



# West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey

## Colloquium Series

Presenting

**E. Ray Garton**

Curator, WVGES Museum

Date: **Monday April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

Place: **Large Conference Room**

Presentation: **Begins at Noon**

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## *Megalonyx jeffersonii* "Jefferson's giant claw"

### the new West Virginia State Fossil



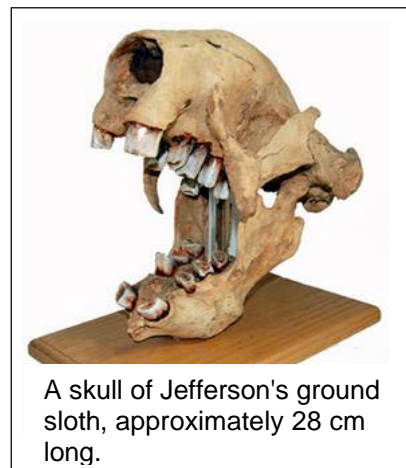
**Ground Sloth Claws, *Megalonyx jeffersonii***, Class: Mammalia, Age: Pleistocene, Haynes Cave, Monroe County, WV, 260 mm x 150 mm, Owner: WVGES (donated by Ray Garton), Notes: This is the specimen described by Thomas Jefferson in 1799.

Workers mining saltpeter in a Monroe County cave discovered fossil bones in 1797 that eventually became the property of President Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson thought they belonged to a large prehistoric lion, but they were later identified as a Pleistocene ground sloth. Although Thomas Jefferson misidentified the fossil, he is credited for the discovery that bears his name. The bones were recently Carbon dated and found to be over 38,000 years old.

*Megalonyx* has been found in two Monroe County caves, a Pendleton County cave and a Greenbrier County cave. *Megalonyx*

*jeffersonii* also has been uncovered on the coastal shelf off New Jersey as well as in California and Washington.

Ray Garton, curator of the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey Museum, was the main force behind making *Megalonyx jeffersonii* the official state fossil. Ray worked with lawmakers for two legislative sessions to finally get the resolution passed in March 2008.



A skull of Jefferson's ground sloth, approximately 28 cm long.

*Ray will tell us all about it on April 14<sup>th</sup>!*