

Was this 18,000-year-old frozen puppy the ancestor of wolves, dogs or both?

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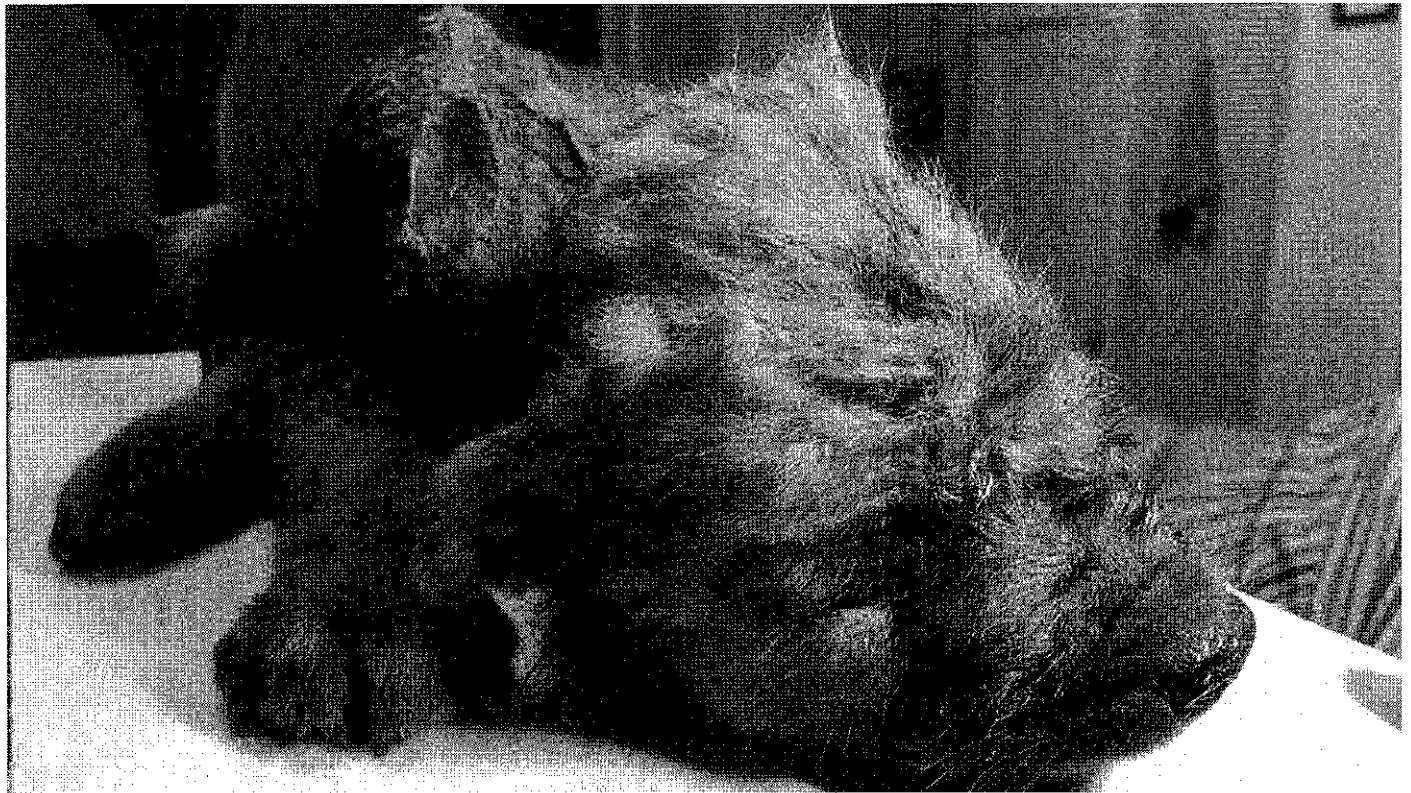


Image 1. Dogor, the 18,000-year-old puppy found in permafrost in the Russia's Far East, on display September 24, 2018, at the Yakutsk's Mammoth Museum, Russia. Russian scientists revealed the unique prehistoric canine to the public on December 2, 2019. Photo by: Sergei Fyodorov/Yakutsk Mammoth Museum via AP Photo by: Sergei Fyodorov/Yakutsk Mammoth Museum via AP

Meet Dogor, an 18,000-year-old pup. Dogor was found deep in the frozen ground of Russia's Siberia region. Siberia is in northern Asia. "Dogor" means "friend" in the Yakut language spoken in parts of Russia. The remains of the pup from the past are confusing scientists. Their tests show it's not a wolf or a dog. This means it could be a rare animal that came before both.

North-Eastern Federal University is located in the Russian city of Yakutsk. Scientists there say locals found the pup's remains in the summer of 2018. The pup was in a frozen lump of ground near the Indigirka River. Parts of the animal are very well-preserved, including its head, nose, whiskers and mouth. It still had its baby teeth when it died. Experts suggest the animal was just 2 months old when it died. They do not know the cause of death.

The pup is very well-preserved. Scientists at the Center for Palaeogenetics in Sweden were able to study the DNA of the animal. Paleogenetics is the study of the past through remains like DNA.

DNA is the material that contains the information that tells the body how to grow and work. It is the body's instruction manual.

Scientists used the pup's rib bone to study its DNA. The results found that Dogor was male. There was one thing the DNA couldn't tell them, though. It was unclear whether he was a dog or a wolf.

Dogs And Wolves Share An Ancestor

"It's normally relatively easy to tell the difference between the two," David Stanton said. He is a scientist at the Centre for Palaeogenetics. "The fact that we can't, might suggest that it's from a population that was ancestral to both."

Dogor could turn out to be an early dog, an early wolf or an ancestor of both. The find is exciting either way. Dogor comes from an interesting time in history. It was a time when wolf species were dying out. Early dogs were beginning to show up.

Stanton said that as you go back in time, it gets harder to tell dogs and wolves apart. That's because they share the same ancestor.

The history of how and when dogs split from wolves is not fully known. Scientists agree that modern gray wolves and dogs split from a common ancestor. They mostly believe it happened about 15,000 to 40,000 years ago. However, how dogs became dogs is not agreed on. Some studies suggest dogs were tamed by humans once. Other studies have found dogs were tamed more than once. Exactly where in the world wild dogs became man's best friend is also an open question. The human-animal friendship has been traced to Mongolia, China and Europe.



Frozen Ground In Siberia Is Thawing

Scientists do not agree about how dogs paired with people. Some suspect humans took wolf pups and actively tamed them. Others suggest that friendlier wolves tamed themselves. They may have hung out near humans to eat their leftover food.

Dogor's DNA could help solve these mysteries. The team plans to do a third round of DNA testing. This round may help find Dogor's place in the dog family tree.

It's also possible that scientists may soon have more samples to work with. Sergei Fyodorov is a scientist at North-Eastern Federal University. Fyodorov said that climate change is affecting Siberia's frozen ground. It is starting to warm up. This means people are finding more and more creatures from long ago. In 2016, a 12,400-year-old puppy that still had its brain, heart, lungs and stomach in place was found near the same region as Dogor in the village of Tumat.

If Dogor is indeed a dog, that would make him the oldest ever found.