVING TEAM," SAID ADAM SPILLANE, A MEMBER OF THE 13-MAN EXPEDITION. "THE COMPLETE SURVEY IS AT PRESENT BEING DRAWN UP BUT INITIAL ESTIMATES SHOW THE MAIN PASSAGE TO BE 200 METRES (656 FT) HIGH IN PLACES AND POSSIBLY GREATER IN SOME SECTIONS.

"MUCH OF THE PASSAGE WIDTH IS OVER 100 METRES (328 FT) BUT CERTAIN SECTIONS ARE OVER 150 METRES WIDE (492 FT)."

THE TEAM HAS RETURNED TO THE UK TO ANALYSE ITS FINDINGS.

MR SPILLANE SAID THAT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE WAS FIRST FOUND BY A LOCAL MAN, HO KHANH, IN 1991. "KHANH HAS BEEN A GUIDE FOR THE TEAM IN MANY EXPEDITIONS TO THE JUNGLE TO EXPLORE CAVES AND THIS YEAR HE TOOK A TEAM TO THE CAVE WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN ENTERED BEFORE BY ANYONE INCLUDING LOCAL JUNGLE MEN," HE SAID.

"THIS WAS BECAUSE THE ENTRANCE WHICH IS SMALL BY VIETNAMESE CAVE STANDARDS AND EMITTED A FRIGHTFUL WIND AND NOISE WHICH WAS DUE TO A LARGE UNDERGROUND RIVER."

THE TEAM SPENT SIX HOURS TREKKING THROUGH THE JUNGLE TO REACH THE CAVE. CLIMBING DOWN INTO A LARGE CHAMBER, THEY HAD TO NEGOTIATE TWO UNDERGROUND RIVERS BEFORE REACHING THE MAIN PASSAGE OF THE HANG SON DOONG.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

JAMES RANDI (BORN AUGUST 7, 1928) 80 YEARS OLD.

HE WAS A STAGE MAGICIAN (STAGE NAME THE AMAZING RANDI) AND SCIENTIFIC SKEPTIC BEST KNOWN AS A CHALLENGER OF PARANORMAL CLAIMS AND PSEUDOSCIENCE. BORN RANDALL JAMES HAMILTON ZWINGE, IN TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, RANDI IS THE FOUNDER OF THE JAMES RANDI EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION (JREF). RANDI BEGAN HIS CAREER AS A MAGICIAN, BUT WHEN HE RETIRED AT AGE 60, HE SWITCHED TO INVESTIGATING PARANORMAL, OCCULT, AND SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS. ALTHOUGH OFTEN REFERRED TO AS A "DEBUNKER", RANDI REJECTS THAT TITLE, DESCRIBING HIMSELF AS AN "INVESTIGATOR". HE HAS WRITTEN ABOUT THE PARANORMAL, SKEPTICISM, AND THE HISTORY OF MAGIC. HE WAS A FREQUENT GUEST ON THE TONIGHT SHOW STARRING JOHNNY CARSON, AND IS OCCASIONALLY FEATURED ON THE TELEVISION PROGRAM PENN & TELLER: BULLSHIT!.

THE JREF SPONSORS THE FAMOUS MILLION DOLLAR CHALLENGE OFFERING A PRIZE OF US $1,000,000 TO ANYONE WHO CAN DEMONSTRATE EVIDENCE OF ANY PARANORMAL, SUPERNATURAL OR OCCULT POWER OR EVENT, UNDER TEST CONDITIONS AGREED TO BY BOTH PARTIES. AS OF THIS TIME, NO ONE HAS CLAIMED THIS PRIZE, WHICH IS TO BE DISCONTINUED ON MARCH 6, 2010. THE PRIZE MONEY HELD BY THE FOUNDATION WILL BE USED FOR OTHER PROJECTS, THE NATURE OF WHICH WILL BE ANNOUNCED AT THAT TIME.

"RELIGION IS BASED UPON BLIND FAITH SUPPORTED BY NO EVIDENCE.

SCIENCE IS BASED UPON CONFIDENCE THAT RESULTS FROM EVIDENCE -

AND THAT CONFIDENCE CAN BE MODIFIED AND OR REVERSED BY FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIMENTATION.

SCIENCE APPROACHES TRUTH, CLOSER AND CLOSER, BY HARD DEDICATED WORK.

RELIGION ALREADY HAS IT ALL DECIDED, AND IT'S IN THE BOOK.

IT'S DOGMA, UNCHANGEABLE, AND UNAFFECTED BY REALITY

AND WHATEVER FACTS WE COME UPON IN THE REAL WORLD."

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"SCIENCE IS BEST DEFINED AS A CAREFUL, DISCIPLINED, LOGICAL SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ANY AND ALL ASPECTS OF THE UNIVERSE,

OBTAINED BY EXAMINATION OF THE BEST AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

AND ALWAYS SUBJECT TO CORRECTION AND IMPROVEMENT UPON DISCOVERY OF BETTER EVIDENCE.

WHAT'S LEFT IS MAGIC. AND IT DOESN'T WORK."

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"HUMANITY HAS THE STARS IN ITS FUTURE,

AND THAT FUTURE IS TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LOST

UNDER THE BURDEN OF JUVENILE FOLLY AND IGNORANT SUPERSTITION."

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(DIRECTED AT TWO CREATIONIST MUSEUM TOUR GUIDES)

".....LIES AND PSEUDOSCIENCE BY A LAUREL & HARDY PAIR OF PROSELYTIZERS,

IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD NOT FORGET.

THESE SELF-DELUDED IDIOTS DESERVE TO HAVE EVERY ADVANTAGE OF EVOLUTION REMOVED FROM THEIR DNA –

AND THE RESULTING SLUDGE SHOULD BE FLUSHED…"