

Dinosaur on Tour

Dippy Goes Walkies



Diplodocus is part of a Natural History Adventure

Dippy the world-famous diplodocus has spent all of its life at the Natural History Museum in London. Now it is on the move. It is not, of course, the real thing. It is a replica made of plaster and, as a result, it took experts at the museum a year to get the breakable, life-sized model of a dinosaur skeleton ready for its journey. A tour of Britain's museums outside the capital has been long in the planning, and a crate of shattered plaster would please no one.

Given its size, preparation for its travels was no easy task. When the skeleton is complete and standing on display, it is 26m long, over 4m wide and over 4m high.

Its first destination was Dorset County Museum – a suitable starting point, given Dorset's Jurassic Coast, the location of so many fossil discoveries. Hard to imagine that, 150 million years ago, its beaches looked like the kind of hot, damp forests you find in your favourite dinosaur movies.

As museum directors often say: rocks are storytellers! It is hoped that having Dippy as a central attraction, families and schools will be encouraged, not only to take an interest in the stories of our prehistory in the form of fossils in rocks, but also to explore nature in their local area.

Visitors are likely to be interested in Dippy's origins. During the construction of a major railroad in the USA, vast quantities of fossilised bones were uncovered by the railway workers. Two teams of scientists became involved. Unfortunately, their rivalry was so great, they often smashed the bones that the other team had found. So much was destroyed and so much information lost!

When a 292-bone skeleton of a diplodocus was found, a millionaire called Andrew Carnegie bought it for his new museum in Pittsburgh. Carnegie, a hugely successful businessman in America, also had a castle in Scotland. One day, King Edward VII, seeing a drawing of the dinosaur during a visit to Carnegie in his castle, asked if one could be sent to the Natural History Museum in London. A replica skeleton arrived in 36 packing cases and was assembled and then revealed in a special ceremony four months later in 1905.

During World War II, it was taken apart and placed in the basement in case of bomb damage, but, otherwise, it has been on display in London until the day it went walkies.