

OCT 28 // 2021

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# THEfirstNEWS

"I must have been inspired" *Joseph Conrad*



## Palaeontologists reconstructing skeleton of rare prehistoric rhino reveal it was saved 'by a whisker' after builders wanted to THROW it away

HISTORY | LIFE

BLANKA KONOPKA OCTOBER 05, 2021



Initially believed to have been an example of a woolly rhinoceros, closer inspection by experts from the University of Wrocław revealed it was a specimen of the much rarer *Stephanorhinus* or Merck's rhinoceros.

*Kalbar/TFN*

The skeleton of a rare species of prehistoric rhinoceros found during a motorway construction in western Poland, was saved after palaeontologists rescued it from builders who planned on throwing it away.

The almost fully preserved skeleton of the 120,000 year-old rhinoceros, dubbed 'Stefania', (after its latin name), was found in May 2016 by the builders working on the S3 motorway near Gorzów Wielkopolski.



*Urszula Ratajczak-Skrzatek*



The almost fully preserved skeleton of the 120,000 year-old rhinoceros dubbed 'Stefania', was saved after builders went to watch a football match.

*Ryszard Połomski*

Initially believed to have been an example of a woolly rhinoceros, closer inspection by experts from the University of Wrocław revealed it was a specimen of the much rarer *Stephanorhinus* or Merck's rhinoceros.

But, as far as the road diggers were concerned the find was just a pile of old bones.







*Kalbar/TFN*



Although many of the bones from Stefania's skeleton were very well preserved, the skull required the most careful reconstruction.

*Kalbar/TFN*

Dr Krzysztof Stefaniak from the University of Wrocław who is reconstructing the skeleton told TFN: “When the skeleton was first discovered, the builders initially wanted to throw it away, not realising its importance.

“We are palaeontologists and paelontological finds don’t legally have to be secured like archaeological ones.

“The builders were about to throw the bones away, but as luck would have it, there was a football match on and they left to watch it.



Stefania is believed to have been over 35 years old and was 3 metres long, 1.8 metres high at the withers and 1.6 metres high at the rump.

*Kalbar/TFN*

“In that time, we took over the site with pneumatic drills and removed the skeleton. We managed to save it by a whisker.”

The Merck’s rhinoceros lived on the territory of today’s Poland from a period of 600-700,000 years ago until 40,000 years ago, when they became extinct.

The discovery of over 100 bones, including a full set of teeth and skull, is believed to make Stefania’s skeleton the most complete and best preserved example of the species in the world.



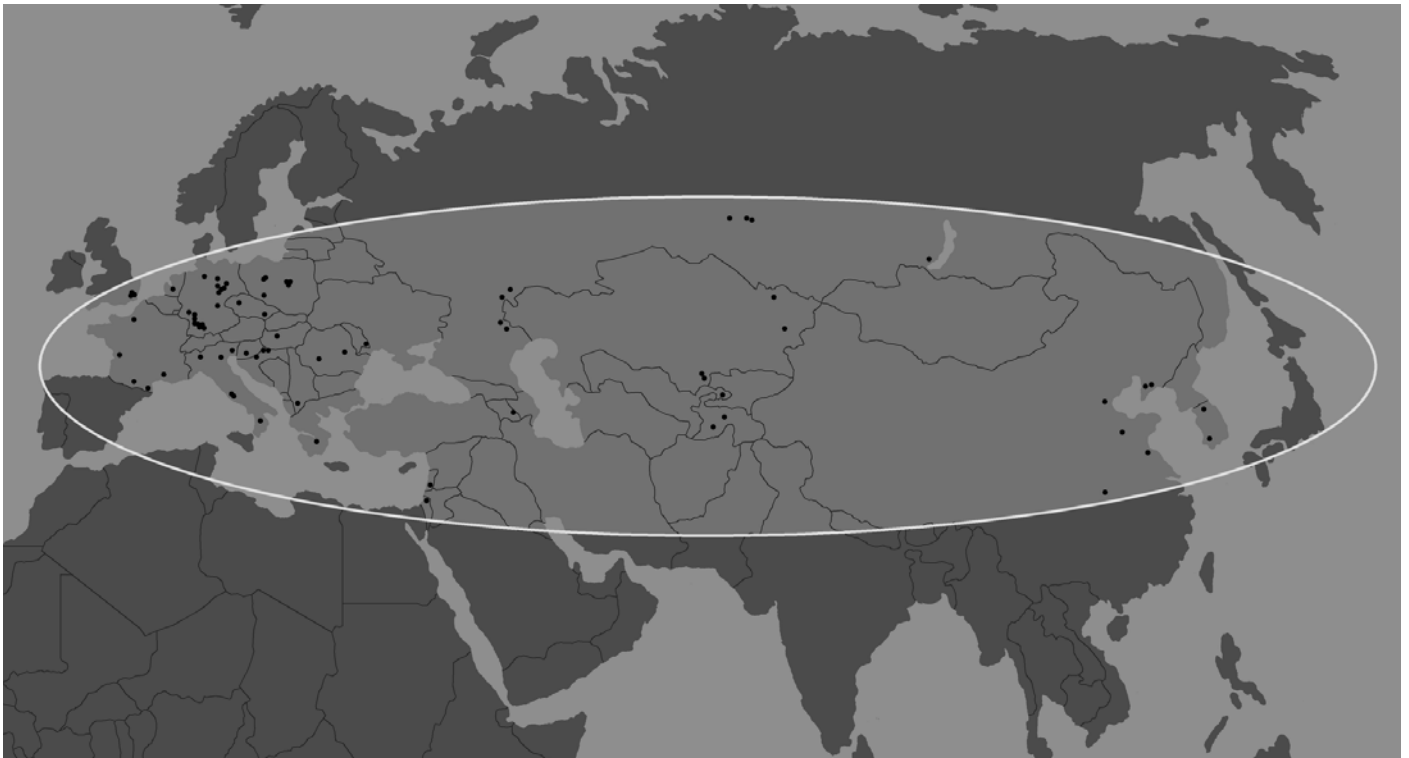
Veterinarian and paleontologist Adam Kotowski (L) and palaeontologist Dr Krzysztof Stefaniak have been reconstructing the rhino's skeleton.

