

Tracks



Sam Noble Museum

SPECIAL EDITION

Vol. 29, No. 3

SAM NOBLE OKLAHOMA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY



IN THIS ISSUE

Read through stories from our archives to celebrate 30 years as the state's natural history museum.



Become a part of the legacy

To celebrate our 30th anniversary, please consider a gift to the museum's endowment fund and become a part of the Oklahoma Heritage Walkway.

Please contact Pam McIntosh, (405) 325-5020 or pjmcintosh@ou.edu, for more information.



TRACKS, SPECIAL EDITION 2017

VOLUME 29, NO. 3

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OUR MISSION

The Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma inspires minds to understand the world through collection-based research, interpretation and education.

OUR VISION

As one of the finest museums, we are at the heart of our community, collectively working to inspire understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the earth and its peoples.

TRACKS

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Entrance of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

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Aerial view of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, courtesy of Welch Creative.

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From the Director



This special edition of *Tracks* covers our second decade as the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 1997–2007. As part of our 30th year as the state’s natural history museum, we selected special stories to take you through the move into the new building, the dedication of the museum and work that went into permanent exhibits such as the *Xiphactinus audax* and the *Pentaceratops*. The openings of the Hall of the People and the Friends of the Museum Limestone Cave exhibit are also highlighted.

During this decade, the museum received its first national award for Outstanding Commitment to the Preservation and Care of Collections. *Saurophaganax maximus* was designated the State Fossil of Oklahoma in April 2000 and has stood for 17 years in “Clash of the Titans” in the Hall of Ancient Life threatening the largest known *Apatosaurus*. Both are from Oklahoma. In addition, the museum received several generous gifts, including one from Conoco for the Oklahoma Oil Pioneers Plaza, from Fred and Edith Brown to establish an endowment for Native American art and from the Whitten-Newman Foundation for developing ExplorOlogy®.

This fall’s *Tracks* will complete our overview with museum history from 2007 to the present. Other events to celebrate the anniversary include a natural history-inspired mural at the Will Rogers World Airport. The mural, ideated and painted by local artist Nick Bayer, is a gift from the museum to airport visitors and will be on display from mid-June through February 2018.

Archaeology curator Marc Levine has been doing research at the Main Plaza at Monte Alban in Oaxaca, Mexico, a Zapotec capital from 500 BCE to 850 CE. His fieldwork will be highlighted in the next issue of *Tracks*. Our mammalogy crew made two trips into the field this summer searching for the Texas kangaroo rat in southwest Oklahoma. No sightings yet of the kangaroo rat, which hasn’t been seen in Oklahoma in 45 years. Our recent invertebrates and herpetology curators, Katrina Menard and Cameron Siler, respectively, returned to the Philippines in June.

We hosted 2,016 students and guests at the 15th annual Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair in April. This remarkable program is helping preserve Native languages. Some instructors in the language fair were students in the first fair 14 years earlier! “Comets, Asteroids, Meteors: Great Balls of Fire!” and “Ugly Bugs!” exhibits have been enjoyed by thousands this summer.

I hope you enjoy these special editions of *Tracks* that will remind you of where we have been over the last 30 years. To help celebrate our 30th anniversary, please consider a gift to the museum’s Oklahoma Heritage Walkway. You and your loved ones can be a part of a very special Oklahoma building that has attracted more than 2 million visitors and preserves Oklahoma’s history. Please contact Pam McIntosh, development and communications officer, for more information.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Mares". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M." and the last name "Mares" clearly distinguishable.

Michael A. Mares, Ph.D.
Director

Big Fish Story

OMNH SUMMER 1997 VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1

About 90 million years ago fish that resembled a giant herring swam a sea that covered parts of the North American continent, including parts of Oklahoma and Texas. The fish somehow met its demise near Celina, Texas, and eventually became embedded in the rock that formed around it.

The fossilized fish, known as *Xiphactinus audax*, was excavated in 1930 by a University of Oklahoma crew led by paleontologist J. Willis Stovall. Stovall was later to become the first director of what is now the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

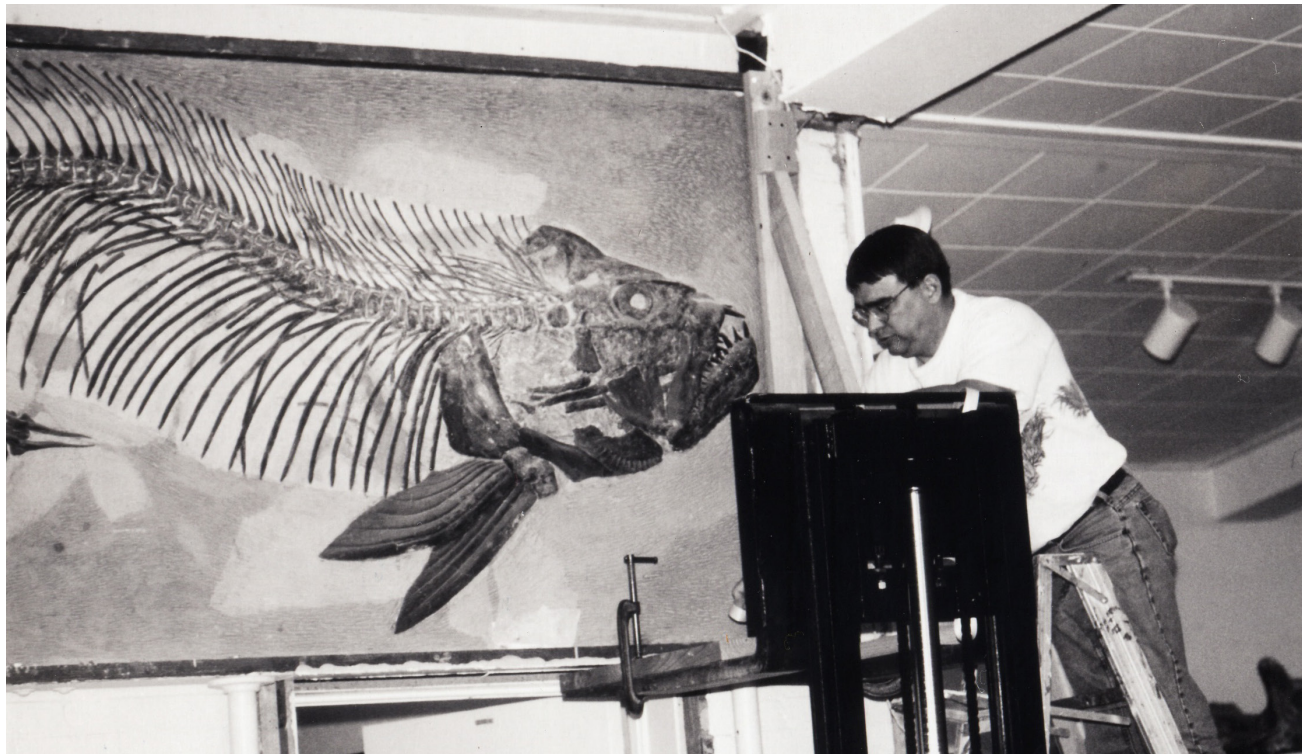
The fossil fish — preserved in the position that it was found — was originally displayed in the old Geology Building at OU, and moved to its place high on the wall of Paleontology Hall in the present museum building

