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7. We found this giant. A 2.1m (7 ft) cross section exposed would imply it's up to 10m (30 ft) around.

A little more hard work reveals a real monster!



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8. Excavating a vertical section of this enormous stump showed the fossil extended downwards through thousands of thin layers of coal, sand and mud with at least one root projecting out the right side.



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9. Does the root imply this tree grew here? A quick check of strata around the root, reveals layers have not been disturbed by the root. The layers go right up against the root with layers intact. Present day tree roots growing into strata will buckle layers as they penetrate and expand.



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10. Strata surrounding the root are full of leaf fossils: sequoia, alder, elm, oak, magnolia. The most likely identity of the huge tree at this point is Giant Sequoia - but no giant sequoias grow in Alaska today! They grow in the warmer foothills of California and Oregon, but not in swamps!

11. WHAT do you make of the observations so far? The easiest conclusions are:

A. The fossil trees are bigger on average than present day trees in Alaska. Alaskan trees today grow only during 12 weeks of Summer. The rest of the year they are snow covered. The implication: whatever environment these fossil trees came from, was better than present day Alaska.

B. The trees were buried in layers of sand, mud and silt, which turned to sandstone, mudstone and siltstone. The area had definitely been formed by water with a huge

source of sediment. The presence of bark which had turned to coal (even around horizontal trees not in coal seams) would imply that what is needed to form coal is the right starting material, not the presence of a swamp. Bark is obviously a good coal starting material, while the wood inside the trees was turned to stone - not coal.

NOW - how do you determine if these trees grew here or were washed in? Your answer will determine whether you conclude these strata formed quickly or represent millions of years.

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