

First discoveries of *Megaloceros giganteus* in Russia

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The first skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* in Russia was discovered in **1886**.

The peasant Karl Krysinsky, who lived in Kamyshlov, asked, through his friend, the secretary of the Ural Society of Natural Science Lovers (USNSL) in Yekaterinburg, Onisim Yegorovich Kler, for help selling the skeleton of a big deer.

[USNSL established on December 29th 1870, was one of the biggest Society of Natural Science Lovers in Russia. The Society had its own museum and reach library. Members of the Society made many discoveries and published many scientific articles on various Natural Science topics. Some artifacts from their museum studied by main zoologists, paleontologists and geologists of Russia.

It was closed by communist regime in 1929 who considered it as potential redemption stronghold of the "counterrevolutionary bourgeois intelligentsia, many of its members were repressed.]

He discovered the skeleton in a peat bog near the village of **Galkino** near **Kamyshlov** in the **Yakaterinburg** province of the Sverdlovsk region. He was interested in selling the specimen to a major museum in Russia or to a foreign one.

By examining the skull and some bones provided by Krysinsky, Kler and another member of the society, Christian Yakovleivich Tal recognized that they belonged to an individual of *Cervus megaceros*. (*Cervus megaceros* is one of the earliest synonyms for *Megaloceros giganteus*.)



Figure 1

On the left: Onisim Yegorovich Kler (1845-1920), the image is from: https://m.vk.com/@museum_nature-o-megaloceros. On the right: Christian Yakovleivich Tal, the image is from <http://www.1723.ru/read/dai2/dai-2-65.htm>

As it was the first such skeleton discovered in Russia, and one of very few skeletons of *Megaloceros giganteus* mounted in Natural History Museums around the world to date, the Society decided to purchase it for their own museum.

After some negotiation and price compromise, the Society paid 300 Rubles, instead of 500 Rubles as asked on the beginning, a quite large sum at the time, to Krysinisky. ^[1b]

The same year, 1886, one of the buildings of the mining department located in the center of Yekaterinburg, donated to the Society by one of their member, the director of the Ural factories I.P. Ivanov with kindly permission of the minister of the state property in St. Petersburg (the capital of Russia at this time).

After some additional digging, an almost complete skeleton was transferred to the Society and was quickly assembled by the preparator Alfred Ignatievich Gakkel for the Siberian-Ural Scientific and Industrial Exhibition, organized by the Society, in 1887.

The mounted skeleton of *Megaloceros* was one of the main attractions at the Expo. ^[1a]



Figure 2 Zoological exhibit at the Siberian-Ural Scientific and Industrial Exhibition in 1887.

The skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus*, on the left, on.

Scarecrows of some domestic animals, hunted in forests of Siberia such as Lynx, baby Bear, Capreolus and antlers of modern deer and elks on the right.

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At the end of the Expo, the skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* returned to the Museum of the Society which opened its door for a wide, after some reconstruction.

In 1890, follow request of famous Russian paleontologist of Polish origin, Jan Czersky, the Society sent him the bones of the *Megaloceros giganteus* (still called *Cervus megaloceros* in their documents and notes) in St Petersburg for a study. [1d]

In 1906 another famous Russian paleontologist M.V. Pavlova studied and described the skeleton.

In August 1897 the skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* was joined by an incomplete skeleton of Mammoth, which was also discovered not far from Kamyshlov.



Figure 3 Jan Czerski on stamp of [Poland 2002](#) (skeleton of *Coelodonta* on the background)

