April 2014

Raptor Review

From The Director
By Dr. Kenneth Carpenter

The first quarter of the year has already been a busy one for the staff. Chief among our accomplishments is a preliminary master plan for the exhibits. Basically, we are planning a total renovation in order to tell the history of life from the single-celled form fossils in 1.7 billion year-old rocks in the Uinta Mountains, to the 1776 first contact between Europeans and Indians in Utah. For the paleontology staff, it means ramping up the collecting program to fill-in the huge gaps in the collections. Your continued membership and donations will make your museum THE premiere educational and tourist site in eastern Utah.

Progress on the Stegosaurus skeleton mount is nearing the halfway point. Chief Preparator Carrie Herbel, aided by volunteer Ralph Esca milla may have the mount finished by next newsletter. You can watch progress at the museum’s Facebook page.

The “What Is Paleontology?” exhibit stalled for a variety of reasons that piled on top one another, but has now resumed. Hopefully it will open in time for Prehistoric Week in early May.

The “What Is Paleontology” exhibit will compliment the existing “What is Archaeology” exhibit.

We have already begun planning events, including some lectures by our archaeologist Tim Riley and by me. Watch for announcements from my administrative assistant, Claire Bennett.

Ken

Inside This Edition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castle Country Cultures</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Shop</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bones Uncovered...</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Exhibits</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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While this incredibly mild winter has everyone at the Museum itching for the upcoming field season, there is still a lot of action going on inside the Hall of Archaeology.

Much of the attention of the exhibit design committee has shifted to a “What is Paleontology?” partner exhibit to the “What is Archaeology?” exhibit unveiled last year in the entrance of the Hall of Archaeology. However, two small archaeology exhibits will be opening in the coming months. The first exhibit will complement the revised Ice Age exhibit and focus on what we know about the biology and origins of the PaleoIndians who colonized this continent at the end of the Ice Age. This is particularly relevant in light of the recent ancient DNA analysis of the only known Clovis-aged skeleton, Anzick boy from Montana. This exhibit will also feature a cast of the Kennewick man skull, a subject of much research, debate and legal controversy since the remains were discovered in 1996. The second new exhibit will feature the Uinta Grayware cooking pot recovered in Nine Mile Canyon last Spring. While this pot has been described in a previous Castle Country Cultures edition, it has yet to be placed on display. Small changes to existing exhibits continue to be made throughout the hall.

In late April, I will be attending the 79th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Austin, Texas. I have been invited by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado, formerly of Utah State University and currently at the University of Oklahoma, to participate in a symposium on incised stones. These portable art forms are something of an enigma in the archaeological record, recovered in secure contexts from the Archaic Period but also observed ethnographically among Shoshone women. My presentation will focus on a large collection of these objects recovered by private individuals in western Utah.

I have microscopically compared the incisions on these stones to both collections from Hogup Cave and Swallow Shelter, housed at the Natural History Museum of Utah, and experimental replicas I created with both stone and metal tools. This data helps authenticate this collection with an unsecured archaeological association. I am looking forward to the rest of the symposium and several other sessions focused on the archaeology of Utah.

Family Day, May 3rd, will be one of the events occurring at the Museum for Utah Archaeology Week. This free admission day will feature hands-on activities from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. If you are interested in volunteering for this, please send me an email. We will also have a public lecture focused on Fremont Artistry on Tuesday, May 5th. On May 17th, I will be leading the museum members-only Huntington Canyon tour that got washed out twice last year. We will be tracing the human occupation of this canyon from the historic period back to the Ice Age. Please RSVP with Claire Bennett if you would like to come along on this trip through time. Finally, the Castle Valley chapter of the Utah Statewide Archaeological Society will be hosting the statewide annual convention here in Price, June 6th-8th. This avocational group does a great job promoting and protecting archaeological resources across the state of Utah and they would love to have you join them. Details can be found on their website.

Tim
Memberships

On March 21st, museum members attended the members-only gallery opening for “Timeless: Art by Charles J. Johnston”. The show will run March 22nd through April 18th. Charles shows the wonder and beauty of landscapes in the Southwest, West, and Alaska through mixed media and painting. He was honored as Artist in Resident for the Grand Canyon National Park – North Rim in 2007 and has been exhibited in Moab, Salt Lake City, Springville, Oregon, Minnesota, and Alaska.

