

Rare mammoth fossils returning to Crawford

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University of Nebraska officials and the Friends of the Prehistoric Prairies Discovery Center agreed last week to bring two mammoth fossils back to Dawes County.

The bones of two ice age mammoths will be on display at the Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson State Park by the spring of 2006.

The mammoths, which have been called the "Moody Mammoths" and "The Clash of the Titans," were excavated north of Crawford on the Moody Ranch in

1962 by a team of paleontologists. They date from the last part of the ice age era, about 12,000 years ago.

The skeleton of one of the mammoths is currently at the Trailside but the heads of both mammoths and one of the bodies were transported to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where they are stored in Nebraska Hall. They are not on exhibit, and are in the same plaster casts used to transport them.

The manner the mammoths died

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is extremely rare, because they died with their tusks entangled in battle, said Mark Harris, the assistant director of the Nebraska State Museum. At the Aug. 11 meeting in Crawford, Harris showed the group pictures of the mammoth fossils.

Rosemary Petersen, a member of the PPDC Friends said that the vote was unanimous at a Crawford meeting of the organization and the university. She said that a few people were concerned about the university's role and that those at the meeting were reassured that the university would not take the bones

back to Lincoln after the move.

"Everybody had it on their mind," Petersen said. She said that there were 35 people at the meeting and several people voted by proxy.

"We were just all excited. Everybody was very happy the vote went this way."

The move to the Trailside will cost \$94,000 but Petersen said the PPDC Friends are pursuing a matching grant that will cover \$40,000 of the costs. She also said that there are other grants that she plans on pursuing.

Most of the money will be tied into lighting and fire sprinkler systems. The PPDC Friends are still

pursuing grant money from the state's building maintenance 309 Task Force for the sprinklers. The task force will vote today on whether to provide for half of the costs.

The university and the PPDC Friends have come up with a rough estimate of costs and a timeline to bring home the mammoths. By October, Nebraska State Museum technicians will start reopening and refinishing eight to ten windows for better lighting. Work on the fire sprinkler system will also start this fall.

The display will be placed where there is currently a stage in the

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building, which was once a theater for the military post. In October of 2005, the stage will be removed to double the main-floor exhibit space of the museum. Also in 2005, metal framework for the estimated 3,000-pound skulls will be constructed and the skulls will be transported by professional movers.

The mammoths will arrive at the Trailside and will be prepared for display by a vertebrate paleontology preparator in the winter of 2006 before projected display in the spring.

Petersen said that the economic and educational impact of the mammoths will be positive. She

said that people are already showing interest in the fossils from the conversations she has had since the planning of the Prehistoric Prairies Discovery Center. "We had a study done by the Nebraska Department of Tourism," she said. "We know they are out there and ready to visit it."

Petersen is one of several local people who have worked for over 20 years to bring the mammoths back to the area. She said that different buildings and plans have been discussed over the years and have failed. She also said that it has been hard to secure grant funding for such a project.