



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Scientists in Greece Find 20-Million-Year-Old Tree

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Greek scientists on the volcanic island of Lesbos say they have found a 20-million-year-old **fossilized** tree.

The rare find was discovered during roadwork near an ancient forest on the eastern Mediterranean island. The area was **petrified** millions of years ago.

Digging, or excavating, at the site began in 1995. It is the first tree in the area to be found in such good condition complete with **branches** and roots, said Professor Nikos Zouros. He is with the Museum of Natural History of the Petrified Forest of Lesbos.

The roots and branches of the tree were still unbroken after 20 million years. Zouros said it was a special find -- one that he had never seen before.

“It is a **unique** find,” he said. “[It] is **preserved** in excellent condition. And from studying the fossilized wood we will be able to identify the type of plant it comes from.”

The 15,000-hectare petrified forest of Lesbos is a protected site of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO. The forest is the result of a volcanic **eruption** 20 million years ago. **Lava** from the volcano covered the island’s ecosystem, which at that time was **subtropical** forest.

The fossilized tree is about 19 meters long. It was preserved by heavy amounts of volcanic ash after it fell. A large number of fruit tree leaves also were found nearby. The trees and animal bones found in the same general area add to the history and understanding of life that once existed there.

“During the excavations, the various forests that existed between 17 and 20 million years ago on Lesbos are being uncovered,” said Zouros. He and his team plan to rebuild the “ecosystem that existed during that period.”

For further study, he and his team transported the tree from the site using a special support system and metal structure.

I'm Anna Matteo.

Elias Marcou reported this story for Reuters news agency. Anna Matteo adapted it for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn edited it.

Words in This Story

fossil – *n.* a trace or print or the remains of a plant or animal of a past age preserved in earth or rock : **fossilized** – *adj.* having been changed into a fossil

petrified – *adj.* used to describe something (such as wood) that has slowly changed into stone or a substance like stone over a very long period of time

branch – *n.* a part of a tree that grows out from the trunk

unique – *adj.* very special or unusual

preserved – *v.* to keep alive, intact, or free from decay

lava – *n.* molten rock that issues from a volcano or from a fissure in the surface of a planet (such as earth) or moon

eruption – *n.* the bursting out of material from a volcano

subtropical – *adj.* of, relating to, or being the regions bordering on the tropical zone

