



MAMMOTH TRACKS

NEWSLETTER

Number 1, April, 2003

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Spotlight on...the Museum's Ichthyology Program

with Mark Steinhilber, Curator of Ichthyology and Herpetology



Director's Message

Spotlight on Alberta is the focus of the Provincial Museum of Alberta for the next few years. Our goal is to be recognized as the best place in the world to learn about this province. It is only natural that the Provincial Museum in the capital of the province tells the story of Alberta.

Our first major project in the spotlight is, of course, **Wild Alberta**. This 10,000 square foot renewal of the *Habitat Gallery* is already in phase-two construction, with the dioramas reinstalled in their new locations and the walls and extraordinary new features being assembled around them. I check it out every day and I know the result will be well worth the investment. Stay tuned for a special **Sneak-a-Peek** weekend in May, your chance to see the new gallery under construction before it opens formally in September.

We are in the planning stages for several other renewals to our Alberta galleries but our primary focus is on Alberta's centennial in 2005. Our feature for that year, should we secure the funding we need, will be Alberta stories of the last 100 years. Western Canadian History curator Jane Ross

and her team are putting the finishing touches on the themes and stories that we feel capture the essence of Alberta and define the Alberta identity. We will need a lot of help to make this gallery a reality. I would be happy to hear from you if you feel you can assist.

On a smaller scale, an Alberta focus is the central theme of the **Spotlight Gallery**, the new name of our second floor feature gallery. Starting with the Quaternary Paleontology program and *Bone Diggers*, the curatorial programs are bringing their collections out of storage to the public. The true measure of a museum is its collections, and the wealth of artifacts, specimens and stories coming to the **Spotlight Gallery** is astonishing!

Speaking of artifacts, the curators have picked their favourites among all that we have on display at the moment. Special maps and signage will help you find them and discover why we think they are so special. Let us know what you think!

Dr Bruce McGillivray
Director



Spotlight on... The Museum's Ichthyology (fish) Program

Curator Profile - Mark Steinhilber

Mark Steinhilber has been with the Provincial Museum since 1981. Starting out as a summer student in the Ornithology program, he then spent six years as a Collections Management Technician before taking charge of the fish collection in 1987. He is now the Curator of Ichthyology (the study of fishes) and Herpetology (the study of amphibians and reptiles). His work with Alberta's fishes will be featured in the **Go Fish!** exhibition in the Museum's **Spotlight Gallery** from **April 24 to July 20, 2003.**

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Alberta Conservation Association in the production of the *Go Fish!* exhibition.

What do you find so fascinating about fish?

Fish have an aura of mystery around them. They live in an environment that we can't easily access, so we really don't see them often unless we make a special effort. The way they live their lives is so foreign to us. You'd think that living in a medium 800 times denser than air would put many constraints on the things that they can do and on the structure of their bodies. Yet, worldwide, there are more kinds of fishes than all other species of vertebrates combined.

Describe how your interest in fish developed.

As a kid, I always liked fishing—even though I was the only member of our family that did. On summer vacations this would often result in conflicts. To say my sisters didn't share my enthusiasm for the sport would be an understatement. Fish were so exciting to catch (they still are), but I knew so little about them. Maybe that's why I'm so interested in promoting the identification and appreciation of fishes and fish diversity in the **Go Fish!** exhibition and the **Wild Alberta** gallery. Fish identification seems like a pretty basic message to present in a gallery, but it has important implications for fish conservation.



Tell us a little about your fish collection.

The fish collection includes about 20,000 specimens, with the majority preserved whole in ethanol. We also have about 2000 skeletal specimens, 1000 tissues in super-cold storage, and about 100 mounts and casts. All of the Alberta fish species are represented in the collection. The focus of the collection has been to preserve specimens from remote regions of the province. The collection includes a good sample of Shortjaw Cisco—a species that has been verified from only one lake in the province and from only a handful of lakes throughout Canada.

