

## House of Bones



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**Woolly mammoths, believe to be the ancient ancestors of modern-day elephants, died out almost 4000 years ago, but now, about 500kms from Moscow in Russia, they have made an interesting reappearance.**

Don't worry! A huge wooly creature isn't about to come rushing down Russia's streets, but a large circular structure constructed entirely from the bones, particularly the heads and skulls of nearly 60 wooly mammoths was recently discovered. So far, 51 mandibles (jaw bones) and 64 skulls have been counted.

The site, named Kostenki 11, was first discovered in 2014. Archeologists then began excavating the site a year later, in 2015 and the job was finished in 3 years. Their findings have now been published in the archeological journal 'Antiquity'.

How old is this structure? Kostenki 11 dates back to the last Ice Age, which took place about 25,000 years ago, and while it is not the first such 'mammoth house' to be discovered in Eastern Europe or Russia, it is the oldest and the biggest. The site measures about 41 feet in diameter.

Temperatures during Ice Age winters dropped to less than -4°F (that's really really cold!) and evidence was found inside the mammoth house to show that wood was burned there, perhaps for warmth or to cook food. This evidence also proves that trees were present in the area during the ice age, despite that not being the case in many parts of the region due to the extreme cold. It also proves that even 25000 years ago, wood was an important resource for human beings and was used as fuel.

Using modern research techniques, including something called floating, where water and sieves are used to find small particle evidence, the researchers at Kostenki 11 also discovered the remains of soft plant matter which may also have been used as food.

While the structure does not appear to have been used as a permanent living space, researchers believe that it is possible that Kostenki 11 was a food storage site and may also have been used for ritual practices. Alexander Pryor from the University of Exeter in the UK who is the lead researcher on the site wants to investigate these ideas further to gather more proof.

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