after the museum's scattered displays were consolidated in one building in 1948.

Embedded in the rock in which it was found, and further weighted by surrounding plaster to square it for display, the roughly 2,100-pound "plaque" presented a unique challenge to the crew charged with removing it from its place on the wall.

Rick Whitehead, museum technician, masterminded the move. The process took one full day. Exhibit assistant Kyle Davies and museum exhibit specialist Mike Callaghan assisted, along with an OU Physical Plant forklift operator. Whitehead first attached a wooden support to the existing framework of the plaque to prevent it from tipping forward as it was lowered slowly down the wall on the tips of three forklifts.

Preparing to remove the fossil fish from display high on the wall at the OMNH, Mike Callaghan adjusts the framework supporting the 2,100-pound specimen.



Once the plaque was lowered, the crew gently placed it on four four-wheeled dollies to roll it out of the building. Whitehead wrapped a nylon strap around the plaque while it was supported by the tips of two forklifts, one on either end. Using the third forklift in the center to slowly release the tension on the strap, the crew lowered the plaque onto the dollies.

Outside, the forklifts were employed once again to raise the plaque onto the museum truck. However, moving the plaque from the truck into the Wilson Center vertebrate paleontology exhibits lab was a different matter. Because the center's old gymnasium floor was too weak to support the weight of a forklift, the crew suspended the plaque from an A-frame and attached a come-along to lift it onto the dollies and roll it into the lab.

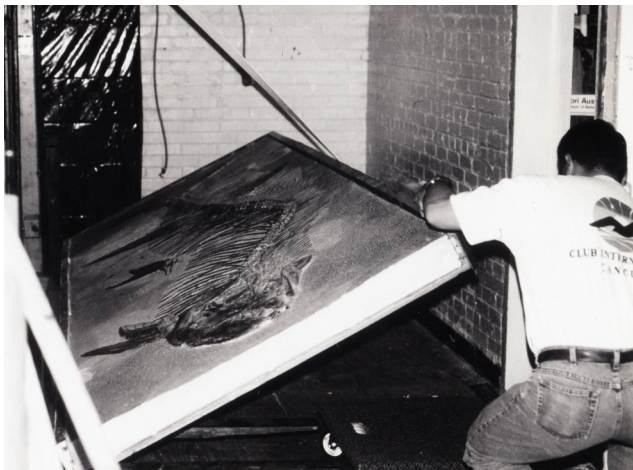
The fish will again be exhibited in the Cretaceous seaway section of the Ancient Life gallery in the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, but not before it gets a new tail!

When the fish was excavated, a tail seeming to belong to it was collected separately in the same area, and the two pieces were assumed to be associated. Fish experts later determined that the tail was not only from a different species, but that it also belonged to a different family of fish.

Wann Langston, curator emeritus of the Texas Memorial Museum in Austin, knew of the mismatched tail and helped Davies get a casting of the correct tail. Langston, a protégé of Stovall's who began his association with the museum as a young boy, has often been called upon to supply missing links to the origins of the OMNH fossil collection.

Volunteers working in the OMNH Vertebrate Paleontology Exhibits Lab already have cut away the incorrect tail and are in the process of installing the correct one.

Things are going swimmingly!



Top: Mike Callaghan eases the plaque onto the dollies with the help of three forklifts.



Bottom: Moving the plaque from the truck into the Vertebrate Paleontology Exhibits lab, Callaghan (left) gently rolls the supporting A-frame while Rick Whitehead (right) steadies the fish.

Treasures Rediscovered in Attic

OMNH FALL 1997 VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2

Braving the blistering summer heat, OMNH staff recently ventured into the attic of a 1930s-era former ROTC gunshed to sort through old storage. The experience was like delving into an unintentional time capsule.

The attic, atop the museum's bird and history collections in Building 3, was virtually inaccessible for years, sheathed in a toxic asbestos cocoon. Donning protective face masks, the move team, assisted by other OMNH staff and students, unlocked a disparate collection full of the nostalgia typical of attic treasures.

They found many old wooden packing crates — some addressed to the late George Miksch Sutton (1898–1982), former curator of birds, and others to former museum director, the late J. Willis Stovall (1891–1953). A number of the crates, along with pick axes thought to have been used by Stovall's 1930s Works Progress Administration crews, are being preserved.

One dust-covered trunk contained dishes and cookware perhaps once used for museum field expeditions. The contents were packed in 1950s newspaper.