*Kalbar/TFN*

In a video released by the University of Wrocław on World Rhino Day, Dr Stefaniak, said: “Earlier, it was believed that this species of rhinoceros mainly fed on grass. It turned out that our Stefania lived in forests and also fed on shoots. Another species of rhinoceros, the woolly rhino, for example fed on leaves.”

The new details of Stefania's diet were confirmed after specimens of her teeth were sent to the Natural History Museum in London.

Although many of the bones from Stefania's skeleton were very well preserved, the skull required the most careful reconstruction and the scientists employed the help of a sculptor, Wojciech Ilenda, to help with this most delicate elements.



The Merck's rhinoceros lived on the territory of today's Poland from a period of 600-700,000 years ago until 40,000 years ago, when they became extinct.

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Adam Kotowski, a veterinarian and paleontologist, and one of the team working on the reconstruction said in the same video: “We are in the final stages of putting Stefania back on her feet.

“All the bones – after a very tedious and long process – have been finally cleaned, prepared and conserved. Some bones were perfectly preserved, but there are also delicate elements, like for example the skull.

“We are now trying to reconstruct it. We invited an artist-sculptor to collaborate with us, who will help us to connect the elements into one whole. The skull was very badly deformed, crushed.”





Alongside a reconstruction of the original skeleton, the team is using a 3D printer which they will be using to gradually print all of the bones to have a copy of the full skeleton alongside the reconstructed original.

*Kalbar/TFN*

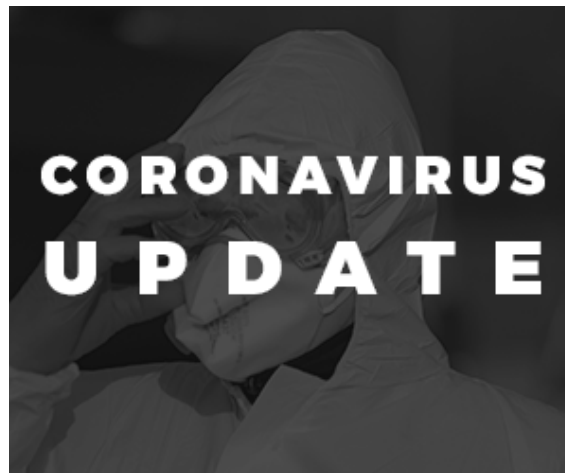
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Though it is not yet confirmed where the original full sized skeleton and its copy will be displayed, possible locations being considered include prominent locations at the University of Wrocław and Gorzów Wielkopolski, where the original was found.

TAGS: DISCOVERY, WROCLAW, MOTORWAY, WROCŁAW, UNIVERSITY OF WROCŁAW, PALEONTOLOGY, SKELETON, RECONSTRUCTION, RHINO, CONSERVATION, SCIENTISTS, RHINOCEROS, STEFANIA, GORZÓW WIELKOPOLSKI, KRZYSZTOF STEFANIAK, WOJCIECH IŁENDA, ADAM KOTOWSKI, FOSSIL , NATURAL HISTORY , PREHISTORIC , EXTINCT , RARE , SPECIES

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SPORT | LIFE

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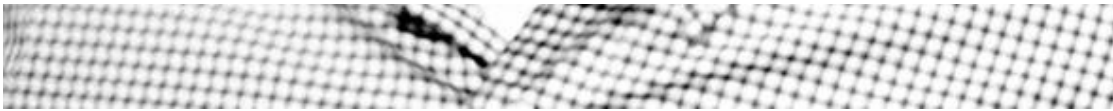
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