

# HOW DO YOU GET A WHALE IN VERMONT?

The Unlikely Story of Vermont's Official State Fossil

by  
Jeff L. Howe

---

[jefflhowe@verizon.net](mailto:jefflhowe@verizon.net)

[www.jeff-howe.net](http://www.jeff-howe.net)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

A flight of imagination down Greenbush Road in Vermont

### PART ONE - Wind, Ice and Bones

#### **Chapter 1 - The Wind and the Sea**

- Setting the scene: the wind-swept tundra during the Ice Age

#### **Chapter 2 - The Mt. Holly Mammoth and the Ice Age**

- A mammoth becomes trapped in a bog in a pass through the Green Mountains
- How glaciers work

#### **Chapter 3 - The Wilderness**

- When it comes to topography, Vermont doesn't play nice

#### **Chapter 4 - The Walk along the Tracks**

- Railroad workers discover the bones of a strange animal near Charlotte, Vermont in 1993

#### **Chapter 5 - The Young Naturalist**

- The early years of Zadock Thompson

#### **Chapter 6 - The Cottage on the Green**

- Zadock Thompson examines the fossil bones at his small lab at the University of Vermont

### PART TWO - 1849

#### **Chapter 7 - The World in 1849**

- The Gold Rush, railroads, abolition and the movement west

#### **Chapter 8 - The State of Science and Geology of 1849**

- Debating the age of the Earth and the nature of the processes that formed it

### PART THREE - Whales, Fossils, Muck and Clay

#### **Chapter 9 - The Singing White Whales**

- The natural history of Beluga whales

**Chapter 10 - The Sticky Blue-Grey Clay of Charlotte**

- Interpreting the Champlain Sea sediments

**Chapter 11 - The Gelatinous Muck of Mt. Holly**

- The natural history of the Mt. Holly bog

**Chapter 12 - The Escape from the Bog at the Pass**

- Railroad workers discover the Mt. Holly mammoth in 1848

**Chapter 13 - The Silent Vigil and the Unmarked Grave**

- The death of Zadock Thompson

**Chapter 14 - The Burlap Skull and the Plaster Skeleton**

- The first reconstruction of the whale skeleton results in gross errors

**Chapter 15 - The Professor and Indiana Jones**

- Prof. George Perkins meets Roy Chapman Andrews

PART FOUR - The Charlotte Whale

**Chapter 16 - The Gunter Chain and the Fourteen-Foot Hole**

- Details of an exploratory pit dug at the whale site by a UVM crew in 1993.

**Chapter 17 - The Charlotte Whale**

- What we do, and do not, know...

PART FIVE - So, How DO You Get a Whale in Vermont?

**Chapter 18 - So, How DO You Get a Whale in Vermont?**

- A creative flight of imagination that summarizes the book

PART SIX - Aftermath

**Chapter 19 - The Bill and the Governor**

- In 1993 the Governor Howard Dean signs a bill designating the Charlotte Whale as the official State Fossil of Vermont

**Chapter 20 - What's New on the Web Today?**

- The story of a historic web site built for the whale at the dawn of the World Wide Web

**Chapter 21 - The Tiny Harmonica**

- Thoughts on a miniature harmonica reputed to hang inside the skull of the Charlotte Whale

Appendix and Bibliography

I - A History of the Specimen

II - The Periotic Bone

III - References Pertaining to the Specimen