



EARLY ELEPHANTS

This large footprint was made by an early relative of living elephants. You can see the toe and pad impressions. Big as they are, elephants actually walk on the tips of their toes! This footprint fossil is from a species (*proboscidean*) that existed from 4 million to 500,000 years ago. The fossil was found in Nevada and is on long-term loan from the **California Academy of Sciences**. It formed when, a few million years ago, an early elephant relative walked through the mud and left its footprints behind. Shortly afterwards, the mud was buried (like by a nearby landslide or ash fall), and the footprints were covered and preserved. As the mud layer was further buried over time, it hardened into mudstone. Later, the deep rocks of the region uplifted, erosion removed overlying rocks, and the hardened fossil imprints were exposed at Earth's surface.

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