



National Park Service Photo, File

Mesonychid teeth and jaw discovered within the Clarno Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

Ancient 'hyena-pig' discovered to have once roamed Oregon

By ERIN ROSS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

JOHN DAY — Oregon's weirdest predator, the first of its kind in the state, was found in a museum drawer. A piece of it, anyway.

Hyena-pig. Murder-cow. With no modern analog, scientists have resorted to combinations of common animals to describe it. Dug up decades ago in the Hancock Mammal Quarry near John Day, the bone from this prehistoric creature languished, misidentified in museum storage, until Selina Robson pulled it from its drawer.



National Park Service Graphic

The John Day mesonychid was initially misidentified as this creature, *Hemipsaladon grandis*, another large predator that would have shared a range with the mesonychid.

Robson wasn't looking for a murder-cow when she found the specimen. It was a fossilized jaw, slightly smoothed, and it was huge: about the length of her forearm. It was labeled "Hemipsaladon," a type of creodont, which were large, bear-like predators that roamed Oregon 40 million years ago.

But Robson, at the time an undergrad student at the University of Oregon, had spent a lot of time looking at *Hemipsaladon* specimens, trying to identify one for a class assignment.

"I looked at it and said, 'This doesn't look right. This doesn't look right at all,'" Robson said. She set it near her spot in the lab, mentally labeling it as "Weird Thing Found In A Closet" and left it there for a few months.

Robson couldn't get the massive jaw out of her mind, so she brought it to her instructors, Samantha Hopkins and Nick Famoso, and asked if she could take a crack at identifying it properly.

She took the jaw to the Oregon Imaging Center next to her university and took a CT scan of the teeth. Teeth, Robson explained, are great for identifying species because they're so specific to diet.

Robson took pictures of the specimen to conferences, compared it to other fossils and eventually submitted a paper on the find. Science can be a slow process, so by the time the paper was published in June, Robson had started a Ph.D. program at the University of Calgary in Canada.

The results were in: The

jaw was definitely not a bear-like *Hemipsaladon*; it best matched a creature called *Harpagolestes uintens*, a type of animal called a mesonychid. It was the first one ever found in the state. In fact, it was the first one ever found in the Northwest.

Mesonychid are an extinct branch of ungulates. Ungulates are still around today. We've all seen them. Cows, pigs, camels, giraffes, elephants, deer, sheep and all other hoofed animals are considered ungulates.

Mesonychid, though, are arguably the weirdest ungulates to ever hoof it around North America.

"It kind of looked a little piggy?" said Famoso, who is now the chief of paleontology and museum curator at the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, where the bizarre jaw was found. "It has a pig-like skull and jaw, it had hooves. But it was definitely out there eating meat and bone."

Famoso searched for a modern analog. "Imagine a hyena, crossed with a pig. And that's kind of what this animal would have looked like."

It would have had massive jaws for crunching bones, and big, stocky muscled shoulders like a hyena. It also would have been about the size of a bear. As Robson put it, "terrifying."

It's a bit weird to think of a meat-eating hoofed animal, though maybe it shouldn't be. Modern pigs are voracious omnivores, willing to eat anything in front of them, whether it's plant or animal. Hippos, though strict vegetarians, are

deadly and aggressive. Famoso said that this specimen confirms that the area around modern-day John Day was once capable of supporting at least two large predators, both the mesonychid and *Hemipsaladon*.

Until now, only one mesonychid had been found on the West Coast, a lone specimen in Southern California. The rest were found around the Great Plains, New Mexico and in Asia.

That means that this John Day mesonychid fills an important gap, said Samantha Hopkins, a paleontologist at the University of Oregon. The only way these species would have traveled from Asia to the plains or New Mexico is through a Northwest route. Now, finally, there's a specimen from the middle, connecting the dots.

"It's always nice when you say, 'This animal ought to have been here,' and then when you look for it, it actually is," Hopkins said.

The John Day mesonychid would have shared its range with large herbivores like *Protitanops*, a relative of modern rhinos.

In the 1950s, when this specimen was most likely excavated, it would have been nearly impossible to identify. Only modern technology allowed Robson to look past the jaw's crushed exterior to the teeth beneath that helped her identify the specimen.

And there are millions of specimens like this one sitting in museum collections all around the world. They're just waiting for the right person, with the right tools and expertise, to take a look.

Jay Rodighiero hired as next Freewater principal

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

MILTON-FREEWATER — The Milton-Freewater Unified School District voted unanimously to hire McLoughlin High School Vice Principal Jay Rodighiero as the Freewater School principal at Monday's board meeting.

Rodighiero has served as the high school vice principal since he came to the district in 2000.