Another crumbling suitcase contained a treasure of handwritten field notes meticulously detailing the observations of professor J.E. Hallimen of Cooperman, Oklahoma Territory. The notes, spanning a period from about 1907–1923, tell a story of the day-to-day life on Hallimen's farm — recording the weather, the flora and fauna — poetically describing his apparent solitary existence with mud daubers and a host of other insects.

Stored among oddities, such as an armless female mannequin, a baby's highchair and a splintered plaster figure of the Greek goddess Diana, were a few oversize items that finally will find a place in their respective museum collections in the new building. These have included an elephant skin, thought to be

donated in the early 1900s by "Honest" Bill Newton, owner of a circus that wintered in Ada, Oklahoma; a headless, poorly mounted alligator skeleton; and a giraffe skeleton.

Scores of excess copies of the 1958–59 Stovall Museum of Science and History Annual Report, written by acting director Ralph B. Shead, were carried from the attic, along with correspondence and ledger books dating from even earlier.

Movers from Emrick's Allied carefully removed archaeological artifacts. Artifacts from the archaeology collection stored in Cross Center had to be taken out the fourth-floor window. The archaeology collection, the largest in the museum, was moved in three phases.



World's Largest Animal Skull Finds Its Home at OMNH

OMNH FALL/WINTER 1998 VOLUME 11, NUMBERS 2 & 3

When the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History opens in spring 2000, it will offer visitors a chance to see a display that may make them think twice about calling an egomaniac “big headed.”

Exhibits staff and paleontologists at the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History have nearly completed restoration of an enormous 75-million-year-old skull. The skull belongs to *Pentaceratops sternbergii*. The specimen, with five horns instead of three, is a rare cousin of *Triceratops*. Its skull is over 10 feet long and stands more than 12 feet off the ground when mounted in the charging position with the 3-foot brow horns pointed forward.

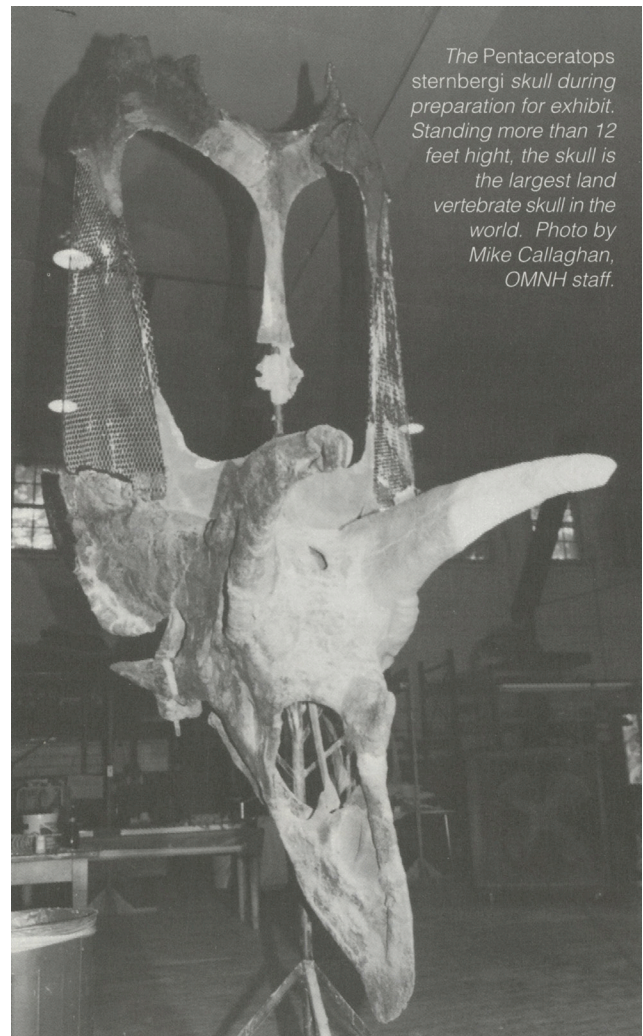
A recent study by Thomas M. Lehman, of Texas Tech University, published in the *Journal of Paleontology*, claims that the specimen at OMNH is the largest skull of any land animal in the world. The previous record was held by another horned dinosaur, *Torosaurus*, at Yale University. The Oklahoma *Pentaceratops* is about 15 percent bigger than the *Torosaurus* and, according to Lehman, 15 to 130 percent bigger than any other known *Pentaceratops* remains.

“Several other skulls of *Pentaceratops* are known, but the Oklahoma specimen is the only one that was found together with its specimen,” said Richard Cifelli, OMNH curator of vertebrate paleontology. “When restoration is complete, the entire animal will be 23 feet long.”

Ironically, the *Pentaceratops* skull is not a new find. J. Willis Stovall, and two of his students, W. Langston and D.E. Savage, collected the specimen in the Four

Corners area of New Mexico in 1941. Not realizing they had the world's largest known skull, it was stored away in its original piano-sized plaster field jacket until 1995, when Savage returned to OU to design exhibits for the Ancient Life Gallery at the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

After more than three years of painstaking work to remove the skull from the rock in which it was



The Pentaceratops sternbergii skull during preparation for exhibit. Standing more than 12 feet high, the skull is the largest land vertebrate skull in the world. Photo by Mike Callaghan, OMNH staff.



Volunteer Richard Hazlin working on the Pentaceratops skull.

encased and to restore and reconstruct the missing and damaged portions, the skull is almost ready for display. Vertebrate paleontology curator volunteer Richard Hazlin, a retired aeronautical engineer, has spent over 3,000 hours working on the skull. Professional sculptor Chris Tullius has spent over 1,000 hours restoring and reconstructing the skull.

Like living crocodiles and other reptiles, dinosaurs grew throughout their lives, so the Oklahoma specimen probably represents an old individual. But it may well have been a giant in its own right; the skull has features somewhat like those seen in human giants. For example, the horns are exceptionally large, the face is long, surface features are exaggerated and the build is very robust. The frill, a bony shield that extends back over the neck, is also huge — more than 6 feet long. The *Pentaceratops* may have used its frill to ward off threatening predators like tyrannosaurs, or to intimidate members of its own

kind. At least one specimen shows a horn wound, telling us that *Pentaceratops* engaged in some kind of combat with rival members of their own species.

