

Object
of the
month

mar
2018

Museum
Atrium

Megaloceros giganteus

“On that late Friday afternoon we finished the task of removing the Collections of Palaeontology from what had been until then its room in the Museum’s exhibition area. That work would allow the installation of a new exhibition. One of the necessary tasks was to remove the fossil skeleton of the *Megaloceros giganteus*, a giant deer specimen that dominated the room which was therefore informally known as the “Deer Hall”. The head, with its hantlers of about 3 meters in wingspan, did not pass through the door except turned on its side. So the skull was detached and stored in an adjoining room, carefully conditioned. The body was moved to another place far away from the Palaeontology Room.

When the task that took some months was over, we celebrated. We were far to imagine that in that night and in the next dawn - March 18, 1978 - a fire would destroy much of the Museum. As a result of the different location of the two parts of the *Megaloceros* fossil, the head was completely destroyed and the body survived. Even without a head, the deer remained a symbol of what had happened. “Forty years after the fire, it was possible to acquire a replica of a *Megaloceros* skull equivalent in size to the original one belonging to the Museum” collections. The deer can continue to go as a symbol. Nowadays related to the reconstruction process developed.

Megaloceros giganteus (Blumenbach, 1799)

This species is also known as the giant deer of Ireland because, since the 16th century, hundreds of these fossils have been referred to in bogs in Ireland dating to about 12,000 years ago. It is in fact the biggest deer that ever existed: 2,10 meters tall at the shoulders and 3 meters of wingspan in the antlers. However, its area of distribution has turned out to be much more extensive: from Ireland to Siberia and China.

In Ireland they will have been extinct some 11 000 years ago, but recent findings confirm their existence still about 7,700 years ago in Siberia. The specimen of the MUHNAC collection comes from Ireland and was purchased in London, on the occasion of the International Congress of Geology in 1888, by Paul Choffat, one of the founding fathers of modern Portuguese geology.



Demonstrative illustration of the reconstitution of *Megaloceros giganteus* from its skeleton

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