NPS Protocols for Paleontological Discoveries

Paleontological sites are fragile, non-renewable resources. Well-intentioned visitors to paleontological sites sometimes cause lasting damage because they don't know how to behave in these fragile places.

Discovering a paleontological site or fossil on Santa Rosa Island is likely because plants and animal communities lived on the island for thousands of years. Plant and animal communities preserved in the fossil record provide insight into what life and the environment was like in past times.

Especially dense on the Channel Islands are Pleistocene mega-fauna fossils such as the Columbian and Island Pygmy Mammoths. Care should be taken not to disturb these deposits or cause them to be mixed in any way. Other common fossil site types include Cetacean (marine mammals) and mollusks.

The following procedures must be observed:

1. When a paleontological site or fossil is found, do not disturb it.

2. Make a note of your location.
   Record your location on a map, or take a GPS reading (be sure to indicate which map projection your GPS unit is using). After completion of the project, all maps containing site locations (or similar lists of GPS coordinates) should be destroyed or surrendered to the NPS archaeologist.

3. Photographic guidelines
   It is okay to photograph sites and fossils. Often these can be useful to the NPS archaeologist in relocating the site/fossil.

4. Notification
   If the site or fossil is endangered due to exposure to regular human traffic, erosion, or other natural or human forces, inform as soon as possible:

   NPS Archaeologist  805 658-5754

   If evidence of looting or vandalism is encountered (or you witness someone in the act), make a note of the location and leave the area (it is a crime scene and your presence may contaminate critical evidence). Make an immediate notification.

   NPS land
   Mark Senning, Island Ranger  805/804-0058
   Dave Ashe, Chief Ranger  805 658-5717
   Kelly Minas, Archaeologist  805 658-5754

   All other discoveries should be reported to the NPS Archaeologist on a regular basis.