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ARCTIC DINOSAUR EXPERT DISCOVERS DIVERSE ASSEMBLAGE OF FOSSILS – INCLUDING MANY HADROSAURS – IN REMOTE ANIAKCHAK NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE

Dr. Anthony R. Fiorillo's recent research paper published in the globally renowned PLOS ONE journal shows that wealth of animals preferred humid, coastal environments – even dinosaurs enjoyed a day at the beach

DALLAS (Oct. 30, 2019) – Arctic dinosaur expert Anthony R. Fiorillo, Ph.D., who has done extensive research in Alaska during the past two decades, will never forget his first visit to Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve, one of the least-visited places in the National Park System (NPS).

Now, 18 years later, research conducted by the veteran paleontologist has been published in one of the world's most prestigious science journals, PLOS ONE. The paper documents Fiorillo's findings of a diverse assemblage of fossils – including birds, plants and many dinosaurs – representing life some 70 million years ago in Aniakchak (read the PLOS ONE paper [HERE](#)).

Fiorillo's studies show that southern Alaska was home to a variety of creatures, and among those were herds of hadrosaurs (duck-billed dinosaurs) that cared for their young. The hadrosaurs – that he fondly dubs as “the caribou of the Cretaceous” – were found often in the ancient environments believed to be humid and coastal.

“Our study shows that despite how remote Aniakchak National Monument is today for visitors, it was home to an abundance of dinosaurs – a virtual paleontological candy store for dinosaur studies,” said Fiorillo. “Also, we found many fossil tracks along the ancient bay and river deposits preserved in these rocks, demonstrating that even dinosaurs enjoyed a day at the beach.”

One of the co-authors on this new study, Dr. Yoshitsugu Kobayashi (Hokkaido University Museum, Sapporo, Japan) adds, “This study provides us a better understanding of the high-latitude dinosaur ecosystems of Alaska. Such an understanding will help us address important questions such as did dinosaurs survive the winters there and, if so, how did they survive? Similarly, how did the dinosaurs migrate between North America and Asia during the Cretaceous?”

Fiorillo's journey began in 2001 when he partnered with the National Park Service, Alaska Region, in search of dinosaur remains on the Alaska Peninsula. The locale was remote and difficult to reach, requiring the service of a float plane and a whitewater raft to circumvent the Aniakchak River.

After days of unfruitful exploration, a sense of melancholy took over as they neared the end of the river. Time was nearing to break down the rafts and head back to King Salmon.

As often is the case in a paleontological field project, in the final hours of the trip Fiorillo peered around the last corner, and his eye caught the image of a 70 million-year-old, three-toed impression of a duck-billed dinosaur.

“Not only was it the first record of a dinosaur in this remote national park unit, but it was the first record of a dinosaur in the entire Alaska National Park system,” said Fiorillo.

He returned to Aniakchak the following year to thoroughly document this track, but the prohibitive travel costs were a challenge, deterring his further research efforts.

From 2003-2015, he partnered again with NPS and headed to Denali National Park, just a few hours from Fairbanks. In Denali, Fiorillo and an international team of scientists discovered and documented several new species and thousands of tracks attributable to a variety of dinosaurs and other fossil animals.

Satisfied with his work in Denali, Fiorillo chose to make a return visit to Aniakchak – this time with a more attuned eye for footprints. Since 2016 and every summer since, he and his team have continued their survey, all while fighting mosquitos, bears, weather and other elements.

“We documented dozens and dozens of footprints, which I clearly missed in my earlier work. And this time, we found an abundance of duck-billed dinosaur footprints representing both adults and juveniles,” said Fiorillo. “But we also found much greater biodiversity with tracks attributable to fossil birds, a meat-eating dinosaur about the size of the pygmy tyrannosaur we unearthed in Arctic Alaska, armored dinosaurs, and fishes.”

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About the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. *The top cultural attraction in Dallas/Fort Worth and a Michelin Green Guide three-star destination, the Perot Museum of Nature and Science is a nonprofit educational organization located in the heart of Dallas, Texas. With a mission to inspire minds through nature and science, the Perot Museum delivers exciting, engaging and innovative visitor and outreach experiences through its education, exhibition, and research and collections programming for children, students, teachers, families and life-long learners. The 180,000-square-foot facility in Victory Park opened in December 2012 and is now recognized as the symbolic gateway to the Dallas Arts District. Future scientists, mathematicians and engineers will find inspiration and enlightenment through 11 permanent exhibit halls on five floors of public space; a children’s museum; a state-of-the art traveling exhibition hall; and The Heglund Foundation Theater. Designed by 2005 Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate Thom Mayne and his firm Morphosis Architects, the Victory Park museum has been lauded for its artistry and sustainability. To learn more, please visit perotmuseum.org.*

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