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Stegosaurus dig resumes

History-museum team hopes to recover 90% of skeleton

By The Associated Press

A team of paleontologists from the Denver Museum of Natural History has returned to Garden Park to try to finish excavating a large stegosaurus discovered a month ago.

Leading the field crew is Bryan Small, who found the 140-million-year-old creature while surveying the canyon for turtles.

"This is a very exciting find," Small said. "At least 70 percent of the articulated stegosaurus skeleton has been unearthed, and we expect to recover maybe 90 percent. I wouldn't be surprised if we find a few toes missing, however."

Small said most unusual is the presence of a complete, intact skull. "This is only the second stegosaurus skull ever discovered. The other was found here down by Fourmile Creek years ago, with just a few skeletal remains, and is now in the Smithsonian."

Small noted that the state fossil stegosaurus exhibited in the Denver Museum was excavated in the 1930s and did not have the skull with it. The skull at the Smithsonian was probably the original, from which a replica was made for the Colorado stegosaurus.

"Increasingly, this is a particularly large stegosaurus specimen, probably 25 feet or so long, we estimate, which is 25 percent larger than other skeletons found," he said.

"We will make a replica of the stegosaurus for the museum, and there is a strong likelihood that the skeleton will be displayed at the National Visitor Center here in Garden Park when it is built."

A number of bones of other dinosaur species have been found scattered around the stegosaurus.

A sauropod vertebra, about 14 inches across; pieces of fossil turtle shell, crocodile bones, and an assortment of teeth, toes and vertebrae of crow-sized dinosaurs are among the discoveries.

"The dinosaur died on the edge of a river channel and was covered with clay layers by overbank flooding, but you really have to be a geologist to interpret all this," Small said.

The Denver Museum is working in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management and the Garden Park Paleontology Society to determine the locations of potential new dinosaur quarries in the area, including one or more for proposed on-site exhibits, where the public will be able to watch the excavation.