

Iconic T.rex to be Unveiled at University of Leicester

October 27 2008

(PhysOrg.com) -- A cast of a 21-foot long Tyrannosaurus rex dinosaur (a rare, sub-adult individual), commissioned from the makers of specimens of T. rex that featured in the film 'Jurassic Park' is to go on permanent display at the University of Leicester.

The ferocious predator, nicknamed 'Jane', will take pride of place in a showcase in the refurbished Department of Geology, Bennett Building, and will be an educational facility for members of the public, school visits as well as for staff, students and academic research.

The 66-million year old carnivore is one of a number of exhibits illustrating Flying dinosaurs...and the origin of birds. The exhibition will be officially opened at 12 noon on Wednesday 29 October by Mr Bill Bolsover, Group Chief Executive of Aggregate Industries UK Limited, in the presence of Professor Bob Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester.

Following over three years of support for the University, Aggregate Industries has further enhanced its relationship with the organisation by stepping in to fund this UK first, and Mr Bolsover is delighted to be involved.

Mr Bolsover said: "When the opportunity arose for Aggregate Industries to work in partnership with the University and bring 'Jane' to the UK we knew it would be a great way to create public fascination.

"This exhibit is the first of its kind to ever be showcased in this country and we consider it an honour and a coup for both Aggregate Industries and the University of Leicester that we have been able to make it happen. I hope it will really engage visitors and students alike and be a catalyst in promoting both the University of Leicester and scientific study in general."

The £60,000 exhibition has been spearheaded by University of Leicester geologist Professor David Siveter who said he was looking for a 'wow factor' when he was asked to set up a display for the foyer.

He said: "We wanted something that would be challenging and exciting – that would promote science, educate students and interest the public and visitors. The theme traces the origin of birds from the dinosaurs. This provides a link between ancient fossils with what we see about us in the trees. The message basically is that dinosaurs - in the form of some of their descendants - haven't become extinct: we just call them birds."

Professor Siveter and colleagues from the Geology Department aimed to produce an exhibit that would appeal at all levels - from a group of primary schoolchildren to the inquisitive academic specialist.

Professor Siveter teamed up with John Martin, former Curator of Geology at Leicester City Museum and now a consultant, and designers John Moseley and Rhod Thomas, to develop the brief for the display. The geologists approached Bill Bolsover, the Group Chief Executive of Aggregate Industries, who warmly supported the Leicester project and offered to fund the cost of the exhibition".

This led to the team working with Research Casting International of Toronto, one of the world's largest providers of museum technical services.

Said Professor Siveter: “This firm is the best in the business and that’s why they made T. rex specimens for ‘Jurassic Park’. We met up with Peter May, the founder of the Company, and worked out the costs and logistics of the display.”

“Not only have we got T. rex from Toronto, we have so-called ‘dino-birds’ from Beijing, a clutch of real sauropod dinosaur eggs and a large vertebra of a real dinosaur. There are mounted exhibits of a magpie and sparrowhawk- a raptor that provides a nice juxtaposition with T. rex.”

“Jane is made of fibreglass and resin. She is a cast of a dinosaur discovered in 2001 by a field party from Burpee Museum, Illinois, where the original skeleton is housed today. They launched an expedition to the Badlands of Montana to look for dinosaurs – and found Jane on the last day of the expedition.

“This was a magnificent find of a T. rex – the most complete sub-adult skeleton of a T. rex ever found and Research Casting International have reproduced it accurately. There are only two other casts of the original skeleton, both at Institutes in the United States: at the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Ohio.”

Professor Siveter said Jane would have lived in a floodplain in Montana, USA, and mysteriously died and was buried fairly rapidly as otherwise she would have been scavenged and her bones dispersed.

“It is estimated that the dinosaur was probably 11 years old at the time of death and the 7.5 ft high skeleton shows that she was built as a predator cum scavenger - you can see it from the long, powerful legs, the claws on the limbs, the razor sharp teeth: this animal was engineered to go out and hunt for flesh. It could probably move at about 20-30mph.”

“However there is no clue as to its cause of death and certainly no sign of

injury- so that remains a mystery.”

Professor Siveter added that one of the particular highlights of the exhibition was the interface between art and science, with detailed consideration being given to the graphics and visual cues in the display.

“The exhibition has been a year in the making and it has been tremendously exciting acquiring the exhibits, thanks to the very generous sponsorship of Aggregate Industries. The display case has been filled with just centimetres to spare - we have to be grateful for Jane not growing any bigger!”

“Natural history has the power to excite and engage – and no matter what your background and age, dinosaurs are a source of fascination. This project has been enormous fun and a career highlight – it’s not every day that one gets the chance to unpack a dinosaur! It is an exhibition for the University and wider community to enjoy.”

Provided by University of Leicester

Citation: Iconic T.rex to be Unveiled at University of Leicester (2008, October 27) retrieved 8 September 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2008-10-iconic-trex-unveiled-university-leicester.html>

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