“The *Pentaceratops* is a magnificent treasure,” said Michael A. Mares, OMNH director. “When this powerful animal is fully articulated, it will be the only mounted *Pentaceratops* in the world.”

Stovall, who joined the OU faculty in 1930 as an assistant professor of geology, established the natural history museum at OU in 1944 and served as its director until his death in 1952. Working with Works Progress Administration crews, Stovall collected more than 30,000 paleontological specimens for the museum, nearly 95 percent of which came from Oklahoma.

He's Big and He's Bronze

SNOMNH SPRING 1999 VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4

Imagine that you and your family are out for a pleasant stroll on a nice sunny day in the Oklahoma countryside. You are talking, sharing the tales of your day, when all of a sudden you turn the corner, and there in front of you, eating vegetation, is a mammoth! At first you think it might be a really big elephant escaped from the zoo, but then you notice that its ears are much smaller than an elephant, and its tusks are much longer than any elephant you've ever seen.

If you think that you might be a little surprised at the sight of this gigantic animal, just imagine how surprised early Oklahomans were when they came across the columbian mammoth 10,000 years ago!

The columbian mammoth migrated from Asia to North America and lived in Oklahoma. The mammoths were extremely large mammals that became extinct due to cooler climates and human hunting.

The years when mammoths roamed the earth have long passed away. But at the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, visitors will have the experience of coming face-to-face with a columbian mammoth.

Located in the Pleistocene Plaza in the new facility stands a 13-foot bronze columbian mammoth, along with a Native American family. The scene depicts perhaps the first meeting between man and beast on Oklahoma soil.

"This bronze tableau will depict a dramatic moment in our history," Michael A. Mares, director, said.

"The scene represents the great changes that have occurred in our state. People persevered and the great mammoth became extinct. We wanted visitors to be able to walk into the plaza and see something that may have taken place on the very spot where the museum sits today, over 10,000 years ago."

Well-known sculptor Fred Hoppe from Nebraska did the sculpting of the mammoth, which is now being bronzed at a foundry in Oregon. The columbian mammoth will be delivered to the museum in May, Mares said.

The bronze mammoth will be the largest one ever cast in the world. The sculpture will weigh 5,000 pounds, will stand 13 feet tall, and its tusks will be 10 feet above the ground and will be 12 feet long. The whole sculpture will be 25 feet long.

The columbian mammoth and many other exciting exhibits will be open to the public when the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History opens in spring 2000.

Conoco Makes Gift for Oklahoma Oil Pioneers Plaza

SNOMNH WINTER 1999 VOLUME 12, NUMBER 3

Conoco Inc. is making a \$300,000 gift to the University of Oklahoma to create the Conoco Oklahoma Oil Pioneers Plaza, a special outdoor educational exhibit area at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History that will tell the stories of the people who shaped the history of the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma.

“Visitors will learn about Oklahoma’s ancient past as well as the link between the state’s rich fossil heritage and its impressive reserves of oil and gas,” said OU President David L. Boren. “Now, because of this generous gift from Conoco, museum visitors also will have an opportunity to learn the extraordinary stories of the individuals who pioneered the American petroleum industry during the early days of the Oklahoma oil boom.”

Archie W. Dunham, a native Oklahoman and OU alumnus, is chairman, president and chief executive officer of Conoco.

“The oil industry in Oklahoma — and in large part the entire industry — owes its existence to the visionaries and pioneers of the late 19th and 20th centuries,” Dunham said. “Now, as we stand poised to enter the 21st century, Conoco is pleased to honor the accomplishments of these heroic leaders so that they remain alive in all of our memories.”

The oil pioneers exhibits was conceived by oilmen James K. Anderson, Robert S. Kerr Jr., Pete Klentos and James Gibbs, who believed it was important to

tell the stories of Oklahoma’s oil pioneers and how their foresight and hard work shaped the modern petroleum industry. Learning about these individuals will provide a better understanding of the petroleum industry and a unique era in American history.

The Conoco Oklahoma Oil Pioneers Plaza will be located in a prominent area outside the museum’s café and will be designed to draw visitors with attractive benches and landscaping. Each pioneer will be featured on a separate bas-relief plaque, with a brief written portrait of the individual’s life and achievements. J. Rufus Fears, who holds the G.T. and Libby Blankenship Chair in the History of Freedom at OU, will write these tributes, in consultation with the family of the individuals.

Currently, about 50 individuals have been identified as Oklahoma oil pioneers, based on research conducted primarily through OU’s Western History Collection. All included pioneers are deceased. Among those identified are Conoco Founder E.W. Marland and such well-known oilmen as J. Paul Getty, Robert S. Kerr, Dean McGee, Lloyd Noble, Frank Phillips, Waite Phillips, Harry Sinclair, W.G. Skelly and Tom B. Slick.

The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is deeply grateful to Conoco for this generous gift to the museum and to the people of Oklahoma.

Right: Call for entries poster in 2006 for the 12th International Dinosaur Art Contest and Exhibit. Graphics and sculpture entries were welcome and prizes were awarded in three age categories for amateur artists and in a professional division. The Dino Art Contest and Exhibition were made possible by the Kirkpatrick Family Fund.

Below: Members of the museum's paleontology team in 2005 and Allosaurus was one of several taken by photographer Scott Fitzgerald for the Metro Library's "Read Y'all" campaign. Five of the seven pictured are still staff at the museum. They include: Kyle Davies, preparator; Roger Burkhalter, collections manager; Nick Czaplewski, curator, vertebrate paleontology; Steve Westrop, curator, invertebrate paleontology; and Rick Lupia, curator, paleobotany, micropaleontology and mineralogy.

