

## Mesozoic to the future, museum full of treasures

By Peg Sheldrick

What's so great about Morrill Hall? "The bones and the models," said Larry, age 9, who was there for a health class.

"The wild animals," said Susie, age 21, a university student.

"The dinosaurs," said Stephanie, age 11, who was visiting from Bellevue.

"I enjoy the imitation diamonds," said one woman in a red pantsuit. "But I think this (Elephant Hall) is the most fascinating, because it has to do with our part of the state." (Fremont, in this case.)

"The big animal statues" are Christin's favorites, but she admits the mummy is also "pretty neat."

In the Time and Space gallery, Simeon, a day care student, was asked what he liked best about Morrill Hall. "This part," he responded, "because it's dark."

Whether you're into stuffed animals or stars, dinosaurs or diamonds, Morrill Hall is likely to have something you'll enjoy. The displays run the gamut from anthropology to zoology, and even if you aren't the museum type, you might find it an interesting place to kill time before the game or to wander through with visiting parents.

Students in engineering, art, geology, and physics are among those who take advantage of the University of Nebraska State Museum (a.k.a. Morrill Hall), but "there could be much more use made," according to Dr. Allen Griesemer, the museum's associate director.

### Major features

The major features include Elephant Hall, the Planetarium, the Vertebrate Paleontology section, the Hall of Wildlife, the Center for Asian Studies, and the ever-popular Transparent Woman. Also cached within the museum's halls are a functioning seismograph and a seismometer, a real live mummy or two, and a reconstruction of a giant rhinosceros, the Baluchither. There are also classrooms and auditorium facilities.

The museum has 12-13,000 specimens on display, and that only comprises one percent of the three million specimens owned by the museum. Some of these have been on exhibit for quite a while. For example, the habitat groups in the Hall of Wildlife were created during the 40s and 50s. Other displays are relatively new, such as the Dinosaur Gallery.

"It's a bit different than other dinosaur displays," according to Griesemer, in that the bones and the reconstruction are displayed in a muted, semi-hidden atmosphere.

"We tried to give you a feeling for the Mesozoic, when those animals were alive," said Griesemer. In his opinion, the atmo-

sphere of "mystery" saves the exhibit from the usual "circus" look with things out in the open in the middle of the floor.

### Reconstruction

Both the dinosaur reconstruction and the reconstruction of the giant rhino are the work of museum staffer Roger Vandevere. They dramatize as no skeleton could the ponderous nature of these beasts. But the skeletons, too, are interesting.

The Vertebrate Paleontology exhibit is particularly strong when it comes to camels, bison, horses, rhinos, and oreodonts (little pig-like herbivores), but the real scene-stealer is Elephant Hall itself. "It pulls together some things you'd never see anywhere else," said Griesemer. It contains everything from the skeletal remains of a circus elephant that died in a fire to the fossil remains of a mastodont once touted as "the world's largest." It's still a colossal exhibit, but the museum no longer calls it the largest. In fact, several specimens once billed as the largest of their kind have been stripped of that claim to fame.

"It's always a tug of war between your scientific conscience and what the public wants," explained Griesemer. "Rather than be inaccurate, we decided to gradually eliminate them (the world's largest labels). There's a certain amount of interest value of a museum. People want to see the 'world's largest.' The claim isn't provable. Hopefully we won't do that anymore. What's important is that it's a good specimen."

Many of the skeletons on exhibit in Elephant Hall are composed of remains found right here in Nebraska. Excavations have unearthed mammoths as well as other mammals at various sites around the state. Periodically the museum sends researchers into the field to try to uncover such fossils. Decisions on where to dig are based on the geologic background of the area. For example, western Nebraska is rich in deposits from the Cenozoic period, (35-40 million years ago), but sometimes random chance lends a hand.

"A lot of it comes from people just coming in and saying 'I have a bone sticking out of my ravine,'" said Griesemer.