How do you add to the collection?

Each year, we spend 50 to 60 days in the field acquiring specimens. Much of my time in the past six years has been

spent in the area north of Lake Athabasca looking for Shortjaw Cisco. Recently, we've begun gathering data on the status of non-game fishes (e.g., minnows) in east-central Alberta. This has involved many weeks of seining (fishing with a net designed to hang vertically in the water) and trapping the small fishes that most people aren't even aware exist. Overall, our collecting has covered almost every corner of the province, from the Milk River to the Slave River.

Do you have any unusual tools of the trade?

The tool that surprises many people is our *electroshocker*. This unit is worn like a backpack and includes a generator that produces an electrical current that runs between two electrodes in the water. Any fishes in the electrical field are either stunned by the shock or swim toward the positive electrode due to a phenomenon called *electrotaxis*. The briefly incapacitated fish are scooped up in a dip net. Within seconds, they recover from the shock and can be released. Many of the fishes we've captured for our **Wild Alberta** aquaria were collected by electrofishing. None shows any adverse effects of the electrical shock.

What would you like all Albertans to know/learn about our fish habitat?

Fishes in Alberta are under enormous pressures due to human activities. There aren't very many lakes in the province that support fish populations. Did you know that we have about 1000 fish-producing lakes whereas Saskatchewan has about 95,000 and Ontario about 250,000? With so little suitable fish habitat available, we can't afford to lose *any* of it! People must realize how precious our aquatic resources are, and they should try to do what they can to help conserve these areas.

What is your vision for the future of the program?

My goal has been to build a collection that documents the diversity of our natural heritage and provides future generations with a window to the past. Who knows what the Alberta landscape will look like in the future? If climate change scenarios are correct, the aquatic environments of today may well disappear along with their inhabitants. Museums may become the only places our children and grandchildren can see the things we now take for granted. Collecting and preserving things that are common today may be priceless in the future. That's what museum work is all about.



Exploring Our Collections... with Dr. Susan Berry, Curator of Ethnology

The painting shown here was purchased for the Provincial Museum's ethnology collections in 2001. It is drawn with mineral pigments on a large (179 cm x 77 cm) moose hide.

The Provincial Museum acquired the painting from the great-grandson of a Hudson's Bay Company employee named Irvine. According to family history, Mr. Irvine received the painting as a gift from a local Dene man while stationed at Fort Norman (now Tulita), a Company post on the Mackenzie River. The man had been caught in a blizzard when out hunting. While lost in the bush, he had a dream of heaven and hell. The painting is his record of that dream.

The painting resembles the "ladders to heaven" used by Christian missionaries in the North. Those pictorial teaching tools portray two paths to Judgment Day, the Way of Good and the Way of Evil. But the painting is also rooted in ancient Dene knowledge. Swan, the large black bird at the painting's top, is intimately linked with the vision quest. Dene prophets, the men who dream, are said to follow Swan's path of flight between earth and heaven. On their trip to heaven, they receive songs and other forms of spiritual knowledge to take back to their people.

Hoping to find information that could identify the hunter, curatorial staff searched records at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Post journals for the years 1867 to 1903 no longer exist, but Company records show that a William Irvine served at Fort Norman from 1882 to 1900. The painting, then, probably dates to those years.

Last March, staff took the painting to a gathering of Dene Elders in Tulita. Photos also were exhibited at an Elders' language workshop held in Ross River, Yukon. Elders' comments on the painting are being transcribed and translated into English. We hope that their insights will cast further light on the history and meaning of this remarkable work.



On the go... the evolution of a gallery

BUILDING A MOUNTAIN IN EDMONTON

Imagine a mountain—rock solid, dappled with lichen. A cool and clear stream tumbles down its face creating a river at the mountain's base.

It's happening right now!

