

REPRINT FROM THE *COLLEGE OF EASTERN UTAH PREHISTORIC MUSEUM*
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The College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum's *Hall of Dinosaurs*

Pearl Oliver 1994

Thirty years ago, a young CEU geologist named Don Burge, freshly transplanted in Carbon County from southern California, told the students in his adult evening Physical Geology class, "You know, you people are crazy! You live in a geologic paradise here in eastern Utah. These geologic formations are all exposed, as an open book, by erosion for you to see." Burge didn't know, however, that his comments would start a series of events, eventually resulting in one Utah's most impressive museums.

Today, the CEU Prehistoric Museum annually attracts visitors from all 50 states and an average of about 25 foreign countries. The combined Hall of Man, Hall of Dinosaurs, art gallery, and museum shop form one of the three largest museums in the state.

Its success has exceeded all expectations. In pointing to its importance, Burge notes that the Museum has recently been accredited by the American Association of Museums.

"To the best of my knowledge, no other two-year colleges, and only a handful of universities in the United States have a museum of this caliber. Even fewer are accredited. Until now, all of the accredited museums in Utah were along the Wasatch Front; so we are in excellent company," he said.

CEU, according to Burge, has significant opportunities to develop a curriculum based on the Museum. In addition to courses in artifact preservation and management of the facility, he envisions the Museum as a base for geological and archaeological research on the Colorado Plateau.

When he steps out of his museum office onto the second floor balcony of the new wing that houses the Hall of Dinosaurs, Burge is justifiably proud of the growth.

"We started with nothing. The idea for a museum really caught on during one of the regular 'bull' sessions we'd have over coffee after my night classes.

"We started gathering artifacts and fossils from private collections or by tromping around the hills and desert. Then we realized that we had nothing to display the stuff in," Burge explained.

The search for display cases ended when Independent Coal and Coke Company at Castle Gate and Kenilworth decided to close their company stores and donated the fixtures to the museum effort. Dr. J. Eldon Dorman, who was one of the museum early enthusiasts, recalls that restoring the cases required nearly as much work as preserving the artifacts.

"The glass was so old, you couldn't see through it any more, and most of the cases had six or eight layers of paint on them that we had to clean up," he said.

After endless work nights, combining muscle, sweat, tears, paint remover, splinters, turpentine, profanity, and ruined clothing, the Museum officially opened to the public on June 3, 1961.

During the three decades that have passed, the Museum has become an increasingly important facility for the preservation and documentation of eastern Utah's unique geological and archaeological remains, primarily because of the dedicated staff and volunteers, according to Burge.

"All that we have accomplished has happened because of the enthusiasm and determination of a lot of individuals. We have always been dependant on the generosity of others because there's never been sufficient funding for the Museum's operations. It's truly been a community effort that we can all be proud of."

Although funding continues to be tight, Burge is optimistic sources will be found for the Museum's continued development.

"You never know what can happen," he says. "Look at what I got myself into over a cup of coffee 30 years ago!"