

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM INVITES
THE PUBLIC TO JOIN A “PALEO-ODYSSEY” IN THE
THOMAS THE T. REX LAB
OPENING MARCH 30**

*Nearly Complete T. rex Specimen, Excavated by Museum’s Dinosaur
Institute, To Be Prepared in Public View for Installation in
Renovated Dinosaur Hall of 1913 Building*

LOS ANGELES— On March 30, 2008, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County will open its *Thomas the T. rex Lab*: a specially designed workroom where visitors may watch the actual work of paleontologists as they prepare and assemble the fossils of a 66 million year old *Tyrannosaurus rex* nicknamed “Thomas.” Destined for permanent installation in the Museum’s newly renovated Dinosaur Hall, Thomas is estimated to be a 70% complete *T. rex* specimen and one of 30 partially complete *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeletons in collections worldwide. Research inside the *Thomas the T. rex Lab* may reveal additional bones further adding to the completeness of the specimen and unravel mysteries involving “his” true gender and untimely death.

Scientists and researchers led by Dr. Luis Chiappe, director of the Museum’s Dinosaur Institute, excavated Thomas in southeastern Montana during field expeditions conducted between 2003 and 2005. As a specimen of a young adult, Thomas will provide another link in the chain of life histories shown in the Museum’s remarkable *T. rex* growth series. The future home for this series, scheduled to open in 2011, will be in the Museum’s historic 1913 Building—the first museum building in Los Angeles—which is currently undergoing a complete renovation and installation of new exhibits.

To create the *Thomas the T. rex Lab*, the Los Angeles-based firm of Hodgetts + Fung Design and Architecture (hplusf) worked closely with Dr. Chiappe and the Museum’s exhibition team to develop what they call a “paleo-odyssey.” In the design, the sleek appearance of a “clean room” or forensic lab complete with multimedia visualizations, is juxtaposed with the grittiness of incoming field work, including the traditional tools and methods required in cleaning, preparing and cataloging fossils.

“The unique design of the *Thomas the T. rex Lab* will engage our visitors by showing what paleontologists do,” said Dr. Jane Pisano, president and director of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. “This very public, fully functioning paleontological workspace will allow us to prepare Thomas in time and on schedule for final installation in the new Dinosaur Hall.”

Finding “Thomas”

Thomas died 66 million years ago in a sand bar of a meandering river, on what is now federal land in southeastern Montana. Dr. Luis Chiappe, leading a team of 15 staff, trained students and volunteers from the Museum’s Dinosaur Institute, conducted three summer field expeditions (2003, 2004, and 2005) at the site, resulting in a collection of about 130 fossil jackets or blocks.

“This exquisitely preserved skeleton provides new information about the most famous of all dinosaurs,” stated Dr. Chiappe. “Although Thomas is estimated to be nearly two-thirds complete, making it a rare discovery, it is possible that unprepared blocks may reveal additional bones not accounted for due to the quarrying process—or how bones are deposited and drifted in the quarry—further adding to the completeness of the specimen.”

The Museum’s Dinosaur Institute began preparing Thomas immediately after the initial field season—a time-consuming task led by the Institute’s lab manager, Doug Goodreau. Nearly half of the collected fossils have now been prepared and documented, while Thomas’s larger elements, such as the pelvic bones and hind limb, will be prepared in the public viewing lab.

Work conducted in the new lab is expected to solve mysteries about Thomas, such as the nature of the injuries and diseases this specimen might have suffered. There is a possibility, for example, that Thomas had a malignant skull tumor, and this hypothesis will be tested in the public lab. Other information developed in the lab may come through the examination of additional skeletal discoveries. Despite his nickname, Thomas’s sex has not been conclusively determined—but this situation would change with the discovery of the medullary bone, a reservoir of calcium in the female *T. rex*.

The Thomas the T. rex Lab: A “Paleo-Odyssey”

Speaking about Dr. Chiappe and the Museum’s exhibition team, hplusf design principal Craig Hodgetts stated, “This has been an experience of true collaboration with an innovative and dramatic team. We wanted these paleontologists and their work to be the stars of this ‘paleo-odyssey.’”

The lab is designed as a vertical glass-and-steel “clean room” located on the south wall of the Museum’s Director’s Gallery. As visitors enter, they will immediately experience the workflow, thanks to the proximity of a crane for delivering heavy fossil jackets into the first portion of the lab. At the entrance, visitors will also be able to get updates on research and progress for final mounting.

The “paleo-odyssey” then leads into two white-lacquered pods. These are forensic stations, complete with airtight apertures and gauntlet-like gloves for the careful and dusty work of stripping away earth and stone to uncover Thomas’s bones. On the side of each glass research pod, directly under the cleaning aperture, will be a visitor interface area featuring an interactive workstation for hands-on experience—whether cleaning or assembling a synthetic *T. rex* bone or cataloging it for collection.

A large blackboard with lighting components will diagram Thomas’s bone structure; map and highlight areas currently under investigation; illuminate missing fossil portions—those yet to be identified or those requiring reconstruction. Scrolling text appearing on the glass structure will complement the blackboard feature. These multimedia tools will provide visitors with ways to track progress on Thomas and help

them to understand that day's research in the context of the larger puzzle of preparing and assembling this major *T. rex* specimen. Soundscapes and interactive dinosaur scale projections may accompany the exhibit.

Building a Permanent Home for Thomas the T. rex

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 amount of objects that are currently on view and emphasizing connections between nature and culture. The newly designed galleries will open beginning in 2010. Over all, 81,000 square feet of the Museum's total 425,000 square feet will be renovated.

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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.

About the Museum

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County serves more than one million families and visitors annually, and is a national leader in research, exhibitions and education. The Museum is L.A.'s first official cultural space, the first to open its doors to the public in 1913, and has amassed one of the world's most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history – more than 35 million objects, some as old as 4.5 billion years.