

Dino 'mummy' has skin turned to stone

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

A newly un-veiled "Dino mummy" is one of the best-preserved of the ancient reptiles found to date, according to researchers who say this one may have had stripes and the ability to outrun fear-some T. rex.

The fossilized skin of "Dakota." (Courtesy Nat'l Geographic Society) Scientists on Monday announced a preliminary analysis of the 67-million-year-old duck-billed dinosaur, with muscles and bones preserved in large, intact segments of skin. "This specimen exceeds the jackpot," exclaimed Philip Maning, a paleontologist at the University of Manchester, U.K., said in the online edition of National Geographic magazine Monday. The National Geographic Channel is to air a special on the dinosaur, "Dino Autopsy," on Dec. 9. The channel and magazine are owned by the National Geographic Society, which funded the research. "Our dinosaur mummy makes many other dinosaurs look like roadkill because the evidence we're getting from our creature is so complete compared to the disjointed sort of skeletons that we usually have to draw conclusions from," said Maning. Nearly everything we know of dinosaurs comes from bones and teeth, usually the only parts hard enough to fossilize. But this creature, dubbed Dakota, survived nearly intact, Maning concluded. That allows scientists to reconstruct major muscle sizes, offering a tantalizing glimpse of a 3-D dinosaur. Dakota may alter our understanding of how dinosaurs looked and moved, he added. Its backside, he said, seems to be 25 percent larger than previously thought, suggesting it could have run 45 kilometers (28 miles) an hour 50 percent faster than T. rex. The skin also shows evidence of a possibly striped camouflage pattern in some areas, researchers said. A pattern of banding was found in the larger and smaller scales, something that in modern reptiles is often associated with color patterns, Maning explained. One of a group of plant-eating dinosaurs known as hadrosaurs, Dakota was discovered in 1999 by then-teenage paleontologist Tyler Lyson on his family's North Dakota property. It was not "mummified" in the sense of King Tut, but in the sense that mineral processes turned large tracts of its body into stone before bacteria ate it. "What usually would have been wiped out by the decay process" the mineralization has been so rapid that it is trapped and preserved," Maning told the magazine. Hadrosaurs had horny, toothless beaks but hundreds of teeth in their cheeks and a long, stiff tail that was likely used for balance. Scientists' papers based on study of the dinosaur are in progress, researchers said.

Courtesy National Geographic Society and World Science staff

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