

Bone of contention resolved

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Storage center, fossil hunters to coexist

BY TERRI MORGAN
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Despite giving a developer the go-ahead to build a storage facility on a well-known fossil site, the Scotts Valley City Council left the door open this week for amateur paleontologists to pursue their hobby on a part of the property known as "Shark's Tooth Hill."

The decision paves the way for construction of an 82,000-square-foot mini-storage center on the former quarry containing a treasure trove of 12 million-year-old fossils, on the condition that the developer explore the feasibility of donating a portion of the property for educational purposes.

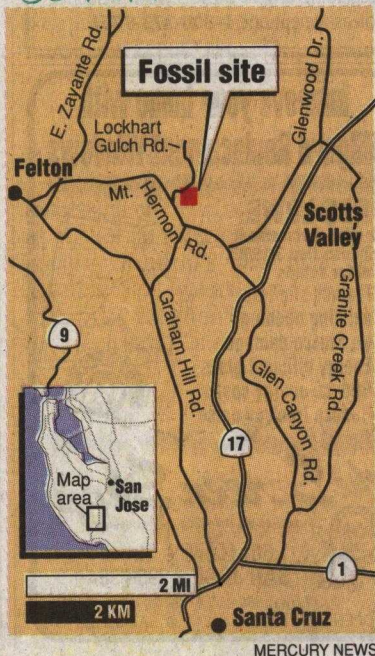
The developer, Howard Norton, plans to use about one-third of the

12.5-acre site off Lockhart Gulch Road to house 798 mini-storage lockers and has offered to donate the remainder of the land — along with the liability — to the city or a non-profit organization for educational purposes. While many details remain to be worked out, city officials were cautiously optimistic part of the site may be used for supervised fossil hunting in the future.

"That sort of accommodation is within reach for both groups," Johnson said. It would allow "access for the kids with the condition that anyone who uses that site must have a paleontological expert looking over their shoulder."

For more than 40 years, paleontologists, school groups and amateur

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Scotts Valley OKs mini-storage center

FOSSIL

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fossil hunters have been visiting the privately owned site to search for the fossilized remains of marine mammals that were deposited when the region was under the Pacific Ocean 9 million to 12 million years ago. Last fall, publicity about the development plans led to an increase in trespassing on the former quarry.

To prevent overzealous fossil hunters from exacerbating erosion on the steep hillsides bordering two sides of the property, the owner enclosed the site with cyclone fencing and posted 32 "No Trespassing" signs. Noting that about 20 years ago a young fossil hunter was paralyzed on the site after the hillside collapsed on him, developer Norton said he couldn't afford to assume the liability for injuries suffered by unauthorized visitors. While Norton

has already agreed to allow limited access to professional paleontologists, plans to allow amateur access are still in the early discussion phase.

The president of the Monterey Bay Paleontological Society, who said he has broached the subject with representatives from two such organizations, offered to assist city officials in their efforts to acquire part of the former quarry or another site for scientific and educational uses.

Amateur fossil hunters may have another option available to them in the future.

Sympathetic to the numerous fossil hunters who have pleaded their case to the city in recent months, Mayor Stephany Aguilar has been pursuing other fossil-site options. Discussions are progressing favorably with the owner of another local sand quarry where fossils also have been found, Aguilar said.