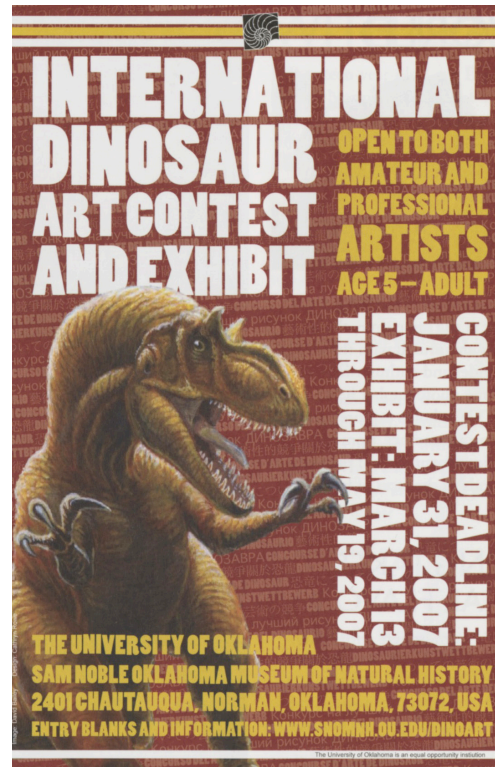


PHOTO GALLERY 1997–2007



Above: The Conoco Oil Pioneers of Oklahoma Plaza was dedicated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony that included (from left) Corporation Commissioner Denise Bode; Oklahoma First Lady Cathy Keating; Liz Williamson, executive assistant to Archie Dunham, chairman, president and CEO of Conoco; OU Regent Mary Jane Noble; Gov. Frank Keating; Plaza committee members James K. Anderson, Robert S. Kerr Jr., Professor J. Rufus Fears; and OU President David L. Boren. Photo: Robert Taylor.

Right: Michael Mares, museum director, stands under the 13-foot-tall mammoth.



Opening the Doors to the New Museum

SNOMNH SUMMER 2000 VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1

At 9:45 a.m. on Monday, May 1, a handful of nervous staff members and volunteers gathered in the empty reception lobby of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. Just outside the triple sets of glass doors opening onto the museum's main entryway, a small crowd was gathering: moms and dads with strollers and toddlers, senior citizens and college students. A yellow school bus had just pulled up and was depositing a stream of elementary school children on the front walkway. On both sides of the glass, the crowd looked eager and excited, waiting for the doors to swing open.

At 10 a.m., security officer Jim Mustoe checked his watch for the 111th time and announced, "It's time."

He stepped forward and unlocked the central set of doors and the crowd streamed into the new museum. As the first arrivals approached the front desk with their tickets in hand, the museum staff standing by broke into spontaneous applause. "They came," said one staff member, beaming tearfully at the in-pouring crowd. "They came."

For the staff and volunteers who had worked long hard hours in an empty building to prepare for their arrival, this was certainly a momentous occasion.

After 100 years, the long wait was over, and a tired but elated staff gladly turned their precious museum over to the people of Oklahoma for whom they have been preparing it all along.

To commemorate the event, Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating declared the week of May 1 through 6 as "Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History Week" and the U.S. Postal Service issued a special commemorative postal cancellation featuring the museum's logo.

The hard work is by no means over. There is continuing construction going on inside the museum, including the installation of museum labels and interpretive materials, construction of interactive exhibits and the completion of the highly technical audio-visual exhibits in the Hall of the People of Oklahoma.

In the meantime, visitors still get a truly awe-inspiring museum experience, enhanced with information provided by a small army of volunteer docents who work in the three main gallery areas answering questions and explaining exhibits.

The museum hosted more than 100,000 visitors in the first two months. The facility is already a popular spot for tour buses and organized church and seniors' groups from all over the state. In addition, more than 35,000 school children visited the new museum in its first six weeks.



Above left: Mary Jane Noble, prominent Oklahoma philanthropist and civic leader and widow of the late Samuel Russell Noble, addressed the crowd.

Above right: A crowd of guests turned out to witness the museum's ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremonies.

Below: Ribbon cutters (from left) Norman Mayor Bob Thompson, Connie Hart Yellowman and her daughter Christina, Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin, Michael A. Mares, Mary Jane Noble, OU Regents Chair C.S. Lewis III, OU President David L. Boren, W.R. Howell, former Sen. Cal Hobson and former Rep. Carolyn Taylor.



Saurophaganax Named Oklahoma State Fossil

SNOMNH SUMMER 2000, VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1

On April 14, Gov. Frank Keating signed Senate bill 1185 designating *Saurophaganax maximus* as the official State Fossil of Oklahoma. Sponsors of the bill are Sens. Cal Hobson and Dave Herbert and Rep. Tommy Thomas.

Saurophaganax maximus was an allosaur similar in size to T-Rex, but much older, ruling the Oklahoma landscape about 145 million years ago, more than 80 million years before T-Rex appeared on the scene. With a name that means “Greatest King of the Reptile Eaters,” *Saurophaganax* was indeed a frightening and deadly predator. Unlike T-Rex, which had tiny, almost useless arms with two small claws, *Saurophaganax* was equipped with long arms and three-fingered hands that sported the largest claws of any meat-eating dinosaur. These long arms and claws allowed it to grasp and hold its prey, making it a much more formidable foe than its *Tyrannosaurus* relative. The *Saurophaganax*’s 2-ton body reached up to 39 feet in length, and its massive skull was up to 4 feet long.

“*Saurophaganax* is similar to *Allosaurus*,” explained vertebrate paleontology curator Richard L. Cifelli. “But there are differences in the structure of the vertebrae. *Saurophaganax* is also significantly larger than *Allosaurus*. All the specimens which have been found have a thigh bone that measures about 4 feet in length.”

