

Imperial Beach Essay winner: Eleanor Yachwan of Imperial Beach

A strange looking object first attracted my son, Howard Blackburn, then age 12, while “exploring” in the Tijuana River bottom. It turned out to be part of the skull and teeth of an ancient elephant that walked in this area over 15,000 years ago. He brought home one large tooth and showed it to his older brother, Jack, who was a rockhound.

Jack was very interested in the tooth and invited his friend, Skippy Allen to go with him and Howard to help dig up more items. Using picks and shovels, then proceeded to dig a hole over seven feet deep. They found part of the skull, the upper jaw and several teeth.

Jack and Skippy were both college freshmen at San Diego State University and they showed the teeth to Jack’s geology professor, E. Dean Milo. Mr. Milo held out his hand to receive the teeth and was amazed at the size of them. They were about ten inches long and about three inches across with ridges across the top.

Mr. Milo sent the teeth to Bayard Bratstrom, Vertebrate Paleontologist at the California Institute of technology in Pasadena, California. He confirmed Mr. Milo’s theory that the teeth came from the remains of a Mammoth of the Archedistodon Imperator species. The mammoth according to Mr. Milo and Mr. Bratstrom reached a height of over thirteen feet at the shoulder and lived during the late Pleistocene era. They believed the animal became trapped in the then swampy area and died in the mud. The area today is a dry river bottom. Time and floods have covered the area with sand and topsoil. Erosion over time forces bones to the surface where the fragile bones can be broken up and lost forever or found by a lucky boy.

The teeth were given to the San Diego Historical Museum where they are on display to this day.