Palaeontologia Electronica
http://palaeo-electronica.org

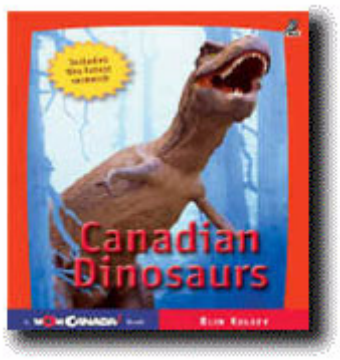
Canadian Dinosaurs: A Wow Canada! Book

Review by Jaelyn Eberle and Nicholas Eberle-Taylor

Elin Kelsey
Maple Tree Press, 2003
ISBN-13: 9781894379557

As Canadian expatriates with family and friends in the prime dinosaur-hunting grounds of the prairie provinces, my son Nicholas and I chose to review the nonfiction book *Canadian Dinosaurs* by Elin Kelsey. At 9 years old, Nicholas has accompanied me on numerous paleontological field expeditions (which began when he was just 8 months old), and he has spent many an afternoon in the Paleontology Hall at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. Although not as fascinated with dinosaurs as his friends in 3rd grade, Nicholas comes by this naturally – his mother studies fossil mammals! Having said that, Nicholas is thrilled by any and all fossil discoveries, whether they're fish scales, snails, or elusive Paleocene mammal jaws.

When most people think of Canada, they think of mounties and hockey! A paleontologist may also think of the Burgess Shale. But dinosaurs? Although this may not be the first topic that comes to mind, Canada has a long and rich history of dinosaur discoveries dating back over a century, and can brag roughly 100 dinosaur species, including some of the best, most complete skeletons of *Tyrannosaurus rex*, *Albertosaurus,* and *Edmontosaurus*. The book *Canadian Dinosaurs* takes you on a coast-to-coast tour of famous Canadian dinosaur sites as well as their ancient inhabitants, and highlights the people who discovered them (as Researcher Profiles throughout the book). With 96 text-filled pages, the book is a pretty heavy read for a 9-year-old. However, Canadian Dinosaurs inspired many questions and exclamations from Nicholas, including the following. 'Mom, where is the Tyrrell?' 'That's not good that they never opened it [plaster jacket] since 1915!' 'Does a trackway count as one fossil or lots of fossils?' And 'I don't see how a meteorite could have killed ALL of the dinosaurs in the world! Some of them survived, didn't they?' As someone who studies the recovery and radiation of mammals after the K-T extinction, this was music to my ears. Nicholas's questions inspired many discussions on our daily drive home after school and at dinnertime. Nicholas and I learned that the very oldest Canadian dinosaurs are 225-million-year old fossil bones and trackways from Nova Scotia, in Canada's maritime region (now a future vacation destination for us). We also learned that dinosaur explorers come in all shapes and sizes (and ages)! Among the more inspiring stories in the book was the discovery of ankylosaur footprints in British Columbia by two kids about Nicholas's age.



Canadian Dinosaurs is well organized and thought out, and the images helped capture and hold our attention. I particularly enjoyed the black and white images of Canada's premier dinosaur collecting family – the Sternbergs, who collected

Eberle, Jaelyn and Eberle-Taylor, Nicholas, 2009. [Review of *Canadian Dinosaurs: A Wow Canada! Book*]. *Palaeontologia Electronica* Vol. 12, Issue 1, R4; 2pp.; http://palaeo-electronica.org/2009_1/index.html

some 20 dinosaur skeletons and literally thousands of fossils in the Alberta badlands in the early 1900s. Incidentally, the family's patriarch Charles H. pioneered the plaster jacketing technique that many use today. At the back of the book, there is a comprehensive list of dinosaurian taxa known from Canada, a discussion of the geologic periods of the Mesozoic Era, and a short glossary of paleontologic terms.

As we read, however, one question that repeatedly came to mind was: What is the age and reading level of the child for which this book was written? The book doesn't actually state this, so I asked Nicholas. His response was 'I'd recommend this book to kids in 5th or 6th grade because the book is a little too high tech for 8 and 9-year olds like me and the words of dinosaurs are hard to pronounce.' Although Nicholas was able to *read* most of the text, this didn't always translate to comprehension either – that is, Nicholas had many questions concerning the definitions of words, and this can sometimes scare off young readers. As paleontologists, we often take for granted the pronunciation and meanings of taxonomic names and important geologic terms, yet (sadly) the majority of the world's citizens (including the parents of most 9-year-olds) have not heard of *Brachiosaurus* or Pangaea. A pronunciation guide for key dinosaurian genera and other important jargon would be really helpful to parents and children alike. Further, a picture is worth a thousand words, so let those pictures talk! Most pages of this book are text-heavy, and in some sections (e.g., Dino Profiles), the font is quite small. Yet, if most kids are like mine, they may find that these sections contain the most captivating, kid-friendly information (e.g., *Ankylosaurus* had a club as big as a wrecking ball!; Kelsey, 2003, p. 23). In my experience reading with Nicholas and his 3rd grade peers, small font (and lots of it!) can be daunting for would-be dinosaur hunters.

These comments aside, Nicholas and I really enjoyed *Canadian Dinosaurs,* and we recommend it to dinosaur enthusiasts, future explorers and paleontologists. We learned a lot about Canada that we didn't know (despite our heritage), and this book led to many interesting discussions in our home, especially related to that infamous meteorite at the K-T boundary. When I asked Nicholas: How could dinosaurs have survived the meteorite impact, his response was 'Dinosaurs could have evolved into birds and flew away!'

Hang onto that idea, kid – you'll go far!