

Meet the Neighbors?

Galapagos Islands located near the equator west of Ecuador and Fillmore, Illinois located in the Great Lakes region of the United States of America would seem to have little in common — except the giant tortoise. In May 1980, a research team of the Illinois State Museum was preparing to excavate mastodont (*Mammut americanum*) remains when team member Leo Carson Davis reached down to the gravel bar he was standing on and picked up what appeared to be a fragment of a plastron from a giant tortoise. Additional pieces were recovered and they were verified to be the remains of a young giant tortoise, *Hesperotestudo crassiscutata*. Fillmore, Illinois in Montgomery County is the farthest north point where remains of Ice Age giant tortoise have been documented.



Giant tortoises photographed in the Caldera of Alcedo on Isabela Island in the Galapagos. From an article entitled Yesterday's Beasts, by Tui De Roy Moore (International Wildlife volume 6, number 5, September-October 1978).

The caption to the photo is: "Like some prehistoric land, the Caldera of Alcedo erupts with life after the rains come. Temporary ponds fill, and tortoises gather to drink, wallow, graze and mate."

The giant tortoise discovery specimen, a partial left xiphiplastron, found in May 1980 by Dr. Leo Carson Davis. In this view, the anterior is to the bottom and posterior is to the top. The tortoise is the extinct species *Hesperotestudo crassiscutata*.



The fossil represents a juvenile tortoise, perhaps 18 years of age at its death. Today's giant tortoises are known live for up to 250 years and the extinct species from Hopwood Farm may have as well.

