

History of Dinosaur Park

Dinosaur Park was constructed as a memorial to “perpetuate the facts of history”, and to acquaint the present generation and others to follow with a fair idea as to the appearance, size and characteristics of our earliest known inhabitants”. The actual project was conceived in 1935 by the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce. The United States Government, through the WPA (Works Progress Administration: a program set up by President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to give jobs and wages to the unemployed, as well as to beautify the country), made large appropriations to furnish the work and wages for those in the area who were in need of employment because of the depression and drought of those years.

This site was donated to the City of Rapid City by private owners of the land. It is due in large part to the Lampert Family and many others that this park came to be. It is interesting to know that real dinosaur tracks have been found nearby.

Preliminary excavations began at the park on May 6, 1936. Work continued, halting only once for a short period while the workers improved Canyon Lake Park. Construction was led by H. H. Babcock, Chief Engineer, and Walter Walking, W.P.A. Engineer. Emmet A. Sullivan, sculptor, was responsible for massive public commissions including Christ of the Ozarks, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, as well as Dinosaur Park. Frank Lockhart and George McGaw completed the actual dinosaurs. The parking lot, terraces, and concession building were all built later.

Upon completion of the original construction, Emmet Sullivan obtained the concession lease. When he died Mrs. Sullivan took over the concession, renewing the lease several times. The Sullivans were granted full control of the property, with the responsibility to maintain it for public use.

In 1967 the City of Rapid City took control of the property. The City maintained that the park was “lacking maintenance to the point of deteriorating steps, inadequate restroom facilities, parking lot and landscaping. In 1967 the state provided \$18,000 in federal matching funds to install retaining walls, terraces, a new concession building and handrail. It was at this time that the facility formally became a city park. At this time the City leased the concession to Mrs. Sullivan.

On June 5, 1969 the present gift shop/concession building was built. At that time the parking lots were resurfaced and the present retaining walls and walks were constructed. In 1977 five brass exhibit plaques were stolen by vandals, these plaques were replaced in 1984 by Bob Hughes for his Eagle Scout Project.

Due to fire damage a renovation project of the gift shop was completed in 2012.

On June 1, 2012, the Parks and Recreation Department with the Rapid City Parks Foundation celebrated the 75th anniversary of the park opening to the public. Prior to this event a restoration project was completed on the Apatosaurus structure.



Dinosaur Park Gift Shop - 2012

A short history and guide to **Dinosaur Park**

940 Skyline Drive
Rapid City, SD 57702
Gift Shop - 343-8687



Built by:

City of Rapid City
and
Works Progress Administration
Project No. 960 - 1936

Administered and maintained by the
Department of Parks and Recreation
515 West Boulevard
Rapid City, SD 57701

(605) 394-4175

Guide to Dinosaur Park

Dinosaurs belong to the Mesozoic era, a vast stretch of time that began about 248 million years ago and ended about 65 million years ago. Dinosaurs first appeared 230 million years ago and disappeared 165 million years later.

As you stand in Dinosaur Park and look to the east you can see the South Dakota Badlands. Most rocks of the Badlands are too young to have dinosaurs preserved in them, but fossil mammals are superbly represented. To the west and north of the Black Hills, dinosaurs have been found in great abundance in the basins of Wyoming and on the Northern Great Plains.

Dinosaur Park is located on a ridge of sandstone that encircles the Black Hills. Along this ridge dinosaurs of the Late Jurassic and Early Cretaceous periods have been found. Not far from the park dinosaur footprints have been found.

There are seven concrete and steel reproductions of extinct creatures in Dinosaur Park. Six are dinosaurs and one is a mammal-like or synapsid reptile.



As you stand in the parking lot below you can see the silhouette of Apatosaurus. The model is eighty feet long and weighs one hundred eighty-five thousand pounds. A live creature would have been considerably lighter, a

mere thirty tons. This ponderous herbivore probably spent much of its life stripping leaves from trees and then moving on to find more food.

To the right of Apatosaurus, with an open mouth, is the largest carnivorous land animal that ever lived, Tyrannosaurus Rex. The head may have been as much as five feet in length. Rex's eyes were directed somewhat forward to keep prey in view so the six dagger-like teeth could do their work effectively. Herbivores such as duck-billed dinosaurs and the horned dinosaurs provided ample food for this voracious predator.



Facing off with Tyrannosaurus Rex is the great three horned dinosaur, Triceratops. The South Dakota State Fossil may have weighed as much as two Indian elephants. Armed with a strong parrot-like beak and a battery of slicing teeth in its jaws, Triceratops was capable of processing very tough vegetation. The three horns of Triceratops and large frill provided substantial protection to an adult particularly if it had the temperament of a



rhinoceros.

Below to the left of Apatosaurus is the very interesting model of Stegosaurus. This form reflects the continuing struggle to understand fossils from bones.



A double row of polygonal bony plates makes a lot of sense when we remember that vertebrates are symmetrical along the midline of the body. Evidence from carefully excavated specimens indicates that these plates

alternated especially over the trunk portion of the creature. Perhaps these large plates acted as radiators to allow heat to escape the body more efficiently. The Stegosaurus had very small teeth, a small head, and was seemingly defenseless. However, this dinosaur had to be approached with caution as its tail was armed with two to four pairs of spikes which may have been an effective, protective weapon.



As you continue down the steps near the road stands a very upright duck-billed dinosaur. This very flat headed form is best thought of as Anatotitan. A name unfamiliar to many because scientists have kept changing it. The very flat toothless bill was good for cropping vegetation which was then chewed thoroughly by a battery of 1200 teeth in the cheek region of the face. Evidence suggests that these animals lived

in large herds that crisscrossed the coastal plains of this region in search of food, returning each year to their nesting sites.



Down by the parking area, just outside the Gift Shop, stands the only non-dinosaur of the park. Dimetrodon is a great carnivore that lived about fifty million years before dinosaurs appeared on the face of the earth. The sail or fin back form was a large predator of the early Permian period. The sail was held up by long, sharp spines of the vertebrae. The sail may have provided a means to keep body temperatures regulated. If Dimetrodon is not a dinosaur, what is it? A pelycosaur synapsid that is close to the ancestry of mammals.

A short distance away is the only model that represents a creature from another continent. The relatively small dinosaur is Protoceratops. An expedition to Mongolia in the 1920's provided spectacular finds of this and other dinosaurs. Perhaps the most remarkable of the discoveries was a nearly complete series of Protoceratops from very small young to fully grown adults. A full grown adult was about six feet long. These creatures lived about 80-85 million years ago and are closely related to Triceratops.