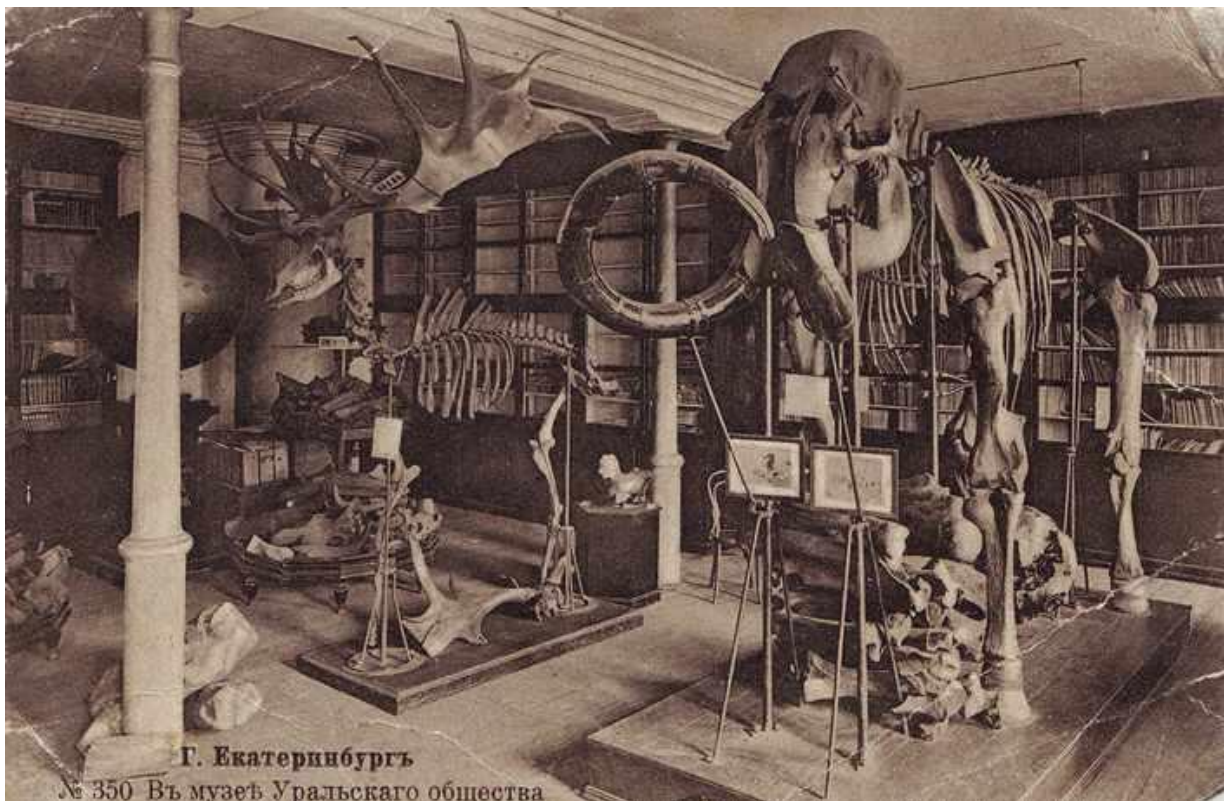


Figure 4 Postcard: skeletons of *Megaloceros* and Mammoth in the museum of the Ural Society of Natural History Lovers (UOL) in Yekaterinburg. The image is from

Nowadays, both skeletons are exhibited in the Sverdlovsk Regional Museum of Local Lore in Yekaterinburg.

In the 1990th, the skeleton of the *Giant Deer* was completely renovated, the missing legs were reconstructed by molding the mirror images of the legs present. The broken and missing bones were reconstructed.

According to radiocarbon analysis, the skeleton belonged to the latest of all known *Megaloceros* - this deer lived 6.8 thousand years ago, whereas the remains of the *Irish Megaloceros* went extinct 10-11 thousand years ago. ^[3]



Figure 5 The skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* in exhibit of Natural History Museum in Yekaterinburg. The image is from the article “О ширококором олене” by Marya Morozova

The second, and at the moment, most complete skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* which found in Russia, discovered as much as 40 years later.

On July 8, **1926**, a peasant, Vasilij Kanin from the village of Kanina went to the market in **Sapozhek** in the **Ryazan** region. He stopped to drink water from a rill by the Sapozhek River, two kilometers from the town. As he laid on his paunch to take a drink, he rested his hand on a twig – only to discover that the twig was actually a bone.

When he arrived the town, he informed the director of the local history museum, doctor Pavel Petrovich Stakhanov. The Doctor was known for his obsession of finding a skeleton of the *Giant Deer*. This obsession started when he was able to acquire a skull with partially preserved antlers of a *Giant Deer* from an unknown peasant in the market in 1898.

Stakhanov examined the site where the bone was found, and recognized antlers that belonged to *Megaloceros giganteus*.

He hired three workers at his own expenses, who began an excavation under very hard conditions, standing in the icy water of the rill on unstable bed. Excavated bones were very fragile and crumbled away in the hands. They were taken out of the mud with great care, as if they were the most precious of jewels.

For several months, Stakhanov dried the bones, until all the moisture was gone and the bones had hardened.

The skeleton consisted of two hind legs, spine, pelvis, skull, and neck. A local craftsman carved the lost fragments of the right horn from wood. Stakhanov was afraid to drill the fragile bones, therefore, he mounted the entire skeleton on a metal framework and tied the antlers to the ceiling.

In the summer of the following year, Stakhanov went to look for the missing bones, by searching in the stream and the bed of the rill. Lucky enough he found the right humerus, two phalanges, the bones of the front leg, and a vertebra.

