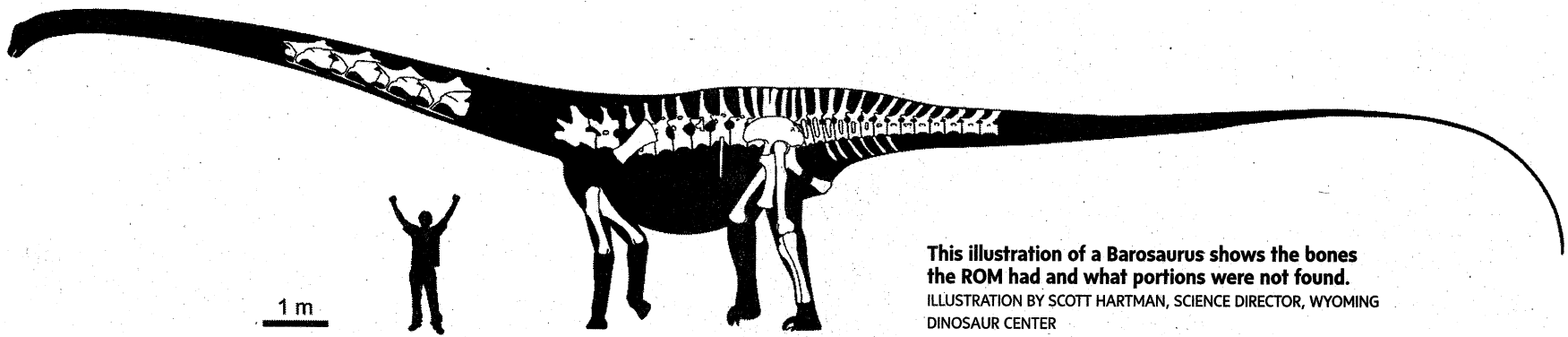


Toronto

REDISCOVERED TREASURE



This illustration of a Barosaurus shows the bones the ROM had and what portions were not found. ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HARTMAN, SCIENCE DIRECTOR, WYOMING DINOSAUR CENTER

A monster task – putting Gordo together

Buried in the ROM vault for 45 years, one of the largest beasts to roam the Earth will finally go on display

BY ANTHONY REINHART
TRENTON, ONT.

Research Casting International looks like an ordinary industrial building until you grab the door handle to enter.

It's a bone.

It sounds like an ordinary plant, too, its air replete with metallic clanks and Metallica cranked on a dust-covered stereo, as a forklift trundles through the dim expanse of racks, machines and more bones.

When you need something big assembled, any such shop will do. When that something is the skeleton of one of the largest dinosaurs to walk the Earth – like the one that spent 45 years forgotten in storage at the Royal Ontario Museum until it was found this fall – you bring it here.

Once it arrives, an ordinary guy named Peter May will look after you – though he'd appreciate it if you could hold off until Dec. 15.

That's the day the ROM plans to unveil its rediscovered treasure, parts of which Mr. May unwittingly handled when he worked at the museum decades ago; which he had a hand in finding again in September; and which his highly specialized company is now feverishly reassembling.

When they're done, Gordo the Barosaurus will be the biggest dinosaur ever displayed in Canada and the only mounted Barosaurus in the world built with actual fossils, rather than mere castings.

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A specimen of Gordo's size and complexity would normally take two or three workers two years to prepare and assemble. For this job, Mr. May was given 6½ weeks, so he's had to push everything else aside and throw 15 experienced technicians at it.

"We haven't pulled a weekend yet, but that'll be coming," says the man whose handiwork greets museum-goers from Sydney to Berlin to Tokyo to Riyadh, and dozens of major centres in between. That includes New York's American Museum of Natural History, where the world's only other mounted Barosaurus – a casting, that is – rears up to protect

its young from a meat-eating Allosaurus.

All of which explains why the ROM called on Mr. May and his team to remount its dinosaur displays in the museum's new Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, incorporating pieces that will be both familiar and new to visitors.

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No one realized that just such a specimen had been hiding in plain view inside the ROM's vaults since 1962.

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Five pages in, Dr. Evans unearthed a verbal artifact that soon had him sitting bolt upright: "These elongate cervicals (CM 1198) probably belong to a partial skeleton, field #155 (now ROM 3670), which was originally identified as Diplodocus."

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Arcane to anyone else, the reference suggested that the random, disparate sauropod bones he'd noticed on shelves and in drawers in the ROM collections room actually belonged to a single dinosaur, and a Barosaurus, no less – a vegan behemoth rarer and larger than Diplodocus and measuring 24 metres long and weighing in at 15 tonnes when it roamed North America.

When the plane touched down in Denver, Dr. Evans fired off e-mails to colleagues in Toronto and to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, to which Dr. McIntosh had referred in his paper as the probable holder of those "elongate cervicals," or neck vertebrae, belonging to the ROM specimen.

After two days that felt like two weeks, Dr. Evans and Mr. May returned to Toronto.

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Brett Crawford works on the fabrication of steel armatures for the Barosaurus exhibit. TIBOR KOLLEY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Peter May examines vertebrae that will be used to fill some of the missing Barosaurus parts. TIBOR KOLLEY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Meanwhile, ROM collections manager Kevin Seymour recalled having seen a letter from Dr. McIntosh to Gordon Ed-

mund, the late ROM curator who retired in 1990, regarding the Barosaurus, and searched for several hours until he found it.

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"That letter was basically the Rosetta stone to figuring the whole thing out," Dr. Evans says, adding that there's nothing particularly unusual about a museum as old and large as the ROM losing track of parts of its collection through several decades and building renovations. Dr. Edmund, for whom Gordo was named, had hoped to mount the big sauropod but lacked the space, and when his career ended, its story simply got lost.

Strangely enough, Mr. May was a young ROM employee in the late 1970s, and had yet to start his casting business, when he helped pack the contents of the collections room for one of those moves within the building.

When Gordo arrived in Toronto, a piece of him came in a cardboard box that Mr. May recognized as having packed himself, in 1979, using then-newfangled protective foam sprayed from a can.

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Daunting as it is, especially under such a tight deadline, the work is rewarding.

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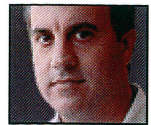
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