Saurophaganax is indeed unique: only a few specimens have ever been discovered, and all of them were found in Oklahoma. The bones come from two quarries near Black Mesa in Cimarron County, and were excavated in the late 1930s by Works Progress Administration crews working under the direction of J. Willis Stovall, OU paleontologist and first director of the museum. Though Stovall recognized

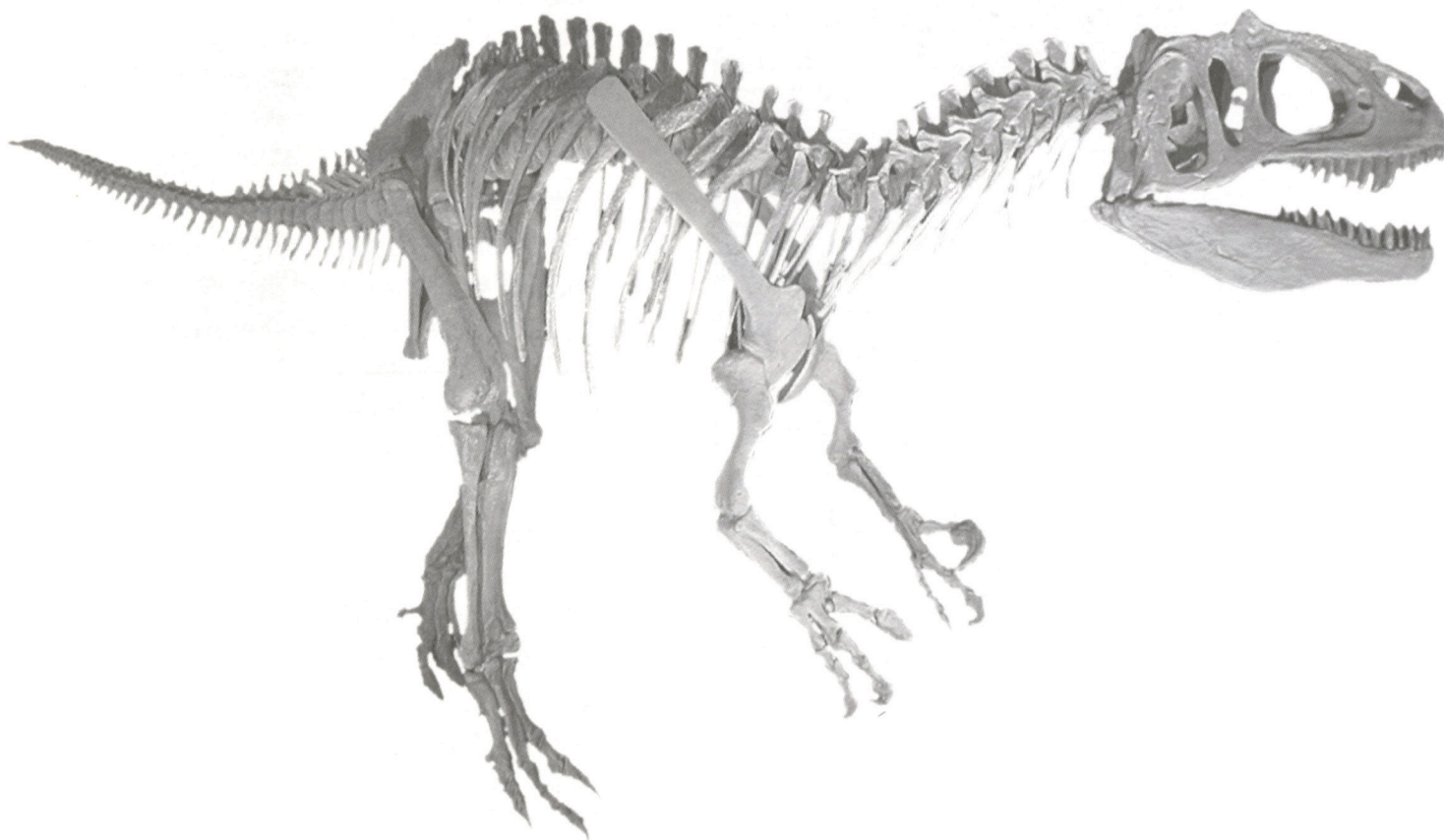
that he had something new, and informally named the new dinosaur “*Saurophagus*” shortly after collecting it, the animal was not formally described to science until 1995, and has never before been exhibited in its entirety.

“Stovall had a stroke of genius in applying for WPA funding for dinosaur digs,” Cifelli said. “These bones were found and collected at a time when there was no federal funding for scientific research of this kind, and national economy was in dire straits. It’s amazing that so much excavation could be accomplished in Oklahoma, one of the states hardest hit by the Depression.”

To make the most of the WPA funding and labor while he had it, Stovall focused his attention on field collection, adding dozens of skeletons to the museum’s collections between 1935 and 1942, including the giant *Apatosaurus* and *Pentaceratops* currently on display in the new facility. When the WPA shut down in 1943, however, there were not enough museum staff to do the intensive, time-consuming work of preparing and cataloging all the material Stovall and his teams had found. Consequently, the bones of Stovall’s “*Saurophagus*” were not fully cataloged or prepared for display until plans were finalized for the new museum.

In the 1990s, the museum gathered up the bones of *Saurophaganax* from their university storage buildings and the various museums around the country to whom many had been loaned, with plans to prepare a skeleton for display in the new facility.

The bones were sent to Jim Madsen, the world’s leading authority on *Allosaurus*, who runs a restoration lab in Utah, for his input regarding the restoration of a display skeleton. A colleague of Madsen, Daniel Chure then recommended the Oklahoma dinosaur be formally described and took it upon himself to complete the scientific description in 1995, renaming the animal *Saurophaganax maximus*, since the genus *Saurophagus* was by that time already in use.



Madsen put long months into the casting and restoring of the new dinosaur, and the superb example of *Saurophaganax* is now on display in the museum's Hall of Ancient Life as part of the centerpiece exhibit "The Clash of the Titans."

"*Saurophaganax* is one of the greatest carnivores to ever walk the earth," said museum director Michael A. Mares. "It makes a very impressive addition to our collection. As Oklahoma's museum of natural history, we are delighted to be able to host the state's official fossil and to offer the public an opportunity to view this unique dinosaur."

