

## Group clears second hurdle needed to excavate Old Vero Ice Age site

By Janet Begley

Friday, February 10, 2012

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Now that two agencies have given the green light for a fossil hunt at the old Vero Man site, it's up to the Old Vero Ice Age Sites Committee to raise at least \$150,000 for a dig that could start in October.

David Gunter from the Indian River Farms Water Control District said Thursday that scientists can use ground-penetrating radar and drill core samples from the site, which is between Aviation Boulevard and U.S. 1 in Vero Beach. It includes a 300-foot right-away along the main canal bank near the County Administration Building.

Earlier this week, the Vero Beach City Council approved a memorandum of understanding with the same committee, giving it permission to search on city-owned land for fossils. The group must receive permission from all land holders near the site before they can move forward on any excavation plan.

The Old Vero Man site has been evaluated and selected by scientists as having a high probability of containing significant fossils and artifacts. Around 1915, dredging at this site unearthed human remains possibly 13,000 years old, along with the remains of extinct animals including mammoth, mastodon, saber-tooth cat and ancient species of tapir, horse and sloth.

It is only one of two sites in North America where Ice Age human skeletons and animal bones have been found in the same place, making the find significant.

Gunter said he received a summary of what the archeologists are initially planning at the site, and will work with them to determine which areas already have been disturbed, lessening the probability of any new archeological finds.

"The city's original wastewater treatment plant was immediately south and when it was demolished, there was a lot of debris," said Gunter. "All we ever found was broken concrete and old plumbing pipes."

But if the ground penetrating radar turns up any evidence of fossils, the Old Vero Ice Age Sites Committee will have to apply for temporary use permits from the Water Control District before they can do actually excavation, Gunter said. He said fiber optic cables, underground electrical lines, sewer lines and even water mains are located under the ground near the site, and they cannot be disturbed.

"I'd love to see Vero Man come to life but my primary responsibility is to make sure anything they decide to do doesn't cause any adverse effects," said Gunter.

The Old Vero Ice Age Sites Committee has received a \$1.3 million proposal from the University of Florida to conduct a full-scale excavation of the Vero Man site over multiple years, vice-chairman Susan Grandpierre said. The plan calls for collaboration between experts, scientists, the city of Vero Beach, the Water Control District and

Indian River County to develop and excavate the site.

"We have been working with them for about a year now," said Grandpierre. "They've all been very supportive of the Old Vero Man project. We couldn't do it without them. Now we just have to concentrate on raising the money."

How to Help:

To make a donation or receive more information about excavation at the Old Vero Man site, log on to the Old Vero Site Ice Age Committee website [atoviasc.org](http://atoviasc.org).



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