

Fossil Museum on the Web

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Ancient shells, dinosaur bones and other fossils are on display at <http://www.3Dmuseum.org>, a virtual gallery created by Ryosuke Motani, an assistant professor of geology at UC Davis. The Web interface allows users to turn, zoom and examine the fossils from all sides.

Exhibits currently on the site include skulls of the carnivorous dinosaur Dimetrodon, cougars and monkeys; teeth from sharks and mammoths; and shellfish, sea urchins and trilobites, hard-shelled segmented animals that were common in the oceans 300 million years ago. Most of the images can be downloaded for personal use and teaching purposes, and can be incorporated into slide presentations.

The Web site was built to explore ways of communicating three-dimensional data about fossils over the Internet, Motani said. He is also using similar methods to study elasmosaurs, a type of marine dinosaur which had an extremely long neck -- up to six yards, half again as long as the rest of its body.

"Our project is to reconstruct it in three dimensions and see how it could move," Motani said.

The fossils on display come mostly from private collections and the Condon Museum at the University of Oregon. Scanning of the fossils was carried out by Motani and his students. Development of the site was supported by an Early Career Award to Motani from the National Science Foundation presented in 2003, while he was on the faculty at the University of Oregon. He joined the Department of Geology at UC

Davis in 2004.

Source: UC Davis

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