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Rediscovering the Dinosaurs

65 Million Years Late, Scientists Are Getting Their Dinosaur Facts Right, at Least for Now



By **NED POTTER**
 Paterson, N.J., April 10, 2007



In 1898, according to legend, the Pennsylvania steel magnate Andrew Carnegie saw a newspaper story about great prehistoric monsters called dinosaurs. He scrawled a note: "Get one for Pittsburgh."

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That is why Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History has one of the world's leading collections of dinosaur fossils.

The problem is that even though the newest of the dinosaurs are 65 million years old, scientists' understanding of them has been racing along, changing with each new find. So the Carnegie staff has decided to dismantle -- and rethink -- its entire collection.

Our image of dinosaurs comes mostly from what one finds in old sci-fi films -- big, lumbering creatures, dragging their tails on the ground. In recent years, scientists have decided they were probably much more energetic and agile -- and the way most fossils were displayed was wrong.

No Instruction Manual

"Unfortunately, they don't come with instruction manuals," Matt Lamanna, a paleontologist at the museum, said with a smile. Skeleton by skeleton -- in fact, bone by bone -- he and his colleagues are overseeing the rebuilding of their dinosaurs.

We caught up with him in Paterson, N.J., in an old foundry that has now been converted into a dinosaur studio. The Carnegie dinosaurs have been shipped here, bone by bone, in carefully padded wooden crates.

In Paterson, a gentle dinosaur lover named Phillip Fraley oversees a small army of painters, sculptors, welders and former museum staffers, who are rehabbing the fossils under the scientists' watchful eye.

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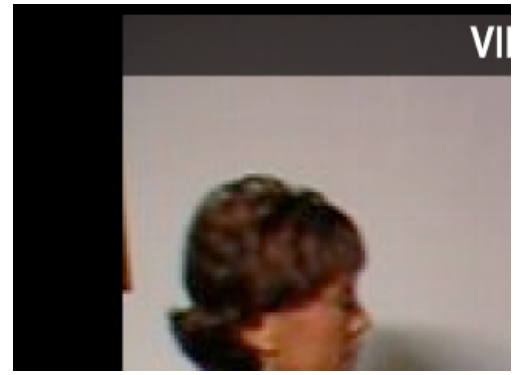
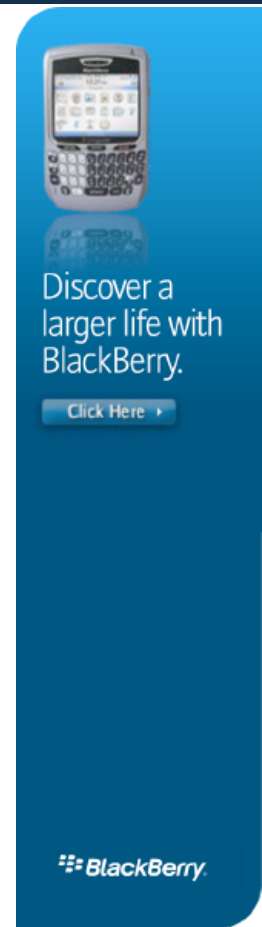
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"These bones begin to dictate to you the way that they want to be put back together again," says Fraley, "the way they want to be lifted up or held."

A Mix of Art and Science

Fraley, a longtime exhibit designer at New York's American Museum of Natural History, oversaw the rebuilding of the dinosaur collection there. He and his wife went into business for themselves, painstakingly assembling skeletons for museums from Chicago to Singapore.

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