

COLORADO & THE WEST

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Stegosaurus flies on historic journey

Chopper hauls dinosaur to flatbed truck from its ancient rocky grave near southern Colorado city

By Bill Scanlon

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CANON CITY — Stegosaurus was propelled into the 20th century Friday.

As dinosaur lovers of all ages watched, a mammoth Army Chinook helicopter lifted a nearly intact stegosaurus from its 140-million-year-old rocky grave near this southern Colorado city.

Bryan Small, the man who in June found the first bone that led to the astounding treasure, watched nervously as the 13,000-pound conglomeration of rock, bone and plaster safely cleared the hole from which it was dug.

"It went perfectly," he said after the 6½-ton mass was lifted high over a ridge, lowered on a meadow, rerigged, relifted and lowered safely on a flatbed truck.

"I'm glad it's done," said Ken Carpenter, lead paleontologist for the dig.

"Now, we have to do the tail."

With the help of quarrymen using jackhammers and volunteers with plaster, the tail should be extracted and ready for transport by the middle of next week, Carpenter said.

Paleontologists earlier had freed the skull — only the second skull of a stegosaurus ever found.

The first skull, found 2 miles from this summer's find, is at the Smithsonian Institution.

School kids recognize stegosaurus by its distinctive bony plates down the backbone and sharp tail spikes.

The chances of finding a stegosaurus preserved intact are about as good as winning the Colorado Lottery.

With this stegosaurus, found



Dean Krakel/Rocky Mountain News

A helicopter lowers 6½ tons of stegosaurus bones, rock and plaster onto a truck in Garden Park. The remains will be stored in the area for several months before going to a permanent home.

among the junipers and boulders at the fossil-rich Garden Park north of the city, researchers got lucky.

Small believes this specimen died in a pond.

Within 12 or 24 hours — before the dinosaur could be torn apart by predators — a creek overflowed, covering the dead dinosaur with muddy sediment.

The stegosaurus stayed intact throughout the creation of the Rocky Mountains and massive land shifts.

That it stayed together Friday is a testimony to the cooperation of several agencies and professionals, and dozens of volunteers.

The Bureau of Land Management, the Army, the Denver Mu-

seum of Natural History, the Colorado Quarry Co. and the Garden Park Paleontology Society all lent a hand.

This stegosaurus — "probably the best that has ever been found," said Garden Park volunteer Jay Hanson — will stay in the area for several months before heading for a permanent home, probably the Denver museum.

The stegosaurus was found during the annual two-week survey in June, by the museum, the society and BLM.

Fort Carson Army Base contributed its only Chinook, some pilots and others experienced in lifting and rigging.

The soldiers from Fort Carson

secured the rock with straps, hooks and pulleys.

As the Chinook, dangling a 100-foot sling, neared, Sgt. Mario Herrera lay on his abdomen in the belly of the helicopter, eyeing the rock and instructing the pilots to make minute movements.

While excavating stegosaurus, Small and Carpenter found what they think may be the vertebrae of a giant dinosaur, similar to a brontosaurus.

"It's fascinating work," Small said.

"I was interested in fossils as a little kid and never grew out of it."

"To know you're the first person to see something like this is a rush."