"He knows the district, he knows the building, the families and the students," recently hired superintendent Aaron Duff said. "He really relates with the students."

After serving as a fourth- and fifth-grade school in 2018-19 while Ferndale Elementary School underwent

renovations, Duff said the Freewater School will operate as an alternative school



Rodighiero

for a wide range of students from preschool to fifth-year high school seniors.

"It's a unique building," Duff said. "And (Rodighiero) is familiar with alternative schools." It's that experience both within the district and with the uniqueness of the school that made Duff and the MFUSD board confident in not just hiring Rodighiero as principal, but also as the district's director of special programs.

In total, Rodighiero will supervise the preschool,

alternative education programs and an elementary behavioral classroom in his new positions.

With Ferndale Elementary School open again in the fall, Duff said that shifting the alternative schooling programs to Freewater will open up rooms at McLoughlin High School and allow the district to make better use of its space in general.

However, Rodighiero's promotion leaves a void for the high school vice principal position he's held for the last 19 years. The position has now opened and the district is accepting applicants, according to Duff.

"We're looking for another solid administrator," Duff said. "We're looking for someone that wants to be a part of the community."

Weston man gets new attorney in manslaughter case

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Manslaughter defendant John McKenzie Mattila of Weston has a new attorney.

Kent Fisher of Pendleton filed a motion Wednesday with Umatilla County Circuit Court to withdraw as Mattila's attorney. Fisher in the request told the court that audio recordings of jail phone conversations between Mattila and a family member forced him to back out.

"The conversations, in summation, reflect a complete and total lack of confidence or trust in any aspect of my representation," Fisher reported. "They are replete with disingenuous remarks about me and attributes falsehoods to my

advice and comments."

Fisher described the situation as a "complete breakdown and an irreparable breach of the attorney-client relationship" and stated the conversations also revealed Mattila intended to file a bar complaint against him.

And while Fisher stated he quarreled with all the "representations," the greater matter was Mattila "has no trust in any aspect of my ability and he needs different counsel as he is in the fight of his life."

Judge Jon Lieuallen heard the matter Thursday afternoon in Pendleton, according to court records,



Mattila

and Pendleton attorney Jody Stutsman Vaughan stepped in and told the court that Mattila hired her as his counsel. Fisher in a separate filing consented to the substitution.

The moves come a little more than two months before the case goes to a jury trial. The court records show the trial remains on the docket for Sept. 18-20.

The state has accused Mattila, 24, of driving drunk the night of Feb. 22 and crashing into and killing Adelaida "Lolly" Solis Torres, 52, of Milton-Freewater. Mattila has pleaded not guilty to charges of second-degree manslaughter, hit-and-run on an injured person, driving under the influence of intoxicants, third-degree escape and interfering with a peace officer.

BRIEFLY

Pilot Rock considers extending feeding ban to all wildlife

PILOT ROCK — The Pilot Rock City Council will consider beefing up ordinances dealing with feeding wildlife and controlling weeds.

The council in the fall of 2017 passed a local law prohibiting the feeding of wild turkeys because dozens of the fowl were inhabiting the town. The council Tuesday night will consider expanding that ban from wild turkeys to all wildlife.

At the same time, the amendment narrows feeding to "intentional feeding" for situations where wildlife might be on property without the owner's knowledge.

The council will vote

on the changes when it meets Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the council chambers. The council during the meeting also will consider amending the city code to allow weeds, grass and noxious vegetation to grow no more than 12 inches tall rather than 18 inches.

Both measures become effective upon passage.

In two other moves, the council could give approval for the city to continue participating in a program from the League of Oregon Cities to receive up to 10 hours of free legal advice a year. And city employees could receive a 3% cost of living increase.

According to the memo from city recorder Teri Bacus, the bump for the city's 11 employees would come to \$13,046 a year, and the city will

save \$17,000 annually from an employee waiving medical and dental benefits, while another employee does not receive retirement payments, a savings of more than \$20,400 a year.

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\$5 Classic Movie
Showing Wednesday
Goosebumps at 10AM
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang 12PM

Stuber (R)	11:50a* 2:10p* 4:40p 7:10p 9:40p
Crawl (R)	12:00p* 2:20p* 4:50p 7:20p 9:30p
Spider-Man: Far From Home (PG13)	2D 1:20p* 7:00p 4D 4:10p 9:50p
Toy Story 4 (PG)	11:40a* 2:00p* 4:20p 6:40p 9:20p
Annabelle Comes Home (R)	1:30p* 10:00p
Midsummer (R)	3:50p* 6:50p
The Secret Life of Pets 2 (PG)	11:30a*

The Lion King (PG)
Thursday, July 18th at 6:00p and 9:00p
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