### Curators responsible

The curators of each of the museum's nine major collections are in part responsible for deciding which specimens should be used for research and which for display. The choices for display are part of an overall plan, and there is also an Exhibits Committee that aids in the process. The specimens are prepared by students and by preparators. If a find was particularly dramatic, as was the assemblage of rhino remains discovered a few years back, some of its specimens will undoubtedly be



Photo by Mark Billingsley

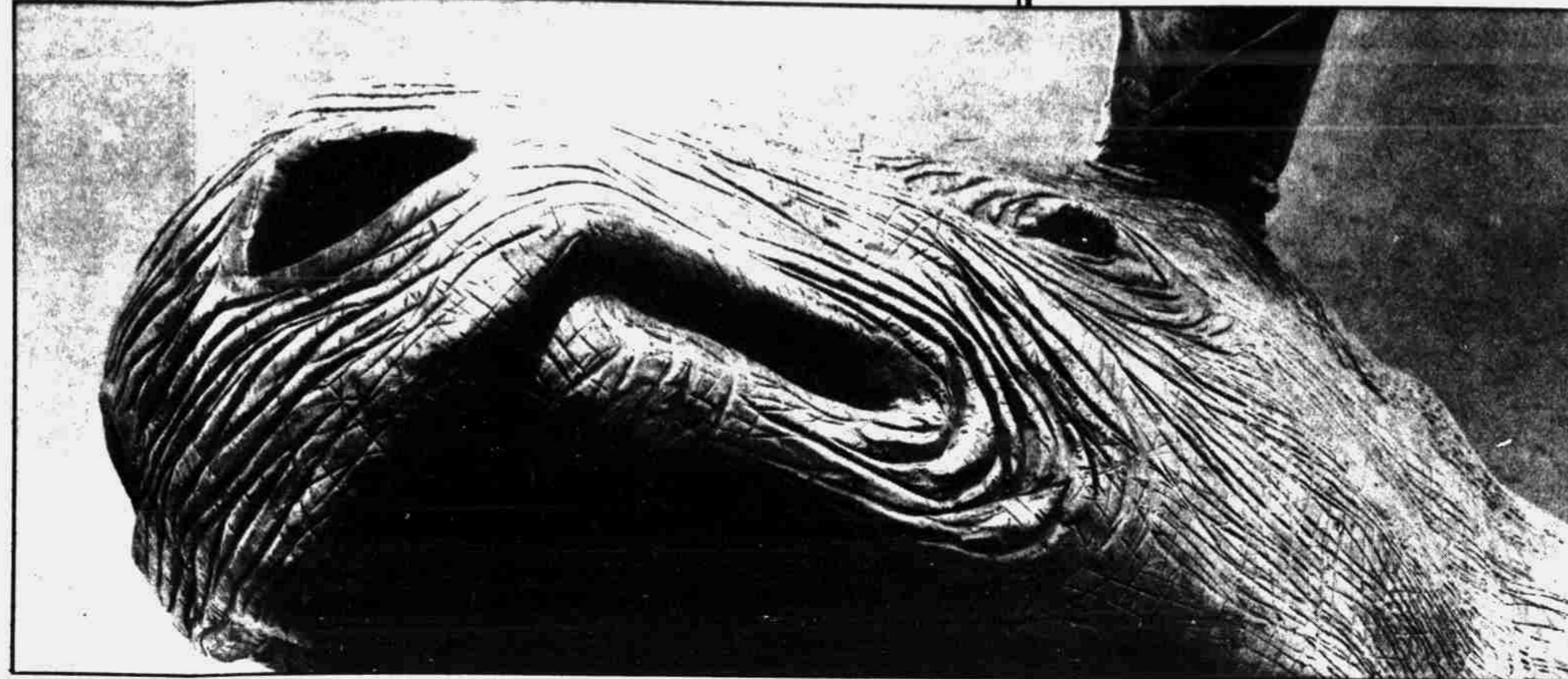


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displayed.

Most university museums are less public-oriented. "I guess universities feel their primary responsibility is to students," said Griesemer. "We feel a responsibility to more than the students." He thinks that Nebraska has a "fairly decent public museum," with some exceptional collections and exhibits. There aren't many of this size or nature in the Midwest. The museum has two satellites, one at Ft. Robinson and one in the form of its exhibition at the State Fair. The museum has come a long way since it opened its doors in 1887.

The building the museum currently resides in (its fourth home) is not without problems. It was built 51 years ago, and some of the cases now in use are as old as the building. Maintenance can be difficult, since none of the cases are air tight. Heat, dust, and light do damage.

"You have to keep taking things off display," said Griesemer. They also have to battle the bugs that come to eat the paper and organic matter on hand. The lack of air conditioning is a discomfort for visitors as well as a hazard for the displays.

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## Director Dunn keeps stars in his eyes

By Kent Warneke

There is a building called Morrill Hall and inside Morrill Hall there is a portion of the building called Mueller Planetarium and inside the planetarium one can often find its director, Jack Dunn, and inside Jack Dunn is a wonder to behold.

Jack Dunn is a reporter's dream. He is easy to talk to, interesting and extremely knowledgeable on his forte, everything concerning planetariums.

