



MEDIA RELEASE

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LIFE-SIZE MODEL OF EXTINCT AMERICAN LION ARRIVES AT THE SAN DIEGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

San Diego, CA: November 29, 2005—Exhibition designers at the San Diego Natural History Museum took recent delivery of a life-size model of an extinct American Lion, the first of many exciting deliveries coming to the Museum to create *Fossil Mysteries*, a new permanent \$8 million exhibition created by the Natural History Museum that opens in July 2006.

Jim Melli, staff artist at the Museum, designed the original to-scale maquette of the lion. The finished model stands 4.5 feet tall at his shoulders and 12.5 feet from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. Paleontologist Chris Shaw, Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's George C. Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits, consulted on the lion's measurements based on skeletons on exhibition at the Page Museum. The fiberglass and resin lion, was created by Blue Rhino in St. Paul, Minnesota, one of several exhibit builders working on *Fossil Mysteries*.

The American Lion (*Panthera leo atrox*) became extinct approximately 11,000 years ago. While African lions continued until today, scientists believe they originally migrated from Asia to North America 70,000 years ago, and before that lived all over Africa, Europe and Asia for a much longer time. The *Fossil Mysteries* exhibition addresses what made these top predators extinct including the introduction of people into their space, and loss of food supply and habitat disruption due to climate change.

Fossil Mysteries will provide a new kind of museum experience. Visitors will be invited to play the role of paleontologist: pondering a mystery, exploring a setting, examining the strong fossil evidence from the Museum's paleontology collection, and using scientific tools to discover

answers. Embarking on a 75-million-year chronological journey, from the age of dinosaurs to the Ice Ages, visitors will experience an unfolding of the prehistory of southern California and the peninsula of Baja California, Mexico. The exhibition is expected to attract 4,000,000 visitors over the next 20 years it is on display.

To develop the exhibition, the Museum was awarded a \$2.8 million grant from the first round of California Cultural and Historical Endowment awards (CCHE funds come from Prop. 40) and a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation, with \$1.1 million additional funding required from private sources.

The next deliveries expected include a giant Sloth (December), a 34-foot-long, 5500 lb. Megalodon Shark, an extinct macropredator that lived from the Miocene (5–24 million years ago) to the Pliocene (1.67–5 million years ago), a life-size Albertosaur and Lambeosaur (January).



Editor's Note: a high-resolution image of this lion is available from the Museum's website: http://www.sdnhm.org/media/images_mysteries.html

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