The concrete *Diplodocus* of Vernal

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**Abstract**

XXX to follow

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# Introduction

*Diplodocus* is a sauropod dinosaur from the Late Jurassic of North America, found in the extensive Morrison Formation of the western states. Although larger and more complete sauropods are now known, *Diplodocus* was the first giant dinosaur known from a substantially complete skeleton: the Carnegie Museum’s iconic specimen CM 84 (Figure A). As explained below, casts of this important specimen were sent all around the globe, and as a result this individual became — and remains — the single best-known dinosaur in the world.

Among the many *Diplodocus* casts that have been mounted, many have been made in plaster, including all the oldest ones; and many have been made in modern lightweight materials such as water-expanded polyester (WEP). But one stands alone, having been cast in concrete by the Utah Field House museum in Vernal.

In this paper, we will summarise the history of the original Carnegie *Diplodocus*, discuss how the concrete cast came to be, and consider its legacy.

## Nomenclature

A distinction is made between molds and casts. A mold is a negative structure made from an original specimen (or, less commonly, a cast), in which the spaces inside the mold match the shapes of the original specimen. A cast is a positive structure, a copy made of a specimen made by filling a mold, and its shape matches that of the original specimen.

Vertebrae are designated as follows, for a vertebra at position *n* in a part of the spinal column: cervical vertebrae C*n*, dorsal vertebrae D*n*, and caudal vertebrae Ca*n*.

## Institutional abbreviations

* AMNH — American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York, USA.
* CM — Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.
* **UNUSED** HMNS — Houston Museum of Nature and Science, Houston, Texas, USA.
* **UNUSED** MB — Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Berlin, Germany; specimen numbers for fossil reptiles take the form MB.R.*nnnn*.
* **UNUSED** USNM – United States National Museum, Washington DC, USA.
* **UNUSED** YPM — Yale Peabody Museum, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

# History of the concrete *Diplodocus*

## The Field Museum in Vernal

1948, October 29: The Utah Field House museum opens in Vernal.

1952: Vernal native J. LeRoy Kay, Carnegie's curator of vertebrate paleontology, gifts the original molds to the Field House. They arrive on or shortly before 7 August (Untermann 1952). By this time, they were "deteriorating" (Gangewere 1999:17), "almost unusable" (Nieuwland 2019:251) and "in pretty bad shape" (Ken Carpenter, pers. comm. 2022).

1957: The Utah Field House's concrete cast is created, and mounted outdoors (Gangewere 1999:17). It is dedicated on 6 June, 1957 (Untermann and Untermann 1970). This is the last time the original molds are used. “The molds finally fell apart because of old age soon after it was made” (Sussaman 1988).

1950s or 1960s: The Field House posted a notice in the SVP news bulletin offering the plaster molds to whoever wanted them (Ken Carpenter, pers. comm., 2022), but there seem to have been no takers.

1960s: the original molds are thrown away by Carnegie Museum (Ilja Nieuwland, pers. comm., 2022). So the invitation that concludes Untermann (1959:369), "Does anyone wish to cast the twelfth?" seems to have gone unanswered.

1979: The British Museum’s cast of the Carnegie *Diplodocus* is moved from the Hall of Reptiles (now the insect exhibit) to the main atrium, where it remained until removed in 2018 to make space for corporate events.

## The lightweight cast in Vernal

1988, January: plans are made to have a lightweight indoor replica of the Field House concrete cast created by the Las Vegas Museum, but these plans fall through.

1989, April: Jim Madsen of Dinolab is contacted to make new plans for creating a replica from the concrete cast

1989, June 30 onwards: Dinolab repaired the deteriorated concrete cast, stabilizing, restoring and sealing the bones. Jim Madsen of Dinolab made new molds from the repaired concrete Diplodocus, using them to create a new lightweight indoor Diplodocus cast for the Field House, from WEP (water-expanded polyester), and reserving the right to make up to 20 additional casts (Madsen et al. 1989)

1991, not later than June 30: Dinolab is contracted to deliver the indoor mount (Madsen et al. 1989) — but I don't know when it actually arrived. It was mounted above the admission counter at the front of the Field House lobby (Ken Carpenter, pers. comm. 2022).

1991?: When the concrete specimen was returned to the Field House, it was in bad shape and went into storage rather than being remounted.

## Further uses of the molds

XXX Some time subsequent to 1989: Jack McIntosh arranges a deal between Dinolab and RCI whereby the Dinolab creates casts of the Diplodocus elements needed to make up the missing part of the AMNH Barosaurus mount. See Gordy (1991), Norell et al. (1991), Dingus (1996:20–29).

Subsequent years: further casts are made from the Dinolab molds, including one in the Las Vegas Natural History Museum and one in the Houston Natural History Museum.

## The fate of the concrete *Diplodocus*

2004: The Field House moves to a new building, and the WEP cast is remounted in the entry hall.

2012: The collections are moved from the old Field House building to the new one, but there is no space for the concrete cast.

2013: The concrete cast is sent to Utah State University Eastern Prehistoric Museum on effectively permanent loan, and to be repaired. It was intended to be mounted outside a new museum in Price, but this museum was never built and the cast remains in storage on the Utah State University Eastern campus.

2019: Dinolab storage in Ogden, Utah, is scheduled for demolition. The Diplodocus molds that were taken from the concrete cast are moved to RCI, where they are kept in storage: some in good condition, some in rough shape. These are probably the only Carnegie Diplodocus molds in the world.

XXX “After the tour, in all likelihood the plaster dinosaur will meet an inglorious end in the basement of the museum; meanwhile, there has been talk of a more weather-resistant cast gracing the garden in front of the museum. And yes, that would mean that in this case, a cast is to be recast. What that means for “authenticity” or “relevance” is anybody’s guess.” (Nieuwland 2019:4).

# Discussion

XXX Photographs of the concrete *Diplodocus* can be found at the J. Willard Marriott Digital Library of the University of Utah: <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/>

# Acknowledgements

XXX to follow.

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XXX Most of these are now unused.

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# Figure Captions

**Figure A.** The *Diplodocus carnegii* holotype CM 84 as it is today: the original fossil material mounted in the public gallery of the Carnegie Museum. Skeleton in left anterolateral view, with *Homo sapiens* Mathew J. Wedel for scale. Photograph by Michael P. Taylor.