



The Natural
History Museum
of Los Angeles
County

Reimagined.
Beginning
Summer 2010.

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NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM COMPLETES FIRST STAGE OF TRANSFORMATION AS ITS HISTORIC 1913 BUILDING IS RENOVATED AND RESTORED

The Next Phase of an Institution-Wide Metamorphosis Begins, as *Age of Mammals* and *Rotunda* (Opening Summer 2010), and *Dinosaur Mysteries* (Summer 2011) Exhibits are Prepared for Installation in Los Angeles' First Museum Building



Children catch a glimpse of two life-size dinosaurs in the Schreiber Hall of Birds — a juvenile *Triceratops* and *T.rex* — as part of NHM's *Dinosaur Encounters*. Photo by Dave Lauridsen.



Historic 1913 Building at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Photo by Dick Meier.

APRIL 23, 2009 – The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County has reached a milestone in its physical and philosophical transformation, realizing its mission to inspire wonder, discovery and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds. More than two years of construction work and architectural preservation are now complete on the historic core of the Museum — the magnificent 1913 Building — the first dedicated museum facility in Los Angeles.

Since December 2006, the Beaux-Arts structure by Hudson & Munsell has been seismically strengthened, retrofitted with 21st century infrastructure, and beautifully restored in all its architectural details — many now visible for the first time in decades. With this first phase now

achieved in a landmark \$91 million project, the centerpiece of an institution-wide transformation of the Natural History Museum, work begins on installing innovative new exhibitions for an opening in Summer 2010. Eventually, a total of 82,000 square feet, including 70,160 square feet of public exhibition space, will be renovated and reinstalled, emphasizing as never before the connections between nature and culture.

During the 1913 Building's renovation, the adjacent portion of the Museum — the 1920s Building — has remained open to the public, presenting dynamic new exhibits, activities and programs for families and adults. Some of these offerings include new behind-the-scenes exhibitions such as the *Thomas the T. rex Lab* and *Visible Vault: Archaeological Treasures from Ancient Latin America*, as well as the historic restoration of iconic diorama halls inside the 1920s Building. The Museum also offers a lively series of public programs including First Fridays, Sustainable Sundays, Art + Science, and the popular roaming life-sized puppets of Dinosaur Encounters. In fact, the Natural History Family of Museums — the Natural History Museum at Exposition Park, the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits and the Hart Park and Museum in Newhall — have enjoyed strong attendance of late, including over 300,000 school children this past year.

“The public has already seen a glimpse of our future in our new exhibitions the *Thomas the T. rex Lab* and *Visible Vault*,” said Dr. Jane Pisano, president and director of the NHM. “But the magnitude of the coming change is only now becoming apparent, as we complete the architectural work on our gem in Exposition Park, the 1913 Building. Soon this lovingly restored treasure will be alive with compelling new experiences, as we continue the Museum's great contributions to the scientific and cultural landscape of Los Angeles.”

Located in Exposition Park near downtown Los Angeles, the NHM is one of the preeminent natural and cultural history museums in the United States, serving over 850,000 visitors annually.

“The Natural History Museum is truly a cultural treasure of Los Angeles County — right along with LACMA and Walt Disney Concert Hall — and is an important anchor in Exposition Park, a thriving neighborhood in the center of our city,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark

Ridley-Thomas. “The Museum is beloved by people of all ages and backgrounds and is a place where all Angelenos can gather together to have fun and learn important lessons about stewardship and responsibility for the natural world while exploring the vibrant cultural history of Los Angeles.”

Coinciding with the Museum’s broad transformation, Angelenos will soon be able to take advantage of enhanced access to NHM via a Metro Rail line connecting downtown Los Angeles to the Westside. Expected to be completed in 2011, the Expo Line will include a stop in front of the Museum at Exposition Park and connecting to other Metro lines via the downtown 7th Street/Metro Center station.

New Exhibitions and Approaches to Inspire Wonder, Discovery, and Responsibility

To engage visitors of all ages and backgrounds with the natural and cultural worlds, while making the Museum’s important collections and research activities vividly accessible, the 1913 Building will become the glorious setting for a new suite of long-term and rotating exhibitions beginning with the milestone opening of the *Age of Mammals* hall and Rotunda exhibitions in summer of 2010; *Dinosaur Mysteries* in the summer of 2011; and *Under the Sun* in spring of 2012. The renovation and new exhibit designs will nearly triple the objects on view from the Museum’s massive collection of art, artifacts and specimens. Today, the Museum’s holdings total more than 35 million objects spanning 4.5 billion years, representing NHM’s nearly 100-year history of world-class collecting, expeditions and research.

“These new galleries will shine the light on the Museum’s extraordinary collections by creating forward looking exhibits to tell the larger story about major world processes like plate tectonics and climate change and how they impacted specific mammals,” said Dr Karen Wise, Vice President of Public Programs. “It is through this storyline that we help visitors of all ages put current and future changes in perspective and instill a sense of responsibility for our planet.”