The Museum has hired *Custom Rock International* to build all of the rock structures, including the mountain stream, in the new **Wild Alberta** gallery. *Custom Rock International*, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, specializes in creating realistic rockwork for museums, zoos and theme parks. A team of craftspeople is assembling the mountain and prairie outcrops that will appear in **Wild Alberta** opening later this year.

Visitors will be able to walk both around and under the stream to explore the ways in which life adapts to high-altitude conditions.

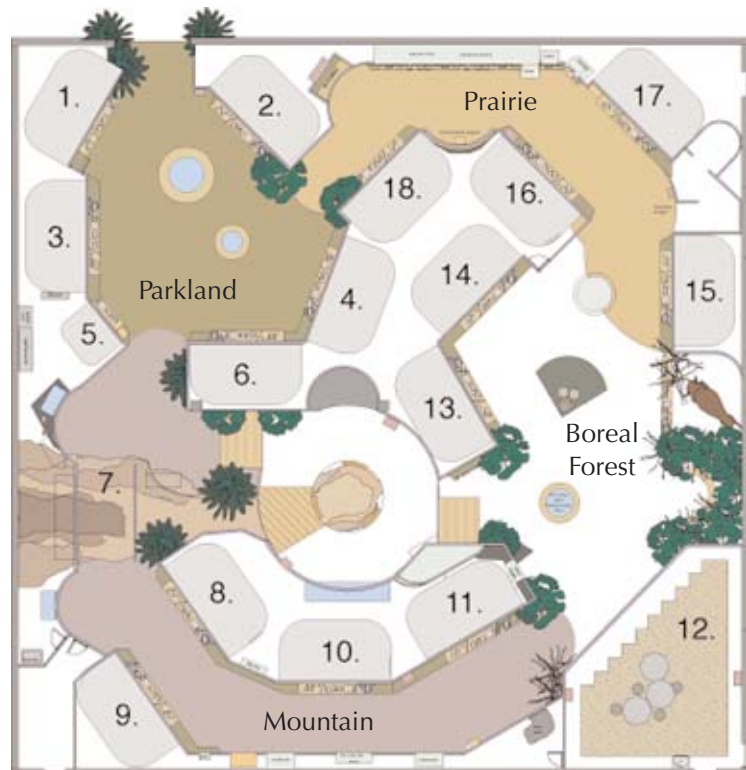


Under Construction



Floorplan for **Wild Alberta** gallery.

1. Pelican
2. Caribou
3. Beaver
4. Wolf
5. Ruffed Grouse
6. Moose
7. Waterfall
8. Mountain Goat
9. Cougar
10. Big Horn Sheep
11. Grizzly Bear
12. Field Station
13. Trumpeter Swan
14. Shore Birds
15. Coyote
16. Golden Eagle
17. Pronghorn
18. Mule Deer





Exhibitions and Events... at the Museum

Oct 12 to April 21: *Ancient Rome*

This exhibition provides Albertans with the unique opportunity to see ancient artifacts that have never before been displayed in North America.

February 15 to May 4: *Fantastic Art* by Edith Eichner

A colourful sampling of Edith's works can be seen in the Orientation Gallery.

March 31 to April 4: *Rome Spring Break!*

Enjoy special activities, included with admission, from 10:00 am to 3:30 pm throughout the week.

April: *Friday Night Tours of Ancient Rome* (dates TBA)

April 24 to July 20: *Go Fish!*

The second installment in the *Spotlight Gallery Series* features the work and collections of our Ichthyology program.

April 26 and 27:

Ancient Rome Shop & Prop Sale

Take a piece of Museum history home! Incredible deals on Rome-related merchandise will also be available from the Museum Shop.

May 11:

Mother's Day Brunch in the Museum Café

Call (780) 488-7333 for more information.

May 31 to September 1: *International Wildlife Photographer of the Year*

Direct from the Natural History Museum of London, UK. This year, photographers from more than 60 countries entered the competition. Browse through 101 of the very best winning and commended images.

May 17 to 19:

Wild Alberta Sneak-a-Peek Weekend

Preview the new gallery under construction.

