



The mystery of the mammoth bones: And how it was solved

James Giblin

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When giant bones are found on a farm in New York State in 1801, no one knows what sort of creature they came from. Are they the fossilized bones of an elephant or of a mammoth, the huge animal that has recently been unearthed in northern Russia? Or do they come from a different animal entirely? There's only one way to find out--dig up and assemble a complete skeleton of the creature. And Charles Willson Peale is just the man to take on the job.

At the age of sixty, Peale has already made his mark as a portrait painter and scientist, as well as the founder of the first natural history museum in the United States. If he can put on display a skeleton of the mysterious creature, people will flock in even greater numbers to his Philadelphia museum. The skeleton may also help to prove a controversial new theory: that some animals that once roamed the Earth have become extinct.

As he searches for more bones, Peale must dig at several different sites. He is confronted by flooding, threats of cave-ins, and oppressive heat but persists in his quest. What he eventually finds confirms the existence of a previously unknown animal -- the mastodon. It also provides solid evidence not only that some animals have become extinct, but also that the Earth is far older than anyone ever imagined.

Based on Charles Willson Peale's own diaries and journals, *The Mystery of the Mammoth Bones* is a gripping scientific thriller.

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