

Dinosaur symposium draws experts from across Canada

March 27, 2018

WEMBLEY, AB – The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum buzzed with activity over this past weekend as participants gathered for the museum’s first Fossil Forum symposium on Saturday, March 24.

Over four dozen attendees assembled in the museum’s Aykroyd Family Theatre to hear about The Great Canadian Dinosaur Rush and the Women in Palaeontology from five experts in palaeontology, including the University of Alberta’s Dr. Eva Koppelhus and Dr. Philip Currie, for whom the museum is named.

Kicking off the morning session, Koppelhus addressed the many contributions of women to Alberta palaeontology, and was followed up with topics by the University of Alberta’s Robin Sissons. Although well-known dinosaur hunter Wendy Sloboda was unable to make the trip due to weather, Dr. David Evans of the Royal Ontario Museum presented her content about work done on the Southern Alberta Dinosaur Project.

Evans and Dr. Jordan Mallon of the Canadian Museum of Nature made the journey from Ontario to address the history of palaeontology in Canada, followed by Currie’s talk – the final and keynote topic of the symposium – addressing the historical ‘Great Dinosaur Rush’ and its modern revival.

This symposium marked the third time Evans had ever visited the museum. “There is a lot of buzz across Canada for this museum and I see why,” he said. “When a building of over \$40 million is constructed to recognize palaeontological finds in a region, people take note. It speaks volumes to the level of commitment of the region.”

Following the symposium, many of the crowd, including the speakers, attended a short reception to welcome several new additions to the museum’s permanent exhibits including fossilized dinosaur footprint impressions found west the museum along the Redwillow River, a hadrosaur femur that visitors can touch, and a wall mural celebrating some of the milestone events of nearly 150 years of palaeontology in the Peace Region, sponsored by a successful Canada 150 grant from the County of Grande Prairie No. 1.

In attendance at the unveiling were members of the Palaeontological Society of the Peace (PSP), Kat Ormay and Sheldon Graber, who contributed to the mural project and have worked



on a large number of significant palaeontological projects in the Peace Region. Ormay read a speech written by her colleague Dr. Bert Hunt who also recognized the contributions of Dr. Desh Mittra and the Grande Prairie Regional College at the mural's unveiling. Hunt and Ormay mentioned the society's appreciation for the museum's recognition of their contributions to palaeontology in the area.

The reception was also the final chance for the public to see the Fossil Country on Canvas special exhibit, which featured paintings of local artist Robert Guest and fossils discovered near the areas depicted. Dr. Camille Torbey, a local physician and owner of the works, was in attendance, as was the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie's executive director Jeff Erbach.

During the events, the museum hosted several dignitaries from the surrounding area, including Mayor Chris Turnmire of the Town of Wembley, Councillor Ross Sutherland of the County of Grande Prairie, Reeve Dale Gervais of the Municipal District of Greenview, and the City of Grande Prairie's David Olinger and Tim Pradzinski.

As April approaches, the museum welcomes Dinosaurs Unearthed, a large special exhibit featuring the latest dinosaur research, an impressive collection of fossils, and life-sized animatronic dinosaurs throughout all galleries.

"The museum is a hub of both scientific discovery and community collaboration," said the museum's executive director Susan Hunter. "We are very excited to see people embracing it as a centre for meaningful discussion and shared fascination of the region's prehistoric natural history."

The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum – a 41,000 square foot world-class facility named for Canada's preeminent palaeontologist and highlighting the rich fossil resources of Northern Alberta – opened its doors to the public on September 26, 2015. It is Canada's second devoted dinosaur museum, and is located 19 kilometres west of the City of Grande Prairie in the Town of Wembley.

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