June:

Friday Night Tours of the International Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition (Dates TBA)

June 15:

Father's Day Brunch in the Museum Café

call (780) 488-7333 for details.

June 20:

National Aboriginal Day Celebrations!

9:30 am to 3:00 pm. Included with regular admission.

Time Travellers X

All lectures start at 7:30 pm in the Museum Theatre.

April 3: *Polynesian Origins* Presented by Dr. David V. Burley from Simon Fraser University.

April 10:
What Drives the Spread of Language? Presented by Dr. Lyle Campbell from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

April 17: *Another Ten Remarkable Things About Alberta Archaeology* Presented by Dr. Jack Ives, Provincial Archaeologist, Heritage Resource Management Branch.

More Info...

Time Travellers X

Ongoing Programs

A to Z at the Museum—a drop-in program for families every Saturday morning between 9:00 am and 11:00 am. Admission is half price on weekends between 9:00 am and 11:00 am.

April's theme is *Ancient Rome*

May's theme is *Go Fish!*

June's theme is *Photography*

Treasured Time for Tots—a 30-minute drop-in program for tots and their caregivers every Tuesday at 10:00 am. Included with regular admission.

Supermarket Botany—in the Science Circle every Sunday afternoon from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm. This fun, engaging and educational program challenges visitor knowledge about some of the plants that are readily available in our supermarkets and that we commonly use but chronically misidentify.



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More Info...

Museum School



Sponsored in part by Allard Foundation

In 2000, the Provincial Museum of Alberta launched an exciting new educational program, the *Museum School*. Unlike our other school programs, which run for one or two hours, the *Museum School* offers an entire week of innovative and hands-on learning. The Museum is a unique place. Teachers and students from grades 2-12 can explore Alberta's natural and cultural history in the Museum's permanent galleries and feature exhibitions; they can also see what goes on behind-the-scenes.

Once a teacher books a week at the Museum, s/he develops a theme with our *Museum School* coordinator. Some of the themes teachers have explored include: Aboriginal people, environmental studies, insects and Harry Potter. During the week, students meet curatorial staff. These experts share their experiences and knowledge with the students. Students also make a behind-the-scenes visit to see our wonderful collections. Students use journals to make daily entries reflecting on what they have learned. To wrap up the week, many of the teachers book lunch and an entertaining theatrical presentation in the *Museum Café*.

By week's end students, parents and teachers are exhausted, but it is one week they will never forget!

For more information on the *Museum School* call (780) 453-9116.

Visit the Web site designed by a class from St. Mary Catholic School that participated in the *Museum School* in 2002: <http://www.stmary.ecsd.net/2C/Web/museum.htm>



Museum School 2002-2003 is made possible by the generous support of the **Allard Foundation** and the **Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry**

What is this?



Recently staff members at the Provincial Museum were asked to identify a bone, like this one, picked up in an open field. What do you think it is? At the time it was believed to be part of a skull. A cursory examination of the bone, however, revealed that it was not a skull at all, but rather a pelvis (hip bone). Indeed, there is no indication of a brain case here. Also, a hole runs the full length of the bone extending into the Vertebrae at one end. The small round opening about half-way down the length of the bone is actually the point of articulation (socket) with the hind limb. This bone belongs to a female Mallard duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) from our collection. (accession number Z87.18.9).

More Info...

Dr. Jocelyn Hudon, Curator of Ornithology

Ornithology Program



Support Your Museum...

The Provincial Museum of Alberta is considered one of Canada's most successful museums. Our plans for the future continue that bold vision of the unexpected for which the Museum has become known. What visitors will see during the next five years are galleries and exhibitions designed to engage, enlighten and entertain no matter how many times they visit.

In our first operational year, the Fund Development Office is successfully creating partnerships with individuals, corporations and foundations in order to bring Albertans the best possible educational programs, collections and exhibitions about Alberta.

