



MEDIA RELEASE: *For immediate use*

MEDIA CONTACT:

Delle Willett, Director of Marketing
619.255.0244, dwillett@sdnhm.org

OR

Jessica Holmes Chatigny, Marketing Communications Specialist
619.255.0241, jchatigny@sdnhm.org

**For vivid, high-resolution images
and more information, visit
www.sdnhm.org/media.**

NEW FOSSIL EXHIBITION ENGAGES VISITORS OF ALL AGES IN A MYSTERY-SOLVING EXPERIENCE

SAN DIEGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM CREATES REGIONALLY-FOCUSED
EXHIBITION CENTERED ON FOSSILS FOUND OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS

San Diego, CA: June 1, 2006—On July 1, 2006, the San Diego Natural History Museum will open *FOSSIL MYSTERIES*, the largest and most comprehensive exhibition the Museum has ever undertaken. Blending traditional and contemporary exhibition techniques, *FOSSIL MYSTERIES* showcases the last 75 million years in the southern California and Baja California bioregion—known among scientists for its incredibly rich fossil record which includes sharks three times the size of great whites, mammoths, sea cows, lions, dinosaurs, giant sloths, whales, walruses, saber-tooth cats, dire wolves and more!

Having conducted extensive research with Museum visitors, members of the community and within the national network of museums, the exhibition developers created new and innovative methods of engaging the public, encouraging visitors to touch, think, and discover.

“There is nothing like this in the world,” said Exhibit Developer Nancy Owens Renner. “We took an inquiry-based approach—meaning the visitor will be presented with evidence and complex questions, then encouraged to ‘solve’ the mysteries themselves. All mysteries, fossils and objects are centered in this region, and will create a sense of place for San Diegans and inspire respect for this region in out-of-town visitors.”

Lynett Gillette, science content specialist for *FOSSIL MYSTERIES*, explained that while nearly 100% of the specimens have been found locally, the science concepts in *FOSSIL MYSTERIES* are global. “In creating the exhibition, our research and exhibition staff consulted and collaborated with over 50 scientists and 20 artists and fabricators from around the world. The result is a presentation of cutting-edge scientific concepts presented in new, colorful and imaginative ways.” Climate change, plate tectonics, and evolution are the themes that string together the exhibition, which is laid out chronologically. “These themes and major regional events in time connect our present to the past and the future and demonstrate the relevance of natural history in our lives today,” she commented.

“Fossils provide different kinds of information,” said Exhibition Curator and Curator of Paleontology, Dr. Tom Deméré. “They address questions of evolution; tell us about ancient environments and ancient ecosystems. They provide direct evidence for extinction and how it occurs... quickly? a drawn out affair? selective or universal? How do you know that this was a whale, this a bat?” Visitors of all ages will be challenged to solve these mysteries.

-OVER-

Highlights of the exhibition include life-size models of an *Alberatosaurus*, a *Lambeosaurus*, and a sea cow, fleshed out on one side and skeleton on the other; a fully fleshed out megalodon shark (the most accurate depiction ever created of this shark, which is the world's largest known predator); a fully fleshed out ankylosaur, based on fossil evidence found in the region (the most complete dinosaur fossil ever found in California); an articulated walrus in one of the biggest free-standing cases known to be in any museum; a floor-to-ceiling "fossil aquarium" with actual whale bones on display, with a giant mural by world-famous paleoartist William Stout as a backdrop depicting all of the animals that lived in the ocean during the Pliocene; a giant sloth and a swooping pterodactyl with a 23' wing span. Children will enjoy huggable baby animals: a mastodon, brontothere and sea cow.

Jim Melli, exhibition art director, says *FOSSIL MYSTERIES* uses the universal language of art to convey complex messages. In fact, "the exhibition is a magical art exhibition in itself," he said, with giant murals painted in California plein-air style by William Stout, illustrations by Doug Henderson and Tim Gunther, animal models by Bill Monteleone, and steel sculpture by Richard Webber. The animal models were created with experimental use of materials under the talented direction of Melli, who sketched every plant and animal in the exhibition, created all of the maquettes for larger reproduction, and art-directed the fabrication processes.

"Accessibility for all was a major goal of the Museum's creative team," explained Exhibition Designer Michael Field. "All interpretive material is presented in both Spanish and English; there's lots of touchable fossils and hands-on activities; displays and signage are the right height for kids as well as adults; the 9700-sq.-ft. floor plan is open, dynamic and flowing. The messages are conveyed in a variety of media to appeal to all types of learning preferences."

Conceived and designed by the exhibition and research staff of the San Diego Natural History Museum over the last three years, and created at an estimated cost of \$8 million, *FOSSIL MYSTERIES* required assistance from many experts for fabrication. The Exhibit Services department of the Science Museum of Minnesota fabricated the interactive components, furniture, platforms, railings and lighting, and managed the installation. Science Museum of Minnesota staff worked with a number of highly talented subcontractors from both the U.S. and Canada for fabrication of the animal and plant casts and models.

Major support for this \$8 million exhibition has been received from the California Cultural and Historic Endowment; National Science Foundation; Stephen and Mary Birch Foundation; an anonymous donor; and generous support from the J. W. Sefton Foundation; the San Diego Foundation: Weingart-Price Fund and Carol and Henry F. Hunte Fund; San Diego County Supervisors Pam Slater-Price, Ron Roberts and Greg Cox; The Legler Benbough Foundation; THE PARKER FOUNDATION: Gerald and Inez Grant Parker; Thomas C. Ackerman Foundation; Charmaine and Maurice Kaplan; Carol and Dennis Wilson; Rice Family Foundation; Samuel and Katherine French Fund; Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation; and Sony Electronics Inc.

Founded in 1874 and actively engaged in biodiversity research and education, the San Diego Natural History Museum is the second oldest scientific institution in California, the third oldest west of the Mississippi. Located in Balboa Park, near downtown San Diego, the Museum is open daily from 10 AM to 5 PM; and is closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Admission is all-inclusive (exhibitions and giant-screen films): \$11 for adults; \$9 for seniors; \$7 for military, youth 13–17, students; \$6 for children 3–12. Free for members. The website is: www.sdnhm.org, the phone number: 619.232.3821.

###

EDITOR'S NOTE:

- Dynamic high-res images are available and more are coming as animals are delivered. Please let us know if you would like to receive images as they come available.
- An extensive media kit is available and includes: a "tour" with the scientific advisor; the scientific concepts; the art and artists; the exhibition design; meeting public needs and California science teaching standards; the vision; engaging elements; a one-sheet summary; unique elements; and a list of all science and art consultants.