

Britain's oldest dinosaur to be released

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Thecodontosaurus. Photo by Ben Jones

(PhysOrg.com) -- After 210 million years of being entombed in rock, the Bristol Dinosaur is about to be released, thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant awarded to the University of Bristol.

The Bristol Dinosaur - *Thecodontosaurus antiquus* - is the oldest-known dinosaur in Britain and one of the oldest in the world. When Thecodontosaurus was first discovered in 1834 it was only the fourth dinosaur ever to be discovered, anywhere.

Since discovery of the University's specimen at Tytherington Quarry in the 1970s, the fossilised remains of the Bristol Dinosaur have largely remained entombed within the rock. The Heritage Lottery Fund grant will at last allow the dinosaur to be excavated and then displayed for all to see.

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "The

remains of the Bristol Dinosaur are of international scientific and heritage importance, offering a chance for us to further understand what our world was like 200 million years ago. Alongside the scientific research, this project will enable local people to learn about one of the city's most important, but least well known, residents.”

Over the years about 500 bones have been removed and those found so far show the presence of males, females and juveniles. However, much work remains to be done. About four tons of bone-bearing rock awaits further research and inspection in the laboratory.

Professor Mike Benton from the University of Bristol, one of the world's leading experts on dinosaurs, said: “This award from HLF will mean that the preparation laboratory can be expanded and a specialist technician employed to oversee the removal of bones from the rock.

“It will also mean more volunteers can be recruited and trained in the extraction process and there will be opportunities for young people from local schools to learn skills in [palaeontology](#) and conservation.”

A new Education Officer will visit local schools and work together with Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery, Explore At Bristol and the City of Bristol College to introduce local history to a wide audience in and around Bristol.



Excavating the bones

During the three years of the project, a complete skeletal reconstruction of the dinosaur will be attempted for the first time. The team is also committed to finding further resources to build a permanent exhibit in the Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery, with the dinosaur - or possibly a herd of dinosaurs - as a centrepiece, together with full details of how it was found and studied.

The Heritage Lottery Fund and the University of Bristol will launch commencement of the Bristol Dinosaur Project today [3 November] at Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery. Visiting children from local schools will be able to talk to the scientists about dinosaurs - and the Bristol dinosaur in particular.

Thecodontosaurus antiquus is one of the most primitive [dinosaurs](#) in the world, lying at the very base of the dinosaur family tree. During the Triassic the kangaroo-sized, plant-eating species lived in herds on lushly vegetated islands around Bristol. The outlines of these islands can still be seen today in the shape of the land - Bristol's famous Downs was one

such island.

The first remains of the Bristol Dinosaur were discovered in 1834 at Durdham Down, Bristol, but were destroyed when the museum was hit in a WWII bombing raid. Further remains were found at Tytherington Quarry in the 1970s and it is these that are at the heart of the current research project.

Provided by University of Bristol ([news](#) : [web](#))

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