

Curator climbs out on limb in mural update

By Melanie Brigockas

IS THAT JACQUES GAUTHIER up there on that evergreen branch? And in that patch of ferns in the shadow of Edmontosaurus? It is indeed. Gauthier, curator of vertebrate paleontology at the Yale Peabody Museum, is part of a new adventure awaiting visitors at the museum this summer. Interactive touch screen kiosks in the Great Hall invite visitors to explore Rudolph Zallinger's dinosaur mural, *The Age of Reptiles*, to learn many interesting facts and stories related to both the science and the art of this famous work.

Created by Kent Golden, Golden Multimedia, and the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, the interactive videos show curators planted within the mural itself. They appear in miniature behind plants, next to dinosaurs, even up in a tree pointing to various items of interest. And they talk, too.

Gauthier surfaces everywhere to give information about the animal species depicted in the mural. The videos also include updated illustrations of what scientists now think some of the dinosaurs in the mural may have looked like. T-rex with feathers is one example, but Gauthier cautions, "Don't let those fluffy feathers fool you. An adult T-rex could probably chomp a car in half." Curator of Paleobotany Leo Hickey talks about the plants featured in the mural, although the plant videos will not go live until 2009.

To manipulate the touch screens, visitors access a series of buttons. The Edmontosaurus button reveals, among other things, that this dinosaur had colorful striped skin. Pressing the Pteranodon button they learn that Pterosaurs were the first examples of flying vertebrates. Information about the geological periods can be accessed in a similar fashion. In the Cretaceous Period, for instance, they learn that the climate became more moderate and the Rocky Mountains began to develop.

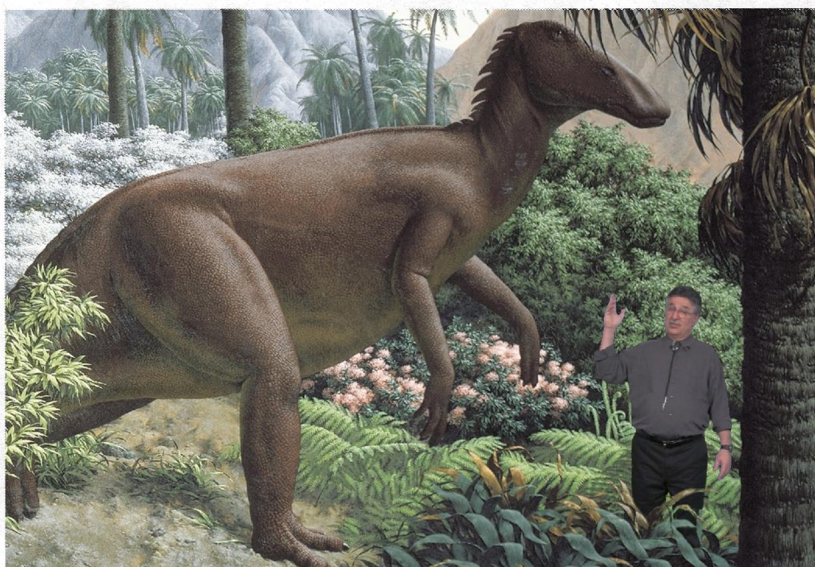


Photo courtesy of Yale Peabody Museum and Kent Golden, Golden Multimedia

Using interactive touch screens, visitors can summon up a curator or educator in a digital version of the mural to inform them on the art and science of *The Age of Reptiles*. Here Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology, Jacques Gauthier, reveals that Edmontosaurus had colorful striped skin.

The "Creating the Mural" button summons up Peabody instructor Armand Morgan, an accomplished artist in his own right, who leads visitors on a visual tour of the creation of the mural. Even the screen saver is enjoyable, where the pencil draft, the egg tempura model, and the mural itself scroll by and fade in and out. It is a treat to see the mural close up, view the different draft versions, and learn about how Zallinger came to paint this timeless masterpiece.

WHIZ KIDS PRODUCE GEOWHIZ

The talented students in the Peabody EVOLUTIONS program are the creative force behind GEOWhiz, a series of mini exhibits set in a cave. Funded by the National Science Foundation with the goal of exposing students to the geosciences, attention is given to labwork, skill sets and an understanding of the proficiencies and college curricula required for careers in these fields.

Working with Museum educator Jamie Alonzo, some 40 students in grades 9 through 12 served as designers, curators, researchers and construction crews to produce exhibits that are visually exciting, as well as instructive, many with fun

interactive elements that children will enjoy. The vulcanology exhibit challenges kids to build a volcano. The geoarchaeology exhibit features a giant word search. Other mini exhibits focus on glacialology, oceanography, planetary geology, paleontology and climatology. The primary visual element is a cave.

Exhibits are populated with objects from the Peabody collections selected by students in collaboration with collections staff. They also benefit from donations of materials such as the cave spelunking and other gear donated by REI (Recreation Equipment, Inc.).

Video shorts produced by some 40 other EVOLUTIONS students can be

seen either in the exhibit or online at www.peabody.yale.edu. The challenge was to base each video on one of the Connecticut State Earth Science Standards for elementary schools. Students learned storyboarding, shooting, and editing techniques and, working in teams, produced videos aimed at ages K-6 or a subset of that range. One group focused on water and its major role in shaping the earth's surface.

GEOWhiz will be on view throughout the summer. The Zallinger kiosk exhibit is a permanent addition. It is particularly timely in that it will be the primary means of viewing *The Age of Reptiles* for several months. The mural is being cleaned this summer with viewing considerably obstructed by tiers of scaffolding and protective cloths.

Thanks to funding from Lucille Alderman and the exhaustive efforts of Peabody docent Dolores "Dody" Gall, the Peabody recently introduced another tool to enhance the visitor experience. Free audio guides, with information and stories at 36 stops, enable visitors to conduct self-guided audio walking tours of permanent exhibits. The tour can also be called up on a cell phone.