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CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS HELP PALEONTOLOGISTS ANALYZE ANCIENT MASTODON REMAINS

🇺🇸 EDUCATION

The Mastodon Matrix Project is putting citizen volunteers to work by getting them to analyze samples of the dirt surrounding ancient mastodon remains.

Following swiftly on from our recent story covering ClicktoCure's crowdsourced approach to cancer research comes word of a like-minded initiative in the world of paleontology. Now under way at the Paleontological Research Institution (PRI), the Mastodon Matrix Project is putting citizen volunteers to work by getting them to analyze samples of the dirt surrounding ancient mastodon remains. The Mastodon Matrix Project has actually been going on for several years already, but it was just recently brought into the public's eye when a fourth-grade class in Pennsylvania discovered an 11,500-year-old mastodon hair through the effort, which targets school classes and other groups of interested volunteers. Participants who sign up to work on the project are first sent a one-kilogram bag of "matrix," or dirt, from one of three mastodon excavations conducted in New York state over the past decade or so. Also included are instructions for meticulously sorting through the matrix to find shells, bones, hair, pieces of plants, and rocks from the time when the mastodons lived and roamed the earth. After sorting, all components are then sent back to PRI, where they are cataloged and further analyzed by paleontologists to help scientists form a true picture of the ecology and environment of the late Pleistocene. There's a USD 18 fee for participation in the Mastodon Matrix Project, details for which are listed also on SciStarter. Tens of thousands of US students have participated already, PRI says. Science entrepreneurs the world over: one to be inspired by? Spotted by: Katherine Noyes

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