NEW MIDDLE CENOZOIC MAMMALS FROM THE LAGUNA DEL LAJA REGION (CURA MALLÍN FORMATION, SOUTH CENTRAL CHILE)

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Widespread fossils in volcaniclastic sediments of the Andean Main Range in central Chile have significantly advanced our understanding of South American mammal evolution. Ensuing paleontological discoveries have also provided key geochronologic information for deciphering the complex tectonic history of this segment of the Cordillera.

Our previous work in this region largely has been within the Abanico Fm. from ~33.5-35.3° S. Here we report discoveries in strata likely laterally equivalent to this unit near Laguna del Laja (37.5° S), a region previously unexplored paleontologically. Well-preserved specimens have been recovered within three very distinct sections in both members of the Cura-Mallín Fm. across a wide area SE of the lake. Although the beautifully exposed Cenozoic strata (previously thought to span the Eocene-Miocene) are spectacularly folded and faulted (obscuring relationships between sections), the fossils show little indication of significant temporal differences. The entire sequence is thus probably temporally short and roughly middle Miocene in age (based on the new fossils). Samples from throughout the section currently being processed for 40Ar/39Ar analysis will provide additional independent chronologic information.

Fossils have been recovered from ~500m of stratigraphic section at Cerro Los Pinos, the upper two-thirds of which are incorporated into a sweeping S-fold. Notable finds include partial lagostomine chinchillid crania, an echimyid closely resembling *Acarechimys*, and teeth of a large, enigmatic rodent. From a tight anticline farther east we recovered notoungulate skulls including a hegetotheriine resembling *Hegetotherium* and an interatheriine resembling *Protypotherium*, a sparassodont, plus several other taxa. Just above these horizons, within strata mapped as Trapa Trapa Fm., we recovered lower jaws of a large rodent and a small-bodied mammal with procumbent and splayed anterior teeth. Various rodents and a pachyrukhine skull comparing closely with *Paedotherium minor* occur in gently dipping strata (Cura-Mallín Fm.) immediately west of the second section.