

Junior Paleontologists Journal – Week 12



Welcome back Junior Paleontologists!

This week we will look at two strange animals that lived here during the Ice Age. They are closely related and came to North America from South America at the beginning of the Ice Age. Both were giants, and both are extinct.

Ground sloths

Ground sloths were large, shaggy, slow moving plant eaters. Some were as big as a grizzly bear, but not as scary. MNA has a wonderful skeleton of a ground sloth from northern Arizona that once was on display in the early days of the museum. Later the museum scientists moved it in a pickup truck to the new museum 3 miles north of town.



The ground sloth skeleton is safe in our paleontology collections. This skeleton shows the size of some ground sloths, which are extinct relatives of today's much smaller tree sloths that live in rain forests.



Here is the skull of that ground sloth in the Ice Age display at MNA. It is hard to tell, but the front of the skull is to the left.

Dinosaur Detectives: Do you remember a dinosaur that had huge claws on the hands?

Here is what ground sloths looked like in life. They had big claws on their hands.





Answer: Yes! Correct! Good memory!

It is the therizinosaur in our museum. Its name is Nothronychus which mean “sloth claw,” Like ground sloths, Nothronychus was a plant-eater and used the claws to gather leaves to eat.



Dinosaur Artists: Can you make a drawing or a painting that shows a ground sloth reaching into a tree to gather some leaves to eat? Or can you write a story or a poem about a ground sloth?

Glyptodonts

The word “glyptodont” (GLIP-tuh-DAHNT) means “grooved tooth.” Glyptodonts were relatives of ground sloths. They were closely related to armadillos, but their shell was stiff, not flexible like today’s nine-banded armadillo that lives in Texas and Florida. In addition, glyptodonts were HUGE, some nearly as big as a car. Some glyptodonts from early Ice Age have been found in Arizona. The Arizona Museum of Natural History in Mesa, Arizona, has a nice display with glyptodonts.



BBC – Ice Age Giants, Land of the Sabertooth

This is what glyptodonts looked like in life. About 2000 bony plates grew together to form the shell, which is a lot like the shell of a turtle. Bony plates protected the top of the head, and rings of heavy bony plates covered the tail.

This picture shows me
and a glyptodont.

That's me on the right.



MNA

The glyptodont skull is weird in lots of ways. I think one of the strangest things about glyptodonts (and ground sloths) is their teeth – even though they ate plants and had to grind their food the teeth do not have enamel. Instead the teeth are entirely dentine which is much softer than enamel like the outside of your teeth.

Dinosaur Detectives: What do YOU think I am thinking?

Answer on pg. 8



American Museum of Natural History

This is a picture of a glyptodont skull (but not the jaws) from Arizona in a museum in New York City. You can compare it to the picture above. There are two holes on top of the head that are not natural. You can see one clearly and the edge of the other one.

Dinosaur Detectives: How do you think those holes got there?

Answer on pg. 8

If you would like to see a movie that has glyptodonts, saber tooth cats, and mammoths, you can watch “Ice Age Giants, Part 1, Land of the Sabre-Tooth” by BBC. I am in that movie, too, excavating a glyptodont skeleton! My part is in the middle of that movie. That was a very BIG DIG!

A small part of that movie showing glyptodonts and the saber-tooth cat is on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3csiO0SM9Qo>



BBC

Congratulations, Junior Paleontologists!! You have been wonderful scientists and artists, and I look forward to the time when we can have a pizza party at MNA, and we can all meet. We will have LOTS to talk about! -- Dinosaur Dave

This is the final week in the series sponsored by MNA for Junior Paleontologists. It will be revised for the Flagstaff Festival of Science in September 2020.

Answer to pg. 5 question:

I was thinking about supper.

I was also thinking about what glyptodonts ate for supper, and the answer is plants, lots of plants.

Answer to pg. 6 question:

From its enemy, the saber tooth cat! There is no other fossil anywhere in the world that shows an attack like this by a saber tooth cat.