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Natural History - Worlds oldest forest identified from fossils

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Researchers have classified an area of land in an abandoned sandstone quarry in Cairo, New York as the remains of the world's oldest forests.

Researchers from the University of Cardiff, New York State Museum and Binghamton University identified these forests to be 386 million years old beating a neighbouring old forest site in Giloba by at least two million years.

The site was first stumbled upon almost 10 years ago. Since then the research team has already identified 3,000 square meters of this devonian forest. Devonian period was the time when trees first appeared on the planet changing the earth's ecosystem including atmospheric CO_2 change.

Fossils of two types of tree have been identified. Primitive tree-fern-like plants without flat green leaves called cladoxylopsids and Archaeopteris, which had a conifer-like woody trunk and frond-like branches with flat green leaves. This was also the first leafy tree of this planet.

The roots of the Archaeopteris are spectacular and extensive with some roots spanning almost 11 meters. The researchers believe that the forest to which these fossils belong once stretched from NEw York to Pennsylvania. The researchers believe that this forest may have been wiped off by floods as they have also found fossilised fish on the surface of the quarry.

This study published in the journal *Current Biology* throws new light on the evolution of trees and the transformative role they played in shaping the world we live in today.

Source:https://www.downtoearth.org.in/video/forests/natural-history-world-s-oldest-forest-identified-from-fossils-68537