**MOVE OVER,
Mountain Boomer!**
**There's a new
lizard in town!**

Hall of the People of Oklahoma Grand Opening

SNOMNH FALL 2000, VOLUME 13, NUMBER 2

The Grand Opening event for the McCasland Foundation Hall of the People of Oklahoma, held on Sept. 9, featured performances by Native American dancers and storytellers as well as demonstrations of traditional games and crafts. The museum, its Native American Advisory Board and the Native American communities worked together in coordinating the five-hour event.

The Hall of the People of Oklahoma traces the history of human habitation in the state from the earliest archaeological evidence, which indicates that people may have lived in Oklahoma as early as 28,000 years ago, to the lifeways of modern Native Americans living in the state today. The gallery is filled with artifacts both ancient and modern

that demonstrate how Oklahoma's Native people lived and worked through the centuries. Some of the exhibits in this gallery are the most technically complex of any in the museum. The entrance to the new gallery includes audio elements that allow the museum visitor to hear the voices of Native Americans relating to their tribal origin stories, and a small theater puts visitors in the middle of a simulated bison hunt as it happened 10,000 years ago.

Highlights of the gallery include the Cooper Skull, the painted skull of a now-extinct species of bison that was found just outside Fort Supply, Oklahoma. The fragile skull, with its ochre-colored zig-zag painted design, dates from about 10,000 years ago, making it the oldest painted object in North America. The Hall of the People of Oklahoma also includes reproductions of thatched-roof houses and a dug-out canoe like those used by the people of the Mississippian Culture, builders of the famous Spiro Mounds in southeastern Oklahoma.



Left: Visitors enjoy interacting with the Handprint Wall at the entrance to the Hall of the People of Oklahoma. In February 2000, 96 people, ranging in age from 4 weeks to 97 years, representing 26 Native American tribes in Oklahoma had casts of their handprints (or footprints, in the case of infants) made, which are featured on the entry walls of the gallery. Photo: Robert Taylor.

Exploring Oklahoma's Dark Side: The Grand Opening of the Friends of the Museum Limestone Cave Exhibit

SNOMNH SUMMER/FALL 2002, VOLUME 14, NUMBER 4



There is a certain mysterious, spooky appeal to exploration of underground caverns. However, crawling through dripping pitch-black passages slimed with bat guano is not everyone's idea of a fun way to spend Saturday afternoon.

On Sept. 21, the museum gave visitors the best of both worlds with the grand opening of the Friends of the Museum Limestone Cave exhibit in the museum's Hall of Natural Wonders. Complete with bat colonies, limestone

Michael Mares, museum director; Glenda Cobb, Friends of the Museum president; and past-president Chuck Thompson performed the ribbon-cutting ceremony on the new exhibit. Photo: Linda Coldwell

formations and examples of the blind and pigmentless fish and insects unique to these underground ecosystems, the new exhibit is designed to mimic as closely as possible the formations and fauna of the real thing. The walk-through exhibit includes a crawl-passage entry for children or adventurous adults, and colorful text panels teach visitors about the formation, ecology and preservation of Oklahoma caves.

Fred Brown Gift Will Build Native Art Collection

TRACKS WINTER/SPRING 2004, VOLUME 16, NUMBER 1

The museum has recently received a testamentary gift of \$500,000 from the late Fred Brown of Lake Placid, New York, to fund an endowment for the acquisition of Native American works in fine arts genres.

The gift will enhance the existing Fred Brown collection of Native American art, which was donated by Fred and Enid Brown in 1993, along with funding for the Fred and Enid Brown Native American Art and Special Exhibitions gallery. The original Brown collection includes more than 175 paintings, drawings, sculptures, pottery and other works by renowned Native American artists such as Jerome Tiger, Fred Beaver and Stephen Mopope.

The generous endowment gift will allow the museum to add to this collection in a planned and systematic way, eventually resulting in a Native American art collection that will serve for teaching, research or exhibit purposes.

"A museum is only vital if it is continuing to collect in service of its mission," said museum director Ellen J. Censky. "Unlike our other museum collection areas, our ethnology and art collections rely completely on donor support for continued growth. New works of art or traditional material culture come to us either as direct gifts from donors or through purchase by museum staff. To purchase such works requires funding, which is why major museums establish endowments for acquisition. With this generous gift, SNOMNH takes another major step forward, one that will help preserve its role as leader in museum anthropology."

"During the 20th century, European art genres such as easel painting were refashioned by Native communities and



Fred E. Brown

their artists," explained ethnology curator Jason Jackson. "Scholars interested in the vitality of Native communities must engage with this rich artistic legacy. This gift will allow us to continue the work the Browns started, building a collection that meaningfully represents the diversity of American Indian expressive traditions."

The first acquisition from the Brown endowment was made in November, with the purchase of a painting by Ruthe Blalock Jones, Delaware / Shawnee / Peoria artist and director of the art department at Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma. The painting, titled "Shawnees at the Ceremonial Ground," was a third-place winner at the 2003 Santa Fe Indian Market.

Museum Receives National Award: Heritage Preservation

TRACKS SPRING 2005 VOLUME 17, NUMBER 1

In November, the museum was one of three institutions nationwide to be honored with the Award for Outstanding Commitment to the Preservation and Care of Collections given jointly by Heritage Preservation, an organization dedicated to the preservation of America's collective heritage, and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, a membership organization of conservators.

The other two institutions selected this year for this national award are The Henry Ford and the National Archives and Records Administration.

"This award is a source of great pride for all of the people of Oklahoma," said OU President David L. Boren. "The museum could never have been built without the partnership between the state, the university and the Norman community and generous donors. This award underlies the worldwide stature of the Sam Noble Museum."

In a letter announcing the award, Thomas Chase, president of the AIC, and Debbie Hess Norris, chairman of Heritage Preservation, wrote, "The awards committee was impressed by how the museum engaged the community and citizens of Oklahoma to come out to the aid of an endangered collection that enabled an extraordinary turnaround for this important museum."

