

CityLife

Dino Score

Cleveland Museum of Natural History curator Michael Ryan digs dinosaurs — literally. Six years after his 2001 expedition that turned up a fossil of a then-unidentified creature, he'd like to introduce you (and the rest of the world) to *Albertaceratops nesmoi*.

Like most little boys, Michael Ryan loved dinosaurs. He loved them on the covers of comic books and in movies such as "King Kong." He loved them so much he built his own "dinosaur museum" in the basement of his parent's home in Canada when he was in the fifth grade.

"By the time I was 5, I had found my career path," recalls Ryan, the curator of vertebrate paleontology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. "[Dinosaurs] were always a constant interest of mine."

The fascination has taken Ryan around the world seeking fossils of these prehistoric behemoths. His most famous find grabbed headlines in February, when news of his discovery of a new horned dinosaur, *Albertaceratops nesmoi*, was one of Yahoo!'s most e-mailed stories of the day.

The discovery is a big deal in the science community and

fresh material for dinosaur lovers to wrap their imaginations around, but it's all very familiar to Ryan. He speaks of the find proudly, almost as if it were a pet — "my dinosaur," "my fossil," "my *Albertaceratops*."

Ryan was working toward his Ph.D. at the University of Calgary when he dug up the previously undocumented specimen in the summer of 2001. A few years earlier, he had been granted access to examine a privately owned horned dinosaur fossil unearthed in Montana. Sensing it may be from a yet-to-be-identified species, he started digging in Southern Alberta, Canada, directly across the border from where the fossil had been uncovered, hoping to find more.

The day Ryan's big find was made — four summers after his search began — his crew first

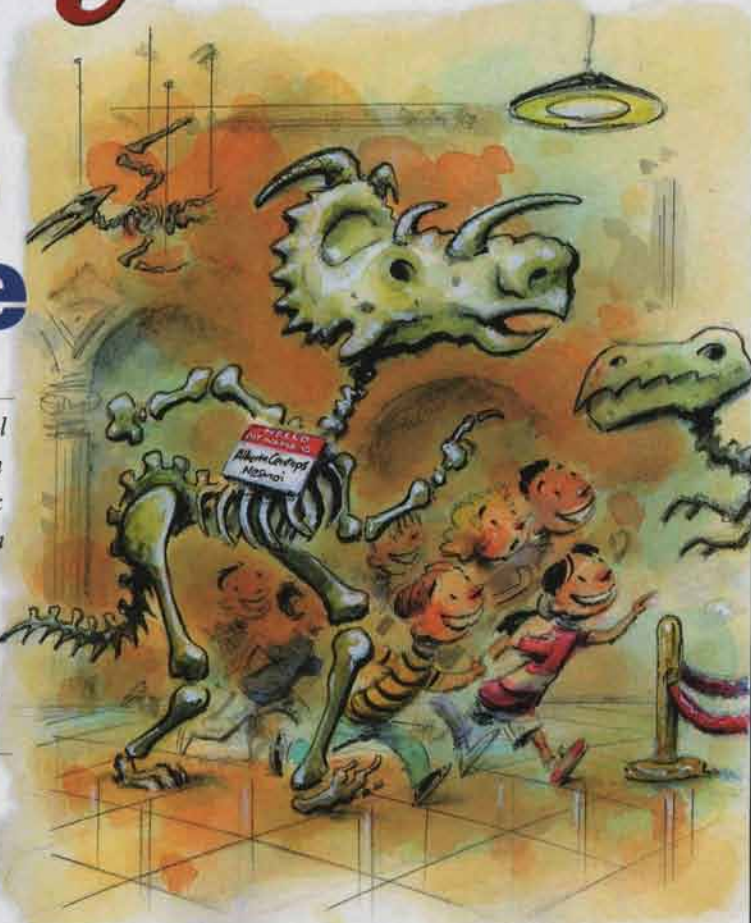
located a badly damaged jaw fossil. When the team collected it and, as is their custom, dug a hole underneath, the tips of two horns appeared.

"Every piece of fossil you find is something that nobody has ever seen," he says. "You get that little bit of a twinge, no matter what it is. But to put that together with something that is brand-new to science gives it that little bit of extra pump."

Knowing he needed extra hands, Ryan phoned undergrad and graduate students, who drove to the site and camped for a week as they helped extricate the fossil of what the crew already knew was a unique dinosaur skull.

Unable to get their transport vehicle near the dig site, Ryan's team picked up a cherry-red

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Porsche hood at a nearby junkyard to use as a sled, and pulled the fossil a mile and a half — a job Ryan says required lots of rope and more than 30 people.

From there, *Albertaceratops nesmoi* traveled to its new home at the Royal Tyrell Museum in Drumheller, Alberta (a mold of the fossil will eventually end up at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History). Ryan then wrote up the find for his Ph.D. dissertation.

“Everything you hear in the news that’s about a new genus or species of dinosaur was almost always found several years before” it makes head-

lines, he explains.

Ryan says he spends about three to four months of every year searching for dinosaurs in Canada, Mongolia and beyond. The rest of the year he resides in Cleveland and spends three of those months collecting the fish fossils prevalent here. Fossils of previously undiscovered vertebrates in general, he says, are found at a rate of about one every six weeks, but new dinosaurs are rare. And Ryan says we have not seen the last of his dinosaur discoveries.

“I’ve got at least three more new horned dinosaurs, which I hope to hang brand-new names on.”

— *Tori Woods*

Dig In

→ Think you have what it takes to dig up some dinos? Michael Ryan is extending an invitation to join him in Mongolia as part of a pay-to-dig program. Last year, Ryan located the remains of a *Tarbosaurus*, (which he describes as an Asian *Tyrannosaurus rex*), and will be collecting the fossils this summer in Mongolia. If you are physically fit enough to work hard in the hot sun, you’ve got all the credentials he needs. Contact Ryan at (216) 231-4600 ext. 3246 or Stacey Heffernan at (216) 231-4600 ext. 3292 to learn more about the two-week expedition.

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