

Winter 2020

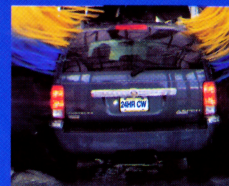
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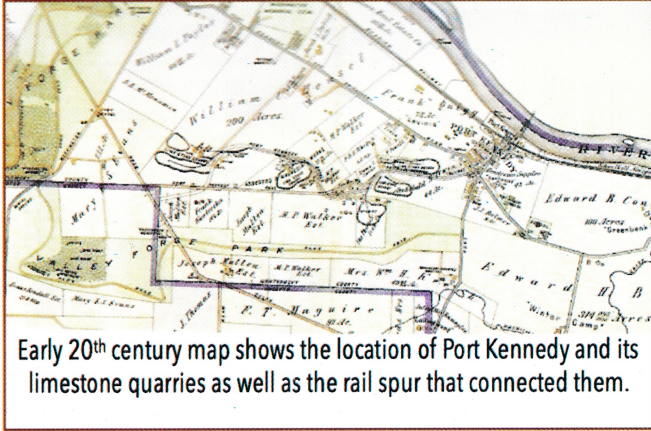
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*Preserving Upper Merion's Past
To Enlighten Its Future*

PORT KENNEDY BONE CAVE

*The following is based on an article in the Summer 2019 issue of the King of Prussia Gazette, **The Lost Bone Cave of Port Kennedy**. All society members receive a copy of the Gazette quarterly via post. Please help us preserve, interpret and share the history of our community - become a member today!*



Early 20th century map shows the location of Port Kennedy and its limestone quarries as well as the rail spur that connected them.

One of the strangest, most astonishing and important fossil finds of the Great Ice Age was discovered within the borders of today's Valley Forge National Park.

In 1846, during excavations at a Limestone quarry near the Village of Port Kennedy in Upper Merion Township the first cave was uncovered. It consisted of several chambers. The largest rivaled other more famous area caverns with stalactites and stalagmites in proliferation.

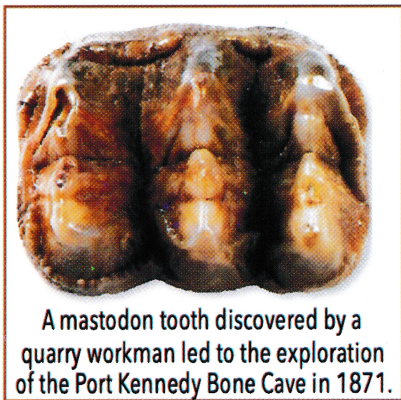
The following year the Great Valley Brass Band held a concert in the largest chamber attended by hundreds of people.

Eventually, the quarry owner, decided the cavern was not of commercial value and destroyed it, caving in the roof and walls and continuing with his quarry operations.

Two dozen years later in 1870 the second cavern was unearth. This time quarry workers found an artifact that turned out to be the portion of a skull of a mastodon and eventually a large quantity of prehistoric remains were unearthed.

Then a third cave, which was a fissure in the floor of the second cave that became known as The Port Kennedy Bone Cave, was uncovered. It was a sinkhole that had long ago been briefly open to the surface. More than 1200 fossils, some 48 animal and 14 plant species, several of which were not found anywhere else on earth, were collected during excavations that occurred over the course of several months.

Only a few insects and plants were collected, and many fragmentary specimens went ignored. The variety of species found was evidence that the prehistoric climate was warm. The landscape of ancient Upper Merion was thickly wooded by oaks, beech, and hickory trees.



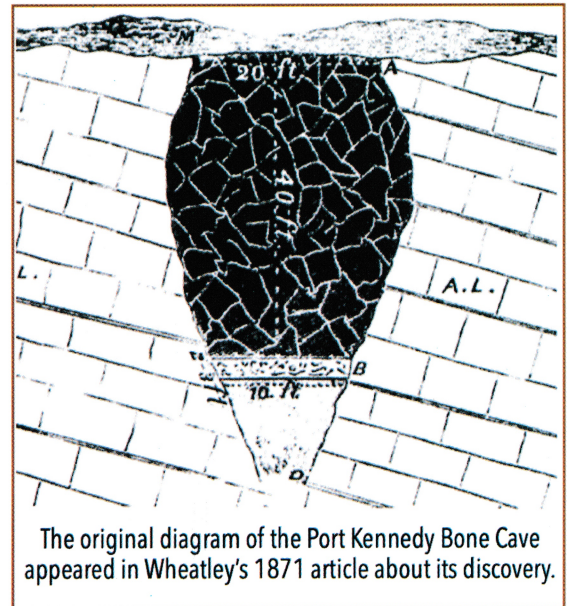
A mastodon tooth discovered by a quarry workman led to the exploration of the Port Kennedy Bone Cave in 1871.

Groundwater in the area severely hampered fossil recovery efforts and the Port Kennedy Bone Cave was never completely excavated.

Then during the early 1900s the quarry was filled with waste from the nearby Ehret Magnesium Manufacturing Company.

Over the decades the prehistoric cave was overgrown and largely forgotten by the public. In 2006 the location was rediscovered and the presence of the sinkhole was confirmed using modern technology.

Today, the majority of the excavated fossils are housed at the Drexel University Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.



The original diagram of the Port Kennedy Bone Cave appeared in Wheatley's 1871 article about its discovery.

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