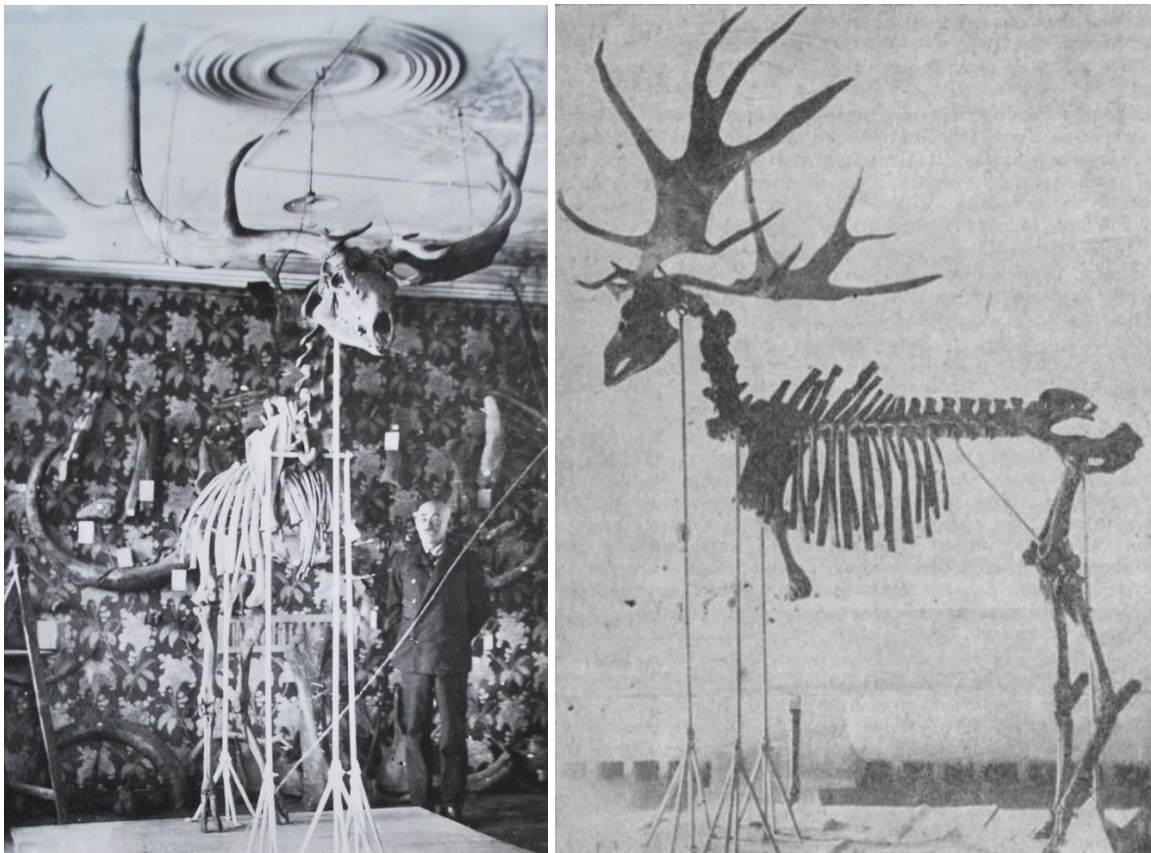


Figure 6

On the left: the skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* mounted by P.P. Stakhanov (next to it), on display at the Local History Museum of Sapozhek circa 1926. The image is the article "[Gigantskiy olen Megaloceros](#)" by Anton Nelikhov
On the right: a photograph from an article by Professor M.V. Pavlova "Discovery of a skeleton of Giant Deer in Ryaz province near the town of Sapozhek", published in 1929

When done, he informed the Paleontologic Museum in Moscow about the find and exchanged some letters with spouse-paleontologists Pavlov (Maria Vasilievna and Alexey Petrovich), who studied and described fossils of *Megaloceros giganteus* from Galkino too. The spouses visited Sapozhek in 1927 where they studied the fossil and visited the site where the fossils were found.

They were very excited, as the skeleton was preserved in very good condition and it was only the second one found in Russia to date.

Later on, this skeleton was transferred to the Paleontological Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, where it is still on exhibit today. ^[2]

The museum in Sapozhek received a plaster copy of the skeleton. Nowadays it is on display in the Kremlin Museum in Ryazan. **[double check it]**

The antlers that purchased by Stakhanov in 1898 are still on the display in the museum of Sapozhek, where they share a place with Mammoth tooth and tusks, skull of a woolly rhino and some other fossils found in the region. ^[2a]



Figure 7 The skeleton of *Megaloceros giganteus* on exhibit in Paleontologic Museum in Moscow

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Figure 8 The skull with partially preserved antlers, that was purchased by P.P. Stakhanov in 1898, at the Museum of Sapozhek.

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