Age of Mammals

One of the key experiences in the Museum, a brand new *Age of Mammals* hall, is scheduled to open in the summer of 2010. It will explore the Cenozoic Era’s tumultuous shifting of continents, reorientation of wind patterns and ocean currents, and significant climatic changes

culminating in a major Ice Age. While an extensive diversity of life forms becomes prominent during this era, it is a time when mammals — including humans, dominate and contribute the largest animals on land or in the oceans.

Age of Mammals provides a dramatic story of the evolution of mammals, including humans, in response to environmental change during the last 65 million years of Earth's history to the present day. Topics to be covered include how and why the climate changed; how terrestrial mammals evolved in response to environmental change; how mammals exploited aquatic habitats and the skies; and the human story — as we went from environmental product to producer. The exhibit, designed by Reich+Petch Design International, will examine evolution in the scope of bigger geological and climatic processes while exploring the science behind “how we know what we know.”

“The *Age of Mammals* exhibit presents partly our own story and the story of our nearest relatives in the animal kingdom. This will be the first time that a permanent museum exhibit will strongly link global processes of geologic and climate change to the impact on evolution and the human story,” stated Dr. John Harris, NHM Head of Vertebrate Studies and Chief Curator of the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits. Harris, a world-renowned paleontologist who has published widely on Rancho La Brea, is perhaps even more recognized for his significant scientific contributions in working with the Leakey family in East Africa.

The exhibit is also an initiative of historic importance for Los Angeles, since one of the principal reasons for the construction of the 1913 Building was to house the remarkable Ice Age mammal fossils that had been excavated at Rancho La Brea, the parcel of Hancock Park land that contains the La Brea Tar Pits. With an extraordinary wealth of new specimens recently unearthed there, and with exciting new design techniques and media now available, a re-imagined *Age of Mammals* hall will be central to the transformed NHM, and will better connect it to the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits, part of the Natural History Family of Museums.

Age of Mammals will integrate multi-media, film footage, recent California discoveries and some of the Museum's iconic specimens such as the Simi Valley mastodon, the La Brea horse and saber-toothed cat, the brontothere and Kellogg's sea lion.

The Rotunda

The iconic Rotunda of the 1913 Building will re-open to the public in the summer of 2010 along with the *Age of Mammals* hall. With its newly restored, brilliantly colored stained-glass skylight, the Rotunda will be a multi-use space and the site for a new series of rotating exhibitions on the ground and mezzanine levels. Nestled between the scagliola columns will be eight architectural glass cases with objects selected from the Museum's diverse collections. The exhibit (working title, *What on Earth?*) will use specimens and objects to engage visitors in a series of enigmatic and playful questions on the side of the case facing the inner portion of the Rotunda while answers or current theories will be presented on the back side. Originally designed to display paintings, the mezzanine-level exhibits will honor Hudson & Munsell's original design intent for art display by exhibiting works on the flat Vermont Marble walls. Its inaugural exhibition will feature Charles Knight's "Life on Earth through Time," examining this iconic artist's early attempts at interpreting past eras. The exhibition provides a historical reference, and sentimental link, to previously-held scientific ideas about the periods of geologic time presented inside the *Age of Mammals* and *Dinosaur Mysteries* halls.

"The 1913 Building Rotunda is where you'll start to see the mission of the Museum expressed in a new and powerful way," said NHM anthropologist and exhibition lead curator Dr. Margaret Hardin. "Here, visitors will experience wonder at the beauty of the setting and the ingenuity of the displays. They will discover the endlessly fascinating questions raised by each specimen and artifact. And they will sense, perhaps as never before, our need to accept responsibility for the natural and cultural treasures we have inherited — including the Museum building itself."

Rethinking the NHM Dinosaur Experience

The transformation of the visitor's dinosaur experience at the NHM began nearly a decade ago as renowned paleontologist Dr. Luis Chiappe developed a collection strategy and ambitious fieldwork program. In 2005, the NHM's Dinosaur Institute was created with the mission to make the Museum a dinosaur hub for the West Coast. "We wanted to provide greater meaning to the Museum's already extensive dinosaur and Mesozoic-age fossils in preparation for the new dinosaur hall scheduled to open in the summer of 2011," said Dr. Chiappe.

Fruitful expeditions to the late Cretaceous sites of Wyoming's Lance Formation, Montana's Hell Creek and the late Jurassic sediments of Utah resulted in pivotal additions to the Museum dinosaur collection — among these is the nearly complete *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton, nicknamed “Thomas,” in southeastern Montana. As a specimen of a young adult, Thomas completes the chain of life histories in the Museum's remarkable *T. rex*-growth series. He became the centerpiece of the Museum's *Thomas the T. rex Lab*, a specially designed workroom where visitors watch the actual work of paleontologists as they prepared the fossils of this 66 million year old dinosaur. Thomas' future home will be inside the Museum's newly renovated dinosaur hall, alongside the rest of the Museum's growth series which includes *T. rex* specimens of a baby, child and adult. Once installed, NHM will be the only destination in the world to view a chain of *Tyrannosaurus rex* life histories. Meanwhile, in the space once devoted to Thomas' preparation, the Dinosaur Institute will begin to work on new specimens, in a revamped setting (working title, *Dino Lab*).