Members are encouraged to attend the members-only field trip to Huntington Canyon on May 17th with our Curator of Archaeology Dr. Tim Riley to explore several prehistoric areas in the canyon, including where the Huntington Mammoth was discovered.

The Leschin family renewed their membership at the Allosaurus Membership level for the year. We thank them for their continued support of the Prehistoric Museum!

Members still have the benefit of free admission to the Museum of Moab through a membership partnership. Simply show your valid Prehistoric Museum membership card to enter the Museum of Moab at no charge.

Memberships may now be processed online at http://usueastern.edu/museum/involved/memberships.htm. If you have any questions, about your membership, please contact Claire Bennett by phone at 435-613-5755, email at claire.bennett@usu.edu, or in person.

Claire

Gift Shop

The gift shop is offering some incredible specials such as 50% off select toys & books and a $1.00 section. Stop by and check out our great sales and support the museum!

The gift shop is adding exciting, educational items. Geoworld Eduproducts is a line of educational games and toys. It is the brainchild of Dr. Stefano Piccini, geologist and paleontologist, who puts his 20 years of experience and his passion for nature in the design of all Geoworld toys.

Budding geologists will love the Geoworld Mining Kit - Geodes. Use the hammer and chisel to uncover the geodes buried in the gypsum block and break open the geodes to see what is inside. The magnifying glass helps kids examine their specimens, and the booklet explains what a geode is. This set is a wonderful introduction to the fascinating world of geology.

Young paleontologists will love this scientifically detailed replica of Utahraptor. Fossil remains tell scientists this half-ton carnivorous dinosaur may have been the largest raptor that ever lived. Huge curved claws on its hind feet have been at least a foot long. Learn by reading the fascinating Fact Card included with the model.

The Geoworld Ice Age Excavation Kit - Mammoth Skeleton, your children can uncover and assemble a scientifically accurate replica to display with pride. Kids will feel the thrill experienced by grown-up paleontologists, as they excavate the Wooly Mammoth skeleton piece-by-piece. The set also includes interesting facts about the Mammoth.

Christine K. Trease
Four months have flown by since I started at the Prehistoric Museum. What an interesting time it has been! My first project has been bringing the Stegosaurus skeleton to life, with it standing in a dynamic pose near the Allosaurus and Camptosaurus in the Jurassic Dinosaur exhibit. So far, I’m pleased at the progress of the Stegosaurus, which was originally a bunch of bones scattered about in the Dinosaur “pit” with its pelvis stashed in the Observation Lab when I arrived last November. Since then, the pelvis and many of the scattered bones have been cleaned up, modified and mounted on a steel armature. It looks mighty fine, if I don't say so myself! I've modified and repaired many of the bones – both real and cast – to look more scientifically accurate. As of this writing, we are modifying the ribs and hope to attach these on the skeleton soon. This will be followed by attaching the last 2-3 feet of tail vertebrae and four spikes, attachment of the head, jaws, and plates, followed by the scapula-coracoid (shoulder girdle) and forelimbs. Last we will attached the feet, as these were also modified following both old and new research studies on this bizarre, small-brained dinosaur. The goal is to have the Stegosaurus finished by early May, just in time for school field trips and tourist visits! I could not have done this alone and want to recognize the help I have received during this project – Ralph Escamilla, a museum volunteer, has been my right-hand man on all parts of the project, and TyRee Olsen, the museum’s student assistant preparator, has also helped a day or two each week. Thanks Ralph and TyRee!!!

Other small projects are worked on when I step away from the Stegosaurus including visiting a couple of other Utah museums in order to get ideas and see what visitors enjoyed at these institutions. Based on these visits as well as earlier visits to other museums across the country, I can readily say that I am continually impressed at the quality of exhibits here at the Prehistoric Museum. I know future plans are also of very high caliber. Amazing for a museum based in tiny Price, Utah! So visit again over the next few years as we continually improve our exhibits, as there will be new things to see as well as renovated and improved older exhibits to view.

