

August 23, 2018

Royal BC Museum accepts world's largest collection of fossils from the McAbee Site

VICTORIA, BC—The Royal BC Museum has accepted a donation of the world's largest and most comprehensive collection from the McAbee Fossil Beds Heritage Site, near Cache Creek, BC.

The donated collection, of an estimated 18,000 specimens, was made by the late John Leahy, who managed the site while it was under mineral tenure, and his colleague David Langevin.

"This is an exceptional donation of paleontological material from a remarkable site in BC," says Royal BC Museum CEO Prof. Jack Lohman. "As befits an epoch-spanning treasure, we anticipate the Leahy-Langevin collection will be used as a research resource for decades to come, and the foundation of numerous educational activities and public programs."

The donation comes as the Province of BC kicks off a BC-wide campaign encouraging citizens to vote for an official "Provincial Fossil":

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/land-use/fossil-management/designating-a-provincial-fossil>

Underpinning both of these announcements is the Province's Fossil Management Framework. Recognizing that fossils and fossil sites are important to BC as heritage resources, the framework sets out guidelines for their use, for the management of impacts on fossils from other activities and for the protection of significant sites. More information is available at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/land-use/fossil-management>

"British Columbia has a rich variety of fossils and they are the footprints of our history," said the Honourable Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Operations and Rural Development. "This extensive collection being given to the Royal BC Museum will mean that museum visitors will be able to learn from and appreciate fossils for generations to come."

The McAbee beds, comprising fossils from the early Eocene Epoch (52 million years ago), are some of the most important in the world, renowned for their incredible abundance, diversity and quality of fossils.

The site, part of an old lake bed, is considered British Columbia's most diverse for Eocene Epoch fossils of plants and insects, and has been designated as a Provincial Heritage site

Dr. Richard Hebda, Royal BC Museum Curator Emeritus (previously Curator of Botany and Earth History), had examined the "Leahy-Langevin collection" in Kamloops years ago to assess its condition, size and suitability for acquisition.



He quickly determined the collection was outstanding in all respects, including its international significance.

John Leahy was a Kamloops-area teacher who was widely-respected as an “informed amateur” in the world of fossils. When he was not guiding tourists at the McAbee site during the summer months, Leahy used a scanner to take detailed photographs of his fossil finds, mailing these images to scientists across North America. Many scholarly paleontological papers were written as a consequence, relying upon both the samples and imagery that Leahy provided from afar, as a passionate amateur.

It was clear to Hebda that Leahy—and his collecting partner, David Langevin, who held a claim at the McAbee fossil site— selected specimens for quality and potential scientific value. Many of the pieces comprise numerous organisms (e.g. plants, insects, fish, etc.).

Hebda’s report suggested that the collection undoubtedly includes many species new to science. Several have already been described, but many more await description, a process that Royal BC Museum staff and associates will soon begin in earnest.

Visitors to the Royal BC Museum’s website can use our new Learning Portal Pathway to find out more about the McAbee fossil beds at:
<https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/fossil-finds>

About the Royal BC Museum

The Royal BC Museum explores the province’s human history and natural history, advances new knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. The museum and archives celebrate culture and history, telling the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Located in Victoria on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations), we are a hub of community connections in BC—onsite, offsite and online—taking pride in our collective histories.

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