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New Study Reveals Rhinos and Elephant-Like Creatures Once Roamed Coast of Texas 11 Million Years Ago

Story by Kritika Bhatia • 1mo • 3 min read





 New Study Reveals Rhinos and Elephant-Like Creatures Once Roamed Coast of Texas 11 Million Years Ago
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Between 1939 and 1941, during the Great Depression, the WPA collaborated with the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology and funded the State-Wide Paleontologic-Mineralogic Survey. The goal was to create jobs, which turned some Texans into fossil hunters. Amateur fossil hunters collected thousands of fossils from the Texas Coastal Plain, which revealed truths about ancient Texas.

Steven May, a research associate at UT Austin's Jackson School of Geosciences, led the research, which was published in the journal *Palaeontologia Electronica*. The team examined 4,000 fossils from 50 species of animals and referred to the landscape as the 'Texas Serengeti.' They discovered that around 11 to 12 million years ago, species like rhinos, antelope, rodents, camels, and horse-like animals roamed the area. The team also found two bird species, seven reptiles, and five types of fish. May stated, "They included a new genus of gomphothere (an extinct relative of elephants), named *Blancotherium*; the oldest fossils of the American alligator; and an extinct relative of modern dogs."

[Knewz.com](#) noted that the ancient fossil collectors dug up fossils from four sites in Bee and Live Oak counties, focusing mainly on larger specimens like tusks and skulls. As a result, the collection at the Texas Vertebrate Paleontology Collections [lacked smaller bones](#). May's team stepped in, located the original sites, and searched for smaller fossils, like tiny mouse bones, to better understand the entire ancient ecosystem. May said in a [press release](#), "It was the most representative collection of life from this period of Earth history along the Texas Coastal Plain."

The study's findings also mentioned 86 large fossils encased in plaster that required further investigation. The researchers planned to continue studying the fossils to analyze the diets and environments of animals from the Beeville sites. They also intended to study the fossils using isotopes, which are different versions of an element with varying numbers of neutrons. John Blackburn, owner of a ranch near Beeville, told [All That's Interesting](#), "We were thrilled to be a part of something that was started in 1939." He added, "It had been a privilege to work with UT and the team involved, and we hoped the project could help bring additional research opportunities."

During Roosevelt's presidency, about 5 million people, or 20% of the workforce, were unemployed. To help the economy, the government created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. The WPA created jobs for people to build roads, bridges, parks, hospitals, and schools, and even install new sewer lines and storm drains.

The WPA hired about 8.5 million people to reduce high unemployment. In some parts of Texas, workers were hired to dig up fossils, though they were not professional paleontologists and were paid \$0.20 an hour. The initiative lasted

helped modern-day scientists.

Dr. Matthew Brown, Director of the Vertebrate Paleontology Collections at the Jackson School Museum of Earth History, told [Sci.News](#), "This extensive collection of fossils helped fill in gaps about the state's ancient environment."

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