

March 25, 2011

Rare dinosaur fossil found near Fort McMurray

Fort McMurray... A rare dinosaur fossil has been found near Fort McMurray.

While working on site, Suncor employees noticed a large lump of dirt with an odd texture and diamond patterns. Following established practice, employees halted work and sent photos of the strange sight to the Royal Tyrrell Museum.

A scientist and technician from the Museum flew to Fort McMurray early Wednesday morning expecting to find a marine reptile fossil, because of the area's ancient history as a sea bed. When they arrived, they were amazed to discover a 110-million-year-old fossil of an ankylosaur, a rare dinosaur covered with bony plates of armour.

"We've never found a dinosaur in this location," said Dr. Donald Henderson, Curator of Dinosaurs at the Royal Tyrrell Museum. "Because the area was once a sea, most finds are invertebrates such as clams and ammonites. Marine reptiles have been found in the area before, but even these are not common. The last giant reptile removed from this area was an ichthyosaur found 10 years ago. To find an ankylosaur is totally unexpected here – finding one of these animals anywhere is a rare occurrence."

Ankylosaurs were squat, plant-eating quadrupeds with powerful limbs and armour plating on their bodies. Their club-like tails were probably used for self-defence. Royal Tyrrell scientists will return to Fort McMurray next week to supervise the specimen's removal and transportation to the Museum for further study.

"Suncor and its staff deserve a big thank you for recognizing this as a fossil and reporting it to us as quickly as they did," said Andrew Neuman, Executive Director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum. "This is a great example of a company calling to report a find and it turning out to be something of potentially major significance."

Operated by the Government of Alberta, the Royal Tyrrell Museum is located six kilometres northwest of Drumheller on Highway 838. For more information visit www.tyrrellmuseum.com or call 403-823-7707 (dial 310-0000 for toll-free access in Alberta).

–30 –

Editor's note: For photos of the discovery go to: www.culture.alberta.ca/newsroom/default.aspx.

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Leanna Mohan
Marketing Coordinator
Royal Tyrrell Museum
403-820-6208

leanna.mohan@gov.ab.ca

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

For Suncor inquiries:

403-296-4000
media@suncor.com