



NEWS

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***Dinosaurs Encounters* Makes U.S. Debut; Juvenile Dinos Roam the Halls of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County**

***Museum Dinosaur Experts Collaborate with Theatrical Performance Troupe to
Create Realistic, Life-Sized Tyrannosaurus rex and Triceratops Puppets***

***Dinosaur Encounters* demonstrations surprise and educate the public three times daily
during summer schedule, Wednesday through Sunday**

LOS ANGELES— Part science and part performance — two life-sized juvenile dinosaur puppets, what would be a 9-year-old *Tyrannosaurus rex* and a 6-year-old *Triceratops*, are now roaming the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County as part of its new ***Dinosaur Encounters*** experience. Designed to spotlight the Museum’s vast collections, fossil discoveries and important paleontological research, ***Dinosaur Encounters*** was created in collaboration with NHM’s Dinosaur Institute as a visceral teaching tool. Its mission: to debunk long-held misconceptions about dinosaur behaviour, anatomy, survival tactics and adaptation trends.

A rotating crew of four puppeteers operates the dinosaurs (one puppeteer per dinosaur), each one hunching inside an animal, relying on core strength and balance to move and behave like live animals. They have very little periphery vision inside the dinosaur puppets and depend on their “handlers,” NHM gallery interpreters, to guide them through galleries and diorama halls in demonstrations developed by Museum scientists and educators. Audience attention is drawn to details of the dinosaurs’ mouths, head shape, feet, skin, eye placement and eating habits. But there is an experiential component to the lesson as well: in programs so far, children have talked to, danced with, and pet the dinosaurs and the photo opportunities are endless. It is also common for adults to seem absolutely convinced the puppets are “real” dinosaurs — while their puppet-savvy kids assure them of the truth.

The puppets were created by Erth, an Australia-based company that started as a theatrical performance troupe and later began to fabricate complicated puppets for its performances. Erth has built dinosaur puppets for five museums — four in Australia and New Zealand, and now the duo at the NHM, making ***Dinosaur Encounters*** a North American debut. The *T. rex* weighs approximately 70 pounds and is 14 feet long and the *Triceratops* is 45 pounds and 9 feet long.

Because the puppets were created specially for the NHM and based on the Museum’s specimens, Erth consulted with paleontology curator and Dinosaur Institute director Dr. Luis Chiappe to

ensure authentic physicality and movement. In keeping with a major area of Chiappe's study — the evolutionary relationship between dinosaurs to birds — Erth gave the *T. rex* feathers, because it is Chiappe's belief that this dinosaur may have possessed an early form of feathers when it lived approximately 66 million years ago.

For their summer schedule, the *Dinosaur Encounters*' puppets perform three times daily, Wednesdays through Sundays. The puppeteers will take two hiatuses in the coming year, breaking for maintenance to the intricately designed puppets from September 2 through September 28, 2008 and again January 19 through February 3, 2009.

Dinosaur Encounters, presented as a regular public program, is part of the innovative rethinking of the dinosaur experience at NHM. It follows the newly-opened *Thomas the T. rex Lab*, in which visitors watch as palaeontologists prepare the fossil of a *T. rex* inside a glass-walled laboratory for final instalment in the renovated dinosaur galleries, scheduled to open in 2011. Those halls will contain the completed Thomas skeleton as the young adult entry in a rare growth series that will spotlight many of the Museum's *T. rex* specimens.

A Historic Transformation at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Development of the new Dinosaur Hall is part of the Museum's current \$84 million project to restore and seismically strengthen its original 1913 Beaux-Arts inspired building. The project includes the installation of new exhibits in the Rotunda of the 1913 Building as well as a portion of the adjacent 1920s addition. Restoration work will reveal exquisite details that have been obscured over the years and highlight elements such as the ceramic-tiled exterior dome, the original stained glass skylight of the Rotunda (by Walter Horace Judson) and architectural details on the East Entrance. In this historic setting, state-of-the-art galleries will feature new exhibits that draw from the Museum's vast, world-renowned collections, nearly tripling the number of objects that are currently on view and emphasizing connections between nature and culture. The newly designed galleries will open beginning in 2010. Overall, 81,000 square feet of the Museum's total 425,000 square feet will be renovated.

Museum Admission and Hours

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is located at 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles. It is open weekdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and weekends and holidays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children. For more information, visit the museum's website at www.nhm.org or call (213) 763-DINO.