Dinosaur Mysteries: Past & Present

Located on the other side of the Rotunda, across from the mastodons and mammals inside the *Age of Mammals* hall, are two large galleries made up of the south wing of the 1913 Building and the adjoining 1920s structure. They provide a spacious backdrop for the most comprehensive dinosaur hall in the Museum's history.

Opening in the summer of 2011, *Dinosaur Mysteries: Past & Present* will explore the great questions — or mysteries — that have driven both scientific inquiry and the popular imagination surrounding dinosaurs. The exhibition will tackle six enigmas: how dinosaurs lived; what they were like as living animals; their behavior; the extinction of large dinosaurs; whether or not dinosaurs are living today; and why they are so popular. The exhibition, designed by Evidence Design, takes an innovative approach, using field work archives, fossil jackets, dinosaur eggs, skeletons and footprints emphasizing questions that drive scientific process and exploring, as *Age of Mammals* does, how scientists know what they know.

Film footage, posters, movie props and a variety of other dinosaur theme items will highlight the changes in perception about dinosaurs. *Dinosaur Mysteries: Past & Present* cuts across many disciplines within the NHM, bringing the scientific approach of paleobiology and geology

together with the aspects of history and popular culture. A section of this exhibition will explore the ancient geographical distribution of the dinosaurs, including the question of why dinosaurs are so rare in California. The NHM houses the best collection of California dinosaurs, including the state's most complete dinosaur — a duckbilled dinosaur from Fresno County — as well as dinosaur remains from the Santa Ana Mountains and the Mojave Desert.

Renovating the 1913 Building

The 1913 Building opened on November 6, 1913, as the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art. Each of its three wings, radiating from the Rotunda, was dedicated to a separate discipline. Using extensive data from the NHM's own archives — including historic drawings, photos and documents — the project team uncovered the original design, layout and construction methods of the original building and its subsequent 1920s additions in order to restore the building, while modernizing it inside and out.

Using the historic structure report for the NHM 1913 and adjacent 1920s buildings authored by Brenda Levin & Associates, CO Architects led by Jorge de la Cal together with Project Manager Don Webb of Cordell Corp and Matt Construction, began renovation of the project in December 2006 with a seismic strengthening of the landmark 1913 Building which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Vertical shafts, each six inches in diameter, were cored into the exterior masonry walls from the roof and through the foundation. The shafts were then fitted with steel reinforcing rods and filled with a high-strength polymer resin which bonds to both masonry and steel. This novel application of bonded carbon-fiber technology, originally developed by the aerospace industry, has permitted the seismic strengthening of the building without any visible effect on the historic facade, and is perhaps the largest such application of this technology in the U.S.

In addition to fortifying the walls, the seismic retrofit involved thinning out the building's heavy concrete rooftops and replacing the mass with the stronger and lighter bonded carbon-fiber materials. The exterior dome was additionally reinforced with steel, and polymer epoxy was injected into hairline cracks that had been exacerbated by earthquakes to prevent water damage.

The early phase of construction also focused on the restoration of the brilliantly colored stained glass skylight at the apex of the Rotunda. This exacting work was carried out by David Judson, grandson of the skylight's designer, the eminent Walter Horace Judson. Under his direction, the ornate and elegant stained glass was cleaned, repaired and strengthened, bringing it back to its full glory 53 feet above the Rotunda's floor.

The renovation team then moved on to uncover and restore the building's exquisite, original architectural details, many of which had been obscured over the years. This phase of construction included the careful restoration and cleaning of the east entrance portico; cleaning and repair of the iconic ribbed and ceramic-tiled exterior dome with its copper parapet; uncovering of marble walls and mosaics; the reconstruction of the building's gargoyles and a newly created six-foot eagle on the east entrance.

NHM Next

The completed renovation of the Beaux-Arts 1913 Building sets the stage for the Museum's rollout of new visitor experiences leading up to the Museum's centennial in 2013. The milestone re-opening of the 1913 Building will begin in Summer 2010 with new exhibitions inside its iconic Rotunda and the *Age of Mammals* galleries. In Summer 2011, the Museum will open *Dinosaur Mysteries*, the highly-anticipated return of a dedicated dinosaur hall. *Under the Sun*, an exhibition focusing on the Southern California environmental history will open in Spring 2012.

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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 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. everyday. 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 was the first cultural institution in Los Angeles 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.