

For Immediate Release

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***T. rex* dig goes online**

For the first time ever, the whole world is invited to a *Tyrannosaurus rex* excavation — virtually, that is. Starting May 10, students in classrooms, scientists in laboratories, and everyone with access to the internet can tune in to the excavation of what may be one of the three best *T. rex* specimens ever uncovered.

“This dinosaur’s great promise comes from the arrangement of its exposed parts,” explained Peter Larson, President of Black Hills Institute of Geological Research in Hill City, South Dakota, and veteran of seven previous *T. rex* excavations. “Already we can see that its tail, one leg, and the pelvis are articulated, still connected as they were in life. Since these bones are leading underground, there is a very good chance that this dinosaur is relatively complete. But we won’t know for sure until we dig it out.”

Those who wish to watch the uncovering of this exciting new find can do so by logging on to **www.unearthingtrex.com**, a Web site that will be updated daily from the field. The crew will utilize video, photographs, slide shows, an interactive bone map, and other means to illustrate exactly what they’re seeing. This site will provide a unique opportunity for visitors to experience first hand an ongoing dinosaur excavation almost as if they were there in person.

“We will post each day what bones were found, what new pieces of scientific evidence were uncovered, and whatever interesting questions or problems we come up with,” Larson said. “Plus, Web site visitors can send us comments, take part in a discussion forum, or ask the opinions of a panel of experts who will be communicating with us as the dig progresses.”

The Web site also will include supporting information about *T. rex*, including facts and theories about the animal’s behavior and anatomy, along with the history of paleontology and stories about the colorful people who have populated this science for hundreds of years.

The idea of taking a Web crew to an Institute dig site was developed by Larry Shaffer, the Institute’s resident computer guru. He is currently fine-tuning the supporting content information, and will have the Web site fully operable by May 10, the day the crew will arrive at the dig site.

“The Institute has decades of experience in the field, including excellent supporting documentation and photography,” Shaffer said. “I am working to create visually interesting, dynamic, and interactive media that will be suitable for all ages and levels of knowledge.”

“With modern computer technology, this is the first time anyone has been able to offer something like this,” Larson added. “Larry and his team will be documenting the dig moment by moment. It will be a new experience for all of us to be able to share the excitement of discovery with people all over the world, as it’s happening.”

Black Hills Institute was chosen to excavate the fossil because of its position as the world's largest private fossil company. In addition, Larson is considered one of paleontology's experts on *Tyrannosaurus rex*. He has published scientific papers on the creature ever since the company excavated Sue, the world's largest and most famous *T. rex*, in 1990. The owners of the land where the new specimen was found hope that the Institute will help them place the fossil in a museum for permanent display.

"This specimen could be extremely important scientifically. Preliminary evidence suggests that this *Tyrannosaurus rex* could be killer," Larson said, his excitement evident. "Such a fossil could easily anchor a world class museum collection."

The two most complete *T. rex* specimens, both collected by the Institute, SUE at the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, and STAN at Black Hills Institute in Hill City, are about 80 and 70 percent complete, respectively; the next best fall in the 50 percent range. Larson hypothesizes that the new *T. rex*, located in eastern Montana, could rank high on the list.

He also anticipated the questions that such an excavation could answer—and which would be posted on the Web site as evidence mounts. These include: What happened during this dinosaur's life? What injuries and diseases did it have? Is it a boy or girl? What was its last meal? How did it die? Was its carcass fed upon, and if so, by whom?

Larson added that he hopes the fossil's special preservation—in "the right stuff," fine siltstone—will shed light on some cutting-edge *T. rex* mysteries, such as what this extinct creature's skin was like, or whether this largest terrestrial carnivore had feathers. Also, each new, relatively complete *T. rex* might help scientists determine if what we think of as *T. rex* was instead two similar species.

"We're really excited that schools will still be in session during this dig, because kids often ask wonderful questions that open up new fields of study," Larson said. "If they check us out each day, they'll see the scientific process in action, and the methods paleontologists use to dig fossils in the field. Then, by using the Web site, they'll also be able to contribute to the study of this new dinosaur."

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Available media (photos by Peter L. Larson — Copyright © 2003 BHIGR — please use credit line):

Photo (6 MB): "Discovery site with joint discoverers, Don and Dan, and friends."

http://media.bhigr.com/BHI_Trex_Site.jpg.zip

Photo (7 MB): "Amateur paleontologists, Don and Dan, inspecting their discovery."

http://media.bhigr.com/BHI_Trex_Finders.jpg.zip

Photo (4 MB): "View of the beautiful Hell Creek badlands from the excavation site."

http://media.bhigr.com/BHI_Trex_Scene.jpg.zip

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