

PRESS RELEASE
February 9, 2021

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Animatronic Dinosaurs of *Prehistoric Forest* Return to SB Museum of Natural History

- Popular outdoor exhibit reopens to Members February 17, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
- General public to be welcomed back to the Museum's outdoor exhibits February 20
- Reservations are required, available at sbnature.org/tickets
- Indoor exhibits remain closed, masks are required for ages 3 and up

SANTA BARBARA, CA—The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is ready to take you back in time millions of years...or just to summer 2019. The popular dinosaur exhibit *Prehistoric Forest* returns to the Museum February 17 for a Members-only preview, opening to non-members February 20. For safe distancing, attendance is limited and reservations are required (available at sbnature.org/tickets). Masks are required for ages three and up, and indoor exhibits remain closed.

The big dinosaurs made 2019 a summer to remember at the Museum, with record-breaking numbers of guests encountering them up close "in the wild." At summer's end, the dinosaurs' creators—animatronic artisans Kokoro Exhibits—shipped them to their next engagement.

As soon as the big dinosaurs left, people started asking when they would return. Less than a week after *Prehistoric Forest* closed, the Museum received a postcard with artwork and a message from a 2.5-year-old future paleontologist named Rosie: "Dinosaurs, come back!" Director of Exhibits & Education Frank Hein, M.S., and President & CEO Luke J. Swetland, M.A., M.I.L.S., replied to say they felt the same. Hein started negotiations with Kokoro to bring the big dinosaurs back for good.

The dinosaurs finally returned to the Museum on January 18, and exhibits and facilities staff undertook the challenging task of installing the heavy animatronics while following new health and safety guidelines. Thanks to careful planning by Exhibits Lead Francisco Lopez, the process went smoothly and now *Tyrannosaurus rex*, *Stegosaurus*, *Triceratops*, *Parasaurolopus*, and *Euoplocephalus* are settling nicely into their old digs in the wooded area across Mission Creek.

Museum staff are breaking the good news, which is particularly welcome right now. School & Teacher Services Manager Charlotte Zeamer, Ph.D., had the pleasure of telling a group of schoolchildren about the dinos' return during a recent virtual field trip. Although the kids were muted, their excitement was clear: "It looked like they were saying 'Wheeeee hooooo!'" Dr. Zeamer cheerfully reported.

Experts and educators at the Museum want guests to learn while they make fun memories. The animatronics are accompanied by plaques drafted in consultation with Dibblee Curator of Earth Science Jonathan Hoffman, Ph.D., and paleobiologist Jenna J. Rolle, M.S. (who teaches dinosaur courses at Santa Barbara City College and also works for the Museum's Education Division). One of

the key messages they wanted to convey is the fact that paleontology is dynamic, with researchers constantly updating what we know about the history of life. Some of the plaques are getting updates, too. After seeing the animatronic formerly listed as *Ankylosaurus* up close last year, the experts determined that it more closely resembles the near relative, *Euoplocephalus*. The sign that accompanies this armored dinosaur family (a mother and two juveniles) is getting an update.

Will the Museum's *T. rex* ever get updated with feathers? Although *T. rex*-specific feather impressions are lacking, Rolle notes that there is evidence for primitive feathers among the larger group of dinosaurs to which *T. rex* belongs. Paleontologists don't yet know whether all these species maintained feathers throughout life, or only kept them as juveniles. "I like to wonder whether they looked cute and cuddly like little chicken chicks or silly and dorky like owl chicks," muses Rolle. More specimens and techniques will be needed to be sure of *T. rex*'s feathers. "A child visiting *Prehistoric Forest* may be the future paleontologist who figures it out!" said Dr. Hoffman.

For a brief time, the Museum will be doubling the fun for dino-lovers, as the temporary exhibit *Dinorama: Miniatures Through the Mesozoic* in the Sprague Pavilion runs through April 25. Another collaboration between the Museum's paleontologists and exhibits staff, *Dinorama* is a curated landscape of mini-dioramas populated by painted and posed figurines of ancient creatures. These little beasts may make the Age of Reptiles more approachable for families with very young or particularly sensitive children, but they also have a lot to offer more sophisticated guests. Earth Science Volunteer Anthony Caruso (who also worked in Guest Services at the Museum) garnered special praise from visitors for sharing his dinosaur knowledge in the pavilion when this exhibit opened briefly in December. Caruso helped train other Museum staff to point out the telltale differences between dinosaurs and other Mesozoic animals in different lineages, like crocodylians, marine reptiles, and pterosaurs. The details illustrate the evolutionary pathways these lineages have followed over time, with some ending in mass extinction and others—like avian dinosaurs and our own mammalian heritage—part of life on Earth today.

For more details, visit sbnature.org.

About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. Founded in 1916, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is a private, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire a thirst for discovery and a passion for the natural world. The Museum seeks to connect people to nature for the betterment of both, and prides itself on being *naturally different*. For more information, visit sbnature.org.



Giant dinosaurs—including *Parasaurolophus*—are returning to the grounds of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Photo by Gary Robinson

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Prehistoric Forest was a family favorite in summer 2019. *T. rex* inspired awe and fear that often turned into laughs and smiles when kids realized these moving monsters were harmless. The big animatronic dinosaurs are back by popular demand starting late February.



Paleontologists at the Museum decided this animatronic's facial features and bony armor make it a dead ringer for *Euoplocephalus*, not its close relative *Ankylosaurus*. Photo by Gary Robinson.

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Exhibits Lead Francisco Lopez tests the volcano in *Dinorama: Miniatures Through the Mesozoic*. This curated landscape of ancient beasts runs only through April 25, *Prehistoric Forest* runs indefinitely.