During much of March, data gathering and research has been my focus as a new project comes into view - repairing a very large, concrete dinosaur skeleton. So I have been working on a grant proposal, due March 28, asking for material and supply funds to fix the nearly 80 foot long dinosaur called Diplodocus. This concrete skeleton was donated to the Prehistoric Museum in April 2013 from the Utah Field House in Vernal. Damage to many of the casts is significant and requires repair, reconstruction, and stabilization of each bone cast so it can withstand extreme weather conditions for another 50+ years, as it will be mounted on USU Eastern campus grounds. Once funds are available, I will be looking for volunteers to help me in this monumental project. Exciting!

I am also planning several mini-field projects for the next several months. Most will be of short duration as I examine new field areas and plan future, more extensive efforts in the coming years. Specimens collected will be used in museum exhibits, as well as expanding our knowledge of other vertebrate fossils in eastern Utah. Should be fun! Paleocene and Eocene mammals are my initial focus, but can include other critters found within these mammal-bearing deposits. Anyone interested in participating, please contact me via e-mail (Carrie.Herbel@usu.edu) or call (435-613-5756). As soon as more details about these trips get solidified, I will let you know.

In early April, I am off for a the 7th Annual Fossil Preparation and Collections Conference in Salt Lake City where I will attend two days of presentations, posters, and workshops. Following this is a field trip in and around Dinosaur National Monument. I plan to bring back new ideas and methods to implement in the lab and field benefiting the Museum. Although my tenure at the Prehistoric Museum has been short, I honestly feel quite at home and thoroughly enjoy what I am doing now and look forward to working on many projects in the future.

Carrie Herbel
Greetings from the Exhibits and Education Department of your museum. Spring is just around the corner and it looks to be a little early this year. My plums and apricot are already budding out – hopefully they won’t get caught in a late freeze like last year…

A sure sign that spring is just around the corner is the diminishing demand for preschool tours and a greatly increased pace of tour bookings by area elementary schools. We have even received bookings from a couple of elementary schools located on the Wasatch Front – the word is finally getting out what a great place this is to visit. The next two months will be very busy hosting numerous school tours every week with choice dates and times filling fast.

Work continues on the sand removal project with about 25% of the job completed. Since this is a low priority project, I only work on it during otherwise slack times that seem to be less frequent today than in the past. We are currently working on the final design of the upcoming exhibit, “What is Paleontology?” It is planned as a “sister exhibit” to the “What is Archaeology?” exhibit completed in the Archaeology Hall last fall.

We have nearly finished revising the full-scale pithouse diorama, awaiting only a reproduction of a Fremont basket. To help protect all of Ken Carpenter’s hard work, I am in the process of designing and fabricating a protective railing, making use of salvaged glass from old exhibit cases, to help keep wandering children or curious adults out of the diorama.

The art exhibit “The Other Side of Utah – 2013-2014” was taken down a couple of weeks ago and we are already installing the next art exhibit. “Timeless: Artwork by Charles J. Johnston” will open to the member’s on March 21 and run through April 18, 2014. A resident of Anchorage, Alaska and Helper, Utah, Charlie has had a long and distinguished career as an artist, including being selected as Artist in Residence for the Grand Canyon National Park – North Rim in 2007.

The next art exhibit will open in early May with a new show by local artist Terry Willis with more of her wonderful landscapes. Her show will run throughout the summer months, ending in early September. Keep an eye out for information on the opening of this show in early May.

Ken Carpenter, Tim Riley, Carrie Herbel, and me have spent several days planning for new or revised exhibits to make your museum an even more exciting place to visit. Dr. Tim Riley and I were recently invited to give opening session presentations, to the Utah Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, when they met in Price at USU Eastern. My presentation, titled “Setting the Stage- Prehistoric Life in Eastern Utah” was very well received. Tim and I both repeatedly emphasized the sights that could be seen in the museum and surrounding area. Museum Director Dr. Ken Carpenter agreed to give the conventioneers a group rate, even if they came to the museum singly. Both of these strategies paid off with many of the participants visiting the museum and interacting with the staff, even resulting in a couple of fossil locality leads. All in all, it was a fun and productive couple of days.

Please take the time to visit your museum in the near future. We welcome your feedback on our new exhibits and changes in the old ones as well as ideas for new exhibits. Remember, family memberships are only $40/year and come with great benefits. They make great gifts for friends and loved ones.

Lloyd Logan
Stop by the museum and see if you can discover what this is.