

Alumni News



Digging for T-rex in the Montana Badlands

Current Notre Dame students often return to the University with exciting tales of how they spent their summer vacations. Sometimes, says, J. Keith Rigby, associate professor of civil engineering and geological sciences, so do alumni. According to Rigby, this past summer 60 "diligent, careful, and patient" people — a mix of Notre Dame graduates, current students, earth science teachers, and other volunteers from around the country — participated in what many of them called a "dream vacation." They prospected for sites, excavated some of those sites, and began to prepare the T-rex fossils they found for casting.

"It was a new experience for me," said Bob Remm, a 1958 graduate of the Department of Electrical Engineering. "Until this summer my only knowledge of paleontology was watching a couple of *Jurassic Park* movies." Remm worked with a team of 12 volunteers in the Fort Peck laboratory, preparing bones uncovered during previous years' digs. He hopes to be able to return and assist in the field this summer.

Another volunteer, Paul Wagenstein (His daughter Susan graduated from Notre Dame in 1997.) is an earth sciences teacher at Sachem High School in Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y. "The entire Montana experience was everything I hoped it would be ... plenty of field time and exploration ... a very fast learning curve ... lots of tedious work ... and experiences to bring back to my students."

In 1997 Louis Tremblay was a member of the group that found one of the largest T-rex specimens ever. Since that time he has returned to the site each summer, spending up to 10 weeks a year at Fort Peck as a staff member. A retired earth sciences teacher, he serves many functions at Fort Peck, including volunteer recruitment and coordination.

A total of four two-week sessions at the Fort Peck location were offered through the Notre Dame Alumni Association, but a few current students also participated in the dig. Melanie Irvine, a first-year University student from Richland, Wash., found it a rewarding experience. "But," she said, "volunteering to sit on a stool in a dusty lab or walk through the Badlands under the hot sun from morning to night has to be something you really want to do."

For information on future digs, watch the Alumni Association web site — <http://alumni.nd.edu>.



The field work took place in an area of badlands topography near Fort Peck, Mont. — specifically the Hell Creek formation, where the first *Tyrannosaurus rex* was found in 1902 by Professor Barnum Brown and where J. Keith Rigby, associate professor of civil engineering and geological sciences, discovered one of the largest T-rex specimens ever in 1997.



After completing intensive training sessions and under the supervision of staff members, volunteers helped prepare dinosaur bones for museum display. The prep work was done at the Paleontology Field Station of the Fort Peck Dam Interpretive Center.