

Ruby Falls Donates Fossils to ETSU Center of Excellence in Paleontology

Ice Age bones from Lookout Mountain Cave find new home at the Gray Fossil Site & Museum

CHATTANOOGA, TN (October 26, 2023) - The private collection of fossils discovered decades ago in Lookout Mountain Cave prompted a significant new partnership between Ruby Falls and the East Tennessee State University Center of Excellence in Paleontology and Gray Fossil Site & Museum. The fossils recently donated for research and display by Ruby Falls are believed to be from the Pleistocene Epoch, commonly known as the Ice Age. The Ruby Falls collection includes fossil remains from an ancient jaguar, black bear, striped skunk, bat, woodchuck, muskrat, deer and weasel.

Matt Bushell, recent graduate of the paleontology master's program at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), reached out to Ruby Falls after learning about the fossil collection held by the popular Tennessee attraction. The specimens are of significant interest to the researcher due to his scientific focus on Pleistocene large cats from this area. "The Ruby Falls jaguar humerus is particularly exciting as that animal no longer lives here today but used to roam these hills back in the Ice Age," says Bushell. He adds, "This jaguar humerus may be one of the biggest found from the state so far."

The collection of Lookout Mountain Cave fossils was initially on loan to the Center of Excellence in Paleontology for confirmation of authenticity and identification. The successful collaboration with Bushell and his research advisor laid the foundation for Ruby Falls to donate the collection to the Gray Fossil Site & Museum's permanent collection.

"The Gray Fossil Site & Museum is a repository for important fossils discovered in Tennessee and the Appalachians, and it is our job to care for these remains using the highest standards," says Dr. Blaine Schubert, Bushell's advisor, Executive Director of the Center of Excellence in Paleontology and Director of the Gray Fossil Site & Museum. "This ensures that these natural treasures will be available for scientific research and exhibit purposes well into the future."

The Center of Excellence in Paleontology conducts paleontological research, and provides teaching, training, and public education at East Tennessee State University. In addition to managing and caring for the Gray Fossil Site & Museum, the Center oversees scientific research related to the five-million-year-



*Ancient bear skull found in Lookout Mountain Cave.
Photo courtesy Gray Fossil Site & Museum.*

old Gray Fossil Site, an extraordinary fossil locality in the heart of the Appalachian Highlands, recognized around the globe for its significance in paleontology.

"We are thrilled to partner with ETSU and the Gray Fossil Site & Museum to preserve, research, and share Lookout Mountain's natural history," says Ruby Falls CEO and president Hugh Morrow. "The caverns of Lookout Mountain hold an incredibly rich story to tell of the past. Through this collaboration, we can better understand and protect its extraordinary range of plant and animal life."

The Center is creating 3D printed replicas of the original specimens to aid Ruby Falls in educating the public about Ice Age wildlife living and taking refuge in the cave systems within Lookout Mountain. Additionally, they will conduct an educational session on Pleistocene-era creatures that once inhabited the Lookout Mountain region.

For more information,
including photos of the fossils,
visit:
<https://bit.ly/ETSRubyFalls>



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Collections Department at Gray Fossil Site & Museum analyze fossils. Photo courtesy Gray Fossil Site & Museum.



Jaguar humerus from Lookout Mountain Cave (right) compared to modern-day Jaguar humerus (left). Photo courtesy Gray Fossil Site & Museum.

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About Ruby Falls

Ruby Falls is home to the tallest underground waterfall open to the public in the United States. Over half a million guests visit the thundering waterfall annually, located 1,120 feet beneath the summit of Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, TN. Committed to cave conservation and environmental sustainability, Ruby Falls is the first attraction in the United States to earn certification from Green Globe and is recognized as a leader in tourism sustainability. www.RubyFalls.com.

About Gray Fossil Site & Museum

The ETSU Gray Fossil Site & Museum and the Hands On! Discovery Center is a dynamic hub for science and education in northeastern Tennessee. The world-class paleontological site in its backyard preserves a one-of-a-kind window into the Appalachian Highlands from five million years ago, making it an invaluable resource for paleontology research and education. www.etmnh.org.