



*Understanding  
our natural  
environment  
and cultural  
heritage*

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Fran Mainella,  
Director, National Park Service,  
1849 C st. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Sirs,

We have received here, with some incredulity, the news that the superintendent of the internationally renowned Dinosaur National Monument in Utah proposes eliminating all scientific research positions there. I understand that, if true, this means there would be no on-site dinosaur palaeontologist at the Dinosaur National Monument!

I write as a vertebrate palaeontologist and a Museum research scientist with over 40 years professional experience. For many years one of my ambitions was to visit the Dinosaur National Monument in Utah. I finally achieved this in 1999 whilst attending an Early Vertebrate Symposium at Flagstaff, followed by a field trip through Arizona, Utah and Colorado. The visit to Dinosaur National Monument was a highlight of my trip, and I know many of my non-U.S. colleagues felt the same way.

Our visit was made especially valuable by the personal introduction and tour behind the scenes at DNM by Dr Dan Chure and his staff. As professional palaeontologists we were all impressed by what is obviously a well run research facility providing an essential scientific back up for the spectacular dinosaur displays on the rock face itself. Part of the interest for me was hearing about all of the newer (and mostly smaller) fossil discoveries from the area around the DNM which throw new light on the other animals and plants which lived with the dinosaurs and the environments in which they lived.

I suspect that any non-scientific and school groups fortunate enough to experience such tours and personal contact with working scientists must leave DNM with very favourable and educationally valuable impressions.

The mere suggestion that a unique world-class palaeontological ecotourism facility in such an area can hope to maintain its scientific integrity WITHOUT on-site experienced palaeontological research staff is ludicrous. If this were to be allowed to take place for short-sighted bureaucratic or budgetary reasons the U.S. National Parks Service will stand justly condemned by scientists world-wide for an act of short-sighted scientific vandalism.

I suspect that Earl Douglass and Andrew Carnegie must be revolving in their graves at the current proposal to downgrade on-site scientific, and especially dinosaurian, expertise on the site they discovered and helped preserved for posterity.

A U S T R A L I A N M U S E U M

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I can perhaps best illustrate the impression the DNM left on me, and the importance I place on it, with an example.

For the past 2 months I've been busy preparing a new 6-lecture course to present here in Sydney early next year. My topic will be "Great Fossil Sites of the World - Windows into the Past". To illustrate this I have selected 15-20 outstanding fossil sites world-wide, ranging from Precambrian (Ediacara, Australia) to Recent (Rancho La Brea tar-pits, L.A.), and I chose Dinosaur National Monument as one of the finest dinosaur sites.

What are my credentials and do I have any personal experience in rural museums based on fossil discoveries?

Please check our Australian Museum web-site

[http://www.amonline.net.au/palaeontology/field\\_sites/canowindra.htm](http://www.amonline.net.au/palaeontology/field_sites/canowindra.htm)

where you will find illustrated the story behind one of the richest and most spectacular Devonian fossil fish sites in the world here in New South Wales.

I rediscovered and excavated this site 9 years ago and my discoveries have since led to the construction of a dedicated Age of Fishes Museum in a small country town in central-west NSW with considerable benefits to the local community. So I am well aware of the educational and ecotourism value such sites provide - but I am also acutely conscious that their continued success depends ultimately on maintaining their scientific integrity.

There is another aspect to this - if the great U.S. National Parks Service cannot employ dinosaur specialists on one of the world's greatest dinosaur sites, what hope is there for less important sites. I know nothing about the recently appointed superintendent of the DNM but I suggest the US National Parks Service should urgently reassess its priorities and take steps to ensure PERMANENT on-site palaeontological research and support staff at the Dinosaur National Monument in Utah.

Yours sincerely,

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