The award was presented by Steve Williams, a member of the board of directors of Heritage Preservation

and assistant professor of museum studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

"Considering that the American Association of Museums lists about 8,200 museums in the United States, and that only 18 museum organizations have been recognized by the conservation community, the people affiliated with the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History can be proud to be a part of a very special and elite group in the American museum community," Williams commented.

"It is an honor to have the museum chosen as the recipient of this award," museum director Ellen Censky said. "It confirms we're fulfilling our mission to protect our state's heritage for current and future generations."

The committee also recognized the contributions of former museum director Michael A. Mares "for his extraordinary personal commitment and vision that has guided the entire process." Mares, director of the museum from 1983 to 2002, was instrumental in promoting public awareness of the plight of the museum collections and raising support for the creation of a new museum.

"Who would have thought the little Stovall Museum would grow up to become a museum of such importance that it would receive the same award as the National Archives, Colonial Williamsburg, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Central Park in Manhattan?" Mares said. "All Oklahomans should take pride in the part they played in this accomplishment."

Paleozoic Exhibit in the Works

By Steve Westrop, Ph.D., Curator of Invertebrate Paleontology

TRACKS SUMMER 2006, VOLUME 18, NUMBER 2

Exciting developments lie ahead, including the planning of a major Hall of Ancient Life expansion.

Museum visitors are surprised to learn many exhibits are temporary. In the Hall of Ancient Life, only the Mesozoic exhibits and Pleistocene mammoth exhibit are permanent. The remainder are temporary exhibits to get as many specimens on display as possible and will be replaced over time with permanent exhibits.

Production of permanent exhibits is time-consuming and the initial phase involves design and layout of the gallery. This is a critical first step because it is difficult to raise funds for construction without a detailed vision. To ensure scientific accuracy, curators are responsible for the content and story lines for each exhibit. A committee of curators and staff, including paleobotany curator Rick Lupia and myself, has been working on this part of the project for almost a year. A professional exhibit design company, Chase Studios, has turned our ideas into a detailed floor plan.

Our general philosophy is to develop exhibits that will not only educate the public on the history of life, but provide teaching resources that can be used by K-12 teachers and OU faculty. Rick Lupia and I already make use of the museum for several labs in our freshman "History of the Earth and Life" course. It is far easier to get students to appreciate things like dinosaurs when you can show them complete, mounted skeletons.

Our current work involves design for exhibits that span the origin of the Earth to the great extinction at the end of the Permian, an interval of more than 4 billion years. Some of the most momentous episodes in the history of life are not preserved in Oklahoma rocks, including

the "Cambrian Explosion" of life in the oceans and the conquest of land by vertebrates in the Early Devonian (about 400 million years ago). We'll use examples from Oklahoma wherever possible.

There are about 40 individual exhibits planned for the gallery expansion. The gallery will begin with a geology lesson. The first exhibit covers the formation of the Earth, as well as basic concepts like geological time and plate tectonics. From there, we move to life in the Precambrian Era, from bacteria in the Archean and Proterozoic Eons to the appearance of complex life in the oceans during the Ediacaran Period, about 570 million years ago. Other exhibits will feature the diversification of marine animals in the Cambrian and Ordovician Periods. This area includes the story of trilobite extinction events recorded in the Honey Creek Formation in the Wichita Mountains and a diorama that reconstructs a marine community based on the Bromide Formation in the Arbuckle Mountains.

Two major themes for the Silurian and Devonian exhibits will be the rise of fishes and the movement of life onto land about 400 million years ago. A major diorama featuring a Pennsylvanian coal swamp from eastern Oklahoma is sure to become a favorite with visitors. It's designed to be a nature trail through a 300-million-year-old swamp, complete with large trees, some of which will be built around existing pillars in the gallery. If the construction of the exhibit goes as planned, visitors will feel like they are part of the forest.

The gallery rounds out with Oklahoma vertebrates from the Permian (about 275 million years old), including an exhibit based on the famous Richard's Spur locality near Fort Sill, and another about the mass extinction at the end of the Permian. The design phase should be complete in 2006. We'll start construction soon after.

ExplorOlogy! Major Gift Will Fund New Education Program

TRACKS FALL 2007, VOLUME 19, NUMBER 3

The museum has received a \$950,000 gift from the Whitten-Newman Foundation of Edmond. The gift will fund ExplorOlogy, a new education project designed to engage children and teachers in doing science by immersing them in the world of field exploration.

The Whitten-Newman Foundation, established by Reggie Whitten; his wife, Rachelle; and her brother, Robert Newman, made the formal presentation to museum director Ellen Censky at a museum ceremony on Oct. 23.

ExplorOlogy will expand museum educational programs to include interactive scientific training and field experiences for Oklahoma youth ages 4 to 18 as well as professional development programs for teachers and outreach to their schools. The program includes several elements, including a week-long summer field experience

at an Oklahoma field research site for middle-school-age youth, where they will interact with scientists to engage in field exploration.

The youth will be introduced to a variety of “ologies,” ranging from archaeology and paleontology to ornithology and herpetology. There also will be an intensive three-week program for 15 to 18 year-olds who will spend two weeks studying geology, zoology and paleontology with museum and University of Oklahoma scientists, followed by a week-long experience at a field site in the western United States.

“We hope this new program will inspire kids just like you to go on into science, or to at least understand what science is about,” said Ellen Censky, museum director, speaking to the school children at the event.

In addition to these field programs, ExplorOlogy also will include summer programs for elementary-age children at the museum, professional development workshops for teachers, outreach programs to Oklahoma schools and field trips for students to visit the museum. The program is scheduled to begin the summer of 2008.



Left: Reggie Whitten (left) and Robert Newman, co-founders of the Whitten-Newman Foundation, present a check for \$950,000 to museum director Ellen Censky to fund ExplorOlogy. Photo: Robert Taylor.



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