

HOW DO YOU GET A WHALE IN VERMONT?

The Unlikely Story of Vermont's Official State Fossil

by
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ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1849, a gang of railroad workers racing to build the first railroad across Vermont stumbled upon the fossil bones of a mysterious animal buried deep in sticky, blue clay high above the shores of Lake Champlain. A local professor and natural historian was consulted and he quickly and correctly declared the bones to be those of a beluga whale from the Ice Age. But with one question answered, a dozen more sprang up.

How did the bones of a small, white whale end up buried ten feet beneath a rural Vermont farm field, two mountain ranges and over 200 miles from the nearest ocean? Why did two of the most significant fossil discoveries in 19th century New England occur in Vermont on consecutive summers? And how would these discoveries fit into the rapidly evolving scientific debate over glacial ice ages, evolution and the history of the Earth?

The story is told using the intertwined stories of a fossil mammoth found in 1848, a fossil whale found in 1849, a country naturalist, and an internationally famous scientist. It places the discoveries within the framework of the 19th century, with all of the advantages of hindsight and our understanding of 21st century science.

Utilizing original reports and writings, period magazines and newspaper accounts and research at the Vermont Historical Society, University of Vermont Special Collections, and the museums of natural history and comparative zoology at Harvard University, Jeff L. Howe weaves together the definitive account of what we *do* and *do not* know about the Charlotte whale. Included for the first time is an account of the exploratory pit dug at the whale site in 1993, a complete chronological history of the whale from 1849 to the present, a new insights into the tiny harmonica that is rumored to hang within the whale's skull.

"How Do You Get a Whale in Vermont?" is the story of a local denizen from an ancient age that captured the imagination of an entire state and went on to become Vermont's official State Fossil.