Famous Fossils
The Columbian Mammoth
How our state fossil was selected by elementary students.

If fossils held a popularity contest in the United States the mammoths and mastodons win hands down. Five different states including Washington picked these hairy elephant ancestors to represent their state. Up until the 1990’s Washington didn’t have a state fossil and when students at Windsor elementary school near Spokane found out they used it as a class research project to figure out which fossil would best represent our state.

Locations where Columbian Mammoth fossils have been found in Washington.
After careful research the students took their selection the **Columbian Mammoth**, which has been found in many parts of Washington State to the state legislature for consideration. Little did they know they had competition with another elementary class who was asking that a dragonfly be named the state insect. The insect won approval and the mammoth would have to wait until the next year for approval.

Find out about more of Washington’s famous fossils by going to: [http://www.burkemuseum.org/static/burke_boxes_materials/fossils/interactive/01_fossils.html](http://www.burkemuseum.org/static/burke_boxes_materials/fossils/interactive/01_fossils.html)

Mammoth fossils are found all over North America. These furry elephant relatives are evidence that the **climate** in North America was much colder, a time called the “**Ice Age**”.
An original source document “Washington Geology” that tells another version of the story of getting our state fossil.

MAMMOTH IS NOW STATE FOSSIL
The Columbian mammoth (*Mammuthus columbi*) became the official state fossil on March 25 when Gov. Gary Locke signed the bill into law. The mammoth roamed the state more than 10,000 years ago, eating pine cones, pine needles, and grass. Its preserved remains are found from the Palouse to Port Orchard. The herbivore weighed about 7 tons and was 11 to 15 feet tall.

The bill was the brainchild of Chris Pineo, 11, a fifth grader at Windsor Elementary School near Spokane. Four years ago, Chris’ second grade class read a book dedicated to a class in Colorado who discovered their state lacked a state fossil, selected one, and got their Legislature to adopt it. Chris figured that if a class in Colorado could do it, so could he and his friends. With the help of their teacher, Sara Aebly, the students researched a suitable fossil after talking to university professors.

Through the third and fourth grades, Chris and his classmates persisted and contacted Rep. Larry Sheahan, R-Spokane, who agreed to introduce a bill in 1997 that would make the fossil official.

Even though Chris testified on behalf of the bill, he and his friends discovered they had competition. An elementary school class in Kent was pushing a bill designating the common green darner dragonfly as the official state insect. The mammoth bill died, but the insect bill was signed into law last year.

But since the bill had already been approved by the House last year, it was a simple matter to resurrect it and send it back to the Senate this year. With backing from Lt. Gov. Brad Owen, the bill was passed and sent to Locke to be signed. Chris and his friends are relieved and gratified.

“It takes a long time,” Chris said of the process. “I didn’t know how many steps it would have to go through.”

Dale Aebly, the students’ fifth grade teacher and husband of Sara Aebly, who helped launch the project, said he used student interest in the project as a teaching tool for geology, history, politics, math, and science.

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Is there enough room for two elephants?  
The tale of two kinds of teeth.

Mammoths and Mastodons both lived in prehistoric Washington and at the same time. Elephants eat enormous amounts of food. How is it that there was enough room for two different kinds of elephants to live in Washington at the same time.

1. Examine the teeth of the Mammoth and the Mastodon.

2. Read the “original source document” about the Columbian mammoth becoming the state fossil.

Which teeth do you think can best eat the kind of food described in the article? Give your reasons why you think so.

Mammoth Models

Compare three models of mammoths:
1. The toy model
2. The wooden skeleton model
3. The on-line “Build a mammoth” model at

http://www.burkemuseum.org/static/burke_boxes_materials/fossils/interactive/01_fossils.html
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