In October, we introduced the *Museum Mammoth Pass*, an exclusive benefits "club" for families, students, seniors and grandparents. Much to our delight we recently welcomed our 1000th member! Thank you! Another development this year was our partnership with **Beaverbrook Land Developments** which helped bring the cultural treasures of *Ancient Rome* to Edmonton.

Our largest endeavour to date is the partnership created with the **Federation of Alberta Naturalists** in support of *Wild Alberta*. Projected to cost \$2.3

million, *Wild Alberta* will be recognized as the foremost provincial source for environmental education. Thanks to the generous support of **Alberta Community Development Centennial Legacies Program**, the **Alberta Conservation Association**, **Alberta Infrastructure**, **Ducks Unlimited Canada**, **TD Friends of the Environment**, the **Friends of the Provincial Museum of Alberta Society**, **Alberta Sports Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation**, and many others we have reached \$1.3 million, so far!

Help us build *Wild Alberta*, a legacy for all Albertans for generations to come.

Lisa Monsees, Development Coordinator
(780) 453-9119

To make a donation to *Wild Alberta*, go online to www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca

OR

www.fanweb.ca and follow the *Wild Alberta* links.

You can also mail your donation to:
The Provincial Museum of Alberta,
Attention: Development Office,
12845 102 Ave, Edmonton, AB,
Canada T5N 0M6

Shopping... at the Museum

Looking for that perfect fish book?
Let us recommend:

Great Canadian Fishing Stories That Didn't Get Away

edited by David Scott, from Lone Pine Publishing.
An anthology of more than 30 Canadian fishing stories full of fun and laughter.

Water Life

by Steve Parker, from Miles Kelly Publishing.
The perfect book for the little fisher in your family.
The underwater world is brought to life with fascinating full-colour pictures and surprising facts!

And coming in May from Lone Pine Publishing...

Fish of Alberta

by Mike Sullivan and Amanda Joynt.
This full-colour, fact-filled fish book focuses specifically on Alberta species.

Don't forget to check out the other great items in the **Museum Shop**.

The **Colosseum Shop**

Close-Out Sale starts in March!



Volunteer Program... ready for a challenge?

The Volunteer program at the Provincial Museum of Alberta manages vital human resources for a number of the Museum's sections and programs. One of the main goals of the Volunteer program is to connect people from the community with staff and projects at the Museum by recruiting for specific volunteer assignments. In the past 12 months, 224 volunteers contributed a total of 14,000 hours to the Museum's exhibitions, curatorial projects, and educational and interpretive programs.

In the public galleries, volunteer interpreters add a highly valued interactive component to the themes explored in our exhibitions. Volunteer assignments in non-public areas at the Museum often reflect some aspect of the research or curatorial work that constitutes a significant part of our mandate. Although all of our volunteer positions are challenging and rewarding, occasionally there are assignments that require highly specialized knowledge. In some cases, finding a volunteer with the requisite background and knowledge for these assignments presents a considerable challenge.

Currently, there is one such volunteer assignment in our Western Canadian History section. We are looking for someone who can assist us by identifying, cataloguing and storing our collection of medical equipment. The medical collection covers the period from 1900 to 1990 and includes everything from surgical instruments to heart bypass machines. The volunteer engaged in this project must have the ability to determine and describe the function of medical instruments and equipment, to measure and accurately record information about these objects, and enter the information into the Museum's computer database. Ideally, this volunteer will be someone with surgical nursing experience. Training in cataloguing methods, artifact handling, storage and the Museum's database will be provided.

For more details about this position or other volunteering opportunities.
Call David Parama at 453-9138

Reader Survey... what do you think?

What part of the newsletter is most important to you?

Are there others items you would like to see?

Please email or mail your ideas and comments back to us!
If you would like to provide us with your email address
please send it to the following email.

Email address: marilyn.nelson@gov.ab.ca

Mailing address: 12845 102 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5N 0M6