

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Could new fossil discovery lead to a Jurassic Canyon?



Photo provided

Prehistoric fossil imprint of three claws/talons (left) and heel imprint (middle right)

By Vera Kochan

As with many inconceivable scientific discoveries the first step begins with an accident of fate or a case of just being in the right place at the right time. The latest chapter in a potential new find comes to the scientific world much like an opening scene of a Steven Spielberg movie.

In August 2019, two hikers ventured into the Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve on the Contra Costa/Alameda County border. Joshua Blague and Laura Scherzo, both recent graduates from the University of California, Los Angeles, were visiting Scherzo's family in Moraga for the summer. "I'm an archeology major," said Scherzo. "I'd heard that Sibley was a great place to explore, and the idea of uncovering any fossil remains in a region known for prehistoric volcanic activity was too tempting to pass up."

Blague, an economics major and outdoor enthusiast, was more than happy to tag along for the amateur expedition. "Anytime we go on hikes, Laura can't help but investigate odd shapes in the rocks," said Blague. "She always wants to be the one to make a discovery that'll rock the

archeology community's world – pardon the pun."

Scherzo may just have gotten her wish. It was during their hike that she made a discovery of a lifetime – a fossil, approximately two feet long, with what appears to be either three claws or talons at one end and a flat heel at the other. After taking numerous photos of the fossil, marking the immediate area and noting their coordinates, the hikers all but ran back to their car, several miles away, to begin Scherzo's quest for scientific notoriety.

Recalling a guest lecturer at UCLA, Kaman I. Gotcha, Ph.D., Scherzo was quick to contact the expert paleontologist and member of the American Paleontological Research Institute League.

"We are still undergoing extensive testing of the fossil itself along with the surrounding area," replied Gotcha, "but it appears that the imprint could date as far back as the Cretaceous period, nearly 66 million years ago."

The discovery of dinosaurs in California is extremely rare which is what makes this find such a boon to scientists like Gotcha. "Given the fact that the surrounding area was once part of the Pa-

cific Ocean, to make an encounter such as this helps us to understand what the topography was like while these creatures roamed our planet. For instance, could this hill have been a small island of refuge?"

Additional assistance at the site comes from team members of Fossils Organisms and Osteology Liaison. Lead scientist Jeeime Kiddin, MSc., has a preliminary theory as to what creature Scherzo's fossil may have belonged to. "I would hazard a guess that this could very well belong in the mosasaur family which was a marine reptile-like predator of other marine species ranging in length of 40-ft long and 5-tons in weight." Kiddin added, "However, we cannot rule out that it could also be a member of the tractorus amphibicus family, not unlike the more popularly known pterodactylus, that could have flown into the area." Time and tests will tell.

At any rate, it would seem that Scherzo's "imprint" on the archeological community has made its mark. The scientific world is in agreement that the discovery couldn't be in better hands than those of APRIL and FOOL.

Neighbors find safe ways to socialize at a distance



Submitted by Trudy Deutz

A few Moraga neighbors found a way to share an evening over cocktails with "social restrictions." Although the weather wasn't great,

hence the warm clothes and blankets, a good time was had by all – even with a good 6-foot distance guaranteed by the traffic cones. Pictured participants, from left: Mike Tolajian, Rene Tolajian, T.J. Deutz, and Trudy Deutz.

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you say "neighbor."

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