Planetariums originated in Germany where they were used strictly for use in the field of astronomy. As time passed and planetariums became more common to other countries, the uses of the planetarium's also expanded.

"The dome of the planetarium, upon which all the projections are made, can be classified into two types according to personal opinion," Dunn said.

"If you want to call the dome a sky, then the material used in planetarium shows should be strictly related to stars and stellar objects; but if you refer to the dome as a screen, then it can be a window to the universe and used for many varied topics."

"Needless to say, I refer to the dome here at UNL's planetarium as a screen," Dunn said.

The Mueller Planetarium was built in 1958 and its use has been growing ever since. Armand Spitz built the projector in the Mueller Planetarium, a conglomeration of assorted, movable shapes to form a unique type of projector.

"The projector that we have is what could be called the middle size, ranging in cost from \$25,000 to \$40,000. The smaller size projector runs from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and the big size cost up to \$300,000," Dunn said.

"We complement the projector with projector pods and booths which make for special effects, greatly adding to the projector's solo capability," Dunn said.

### Unique effects

"Some of our most unique effects come from these small, inexpensive projectors," Dunn said. "I have bought lenses for around \$12.00 apiece that work just great with our shows, mainly because they are cheap quality lenses and cause distorted images when we need them."

The newest piece of equipment that the Mueller Planetarium employs is the laser beam in a show called "Laser-The Light Fantastic."

"The laser beam has really begun popping up in planetariums around the country and the only thing holding it back is the cost, which can be very expensive," Dunn said.

"Mueller Planetarium's laser is a single-colored beam and we could add more colors, but it would cost us a great deal of money," Dunn said. "We feel we're glad to have what we have."

"All of the laser's gyrating, fascinating images projected upon the dome must be run manually. It takes a lot of practice to put a laser show together to make it run smoothly with the music accompanying it and also just to get the timing down pat," Dunn said.

"Basically, it is not the shows themselves that cost money—we can put one together for \$50—but the equipment that is needed runs the price up," Dunn said. "But you have to remember that once we buy a piece of equipment, we can use it over and over again."

### Activities not limited

Dunn is not limited to activities concerned with UNL's planetarium. He also is a member of the International Planetarium Society (IPS), a society of 10 countries formed to exchange ideas. The United States and Canada are the originators and it has been growing since then.

"Currently, I am the representative of the Great Plains area in the U.S. on the council of the PIS, which is their governing body," Dunn said. "We're also going through elections by mail right now and I have been nominated for the position of president-elect, which would be a two-year term, starting January 1 if I was elected."

"The IPS is an organization of planetarium people. We were isolated as a whole until this group was formed. Now we have greatly increased our exchange of show ideas, increased communication and have information on government grants, new materials and equipment coming out," Dunn said.

"The exchanging of script ideas is probably one of the best examples of IPS's usefulness," Dunn said. "I have probably traded with 30 other planetariums, including one from Athens, Greece, and it's a

great way to promote cooperation between planetariums and get new show ideas.

To be a director of a planetarium one needs to possess more than a knowledge of astronomy, especially when the interests of people are broadening every day, Dunn said.

"A director's job is one that tends to appeal to certain kinds of people, people who like the public and enjoy working with them," Dunn said. "You have to have a broad background, music, science, the arts, and especially have a knowledge of public relations."

### New techniques

"We're getting into new techniques in promoting planetarium shows, working with Public Service Announcements and thinking about getting into the video field. "Present a variety of topics" is the main concept that Dunn said he bases his shows on at the planetarium.

"With so many different people in the world today, you need just as many different ideas," Dunn said. "Your shows have to be applicable to current events. If there's going to be an eclipse of the sun, we'll have a show featuring eclipses. When the space shuttle is set into space, we'll more than likely have a show on the space shuttle."

"You have to touch and look into the things the universe, astrology, philosophy, energy, psychic phenomena's and areas that wouldn't normally even be associated with the sky. For instance, *Shakespeare in the Sky* and *Death and the Universe*, are topics that are very interesting, but aren't usually connected to the stars," Dunn said.

"Audience involvement is very important when producing a planetarium show. You have to make it a real experience for them," Dunn said. "Involve the audience in what they see and hear, try to get them to think about what the show is telling them, because receiving the show's message is what it's all about."

### Movies, TV

The new advent of space-connected movies and TV shows have also been advantageous for planetariums, Dunn said.

"I think that the current TV shows now are as much space fantasy as science fiction, and it's great for us because it's a sign that people are interested in space," Dunn said. "Regardless of the quality of the science in the shows, it's still a very healthy sign."



Photo by Mark Billingsley



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