



The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt

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In 1911, Dr. Ernst Stromer led an expedition to Egypt's Bahariya Oasis in the Sahara and discovered four new species of dinosaurs, including the *Tyrannosaurus rex*-size predator *Spinosaurus*. But tragically, all his work was incinerated in 1944 during the Allied bombing of Munich.

In 1999, Josh Smith, then a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, took his brilliant, precocious team to Egypt under the direction of world-renowned paleontologist Dr. Peter Dodson and blundered onto an archaeological site that yielded awe-inspiring results: all of Dr. Stromer's early findings, and also an entirely new genus of dinosaur, *Paralititan stromeri*, one of the largest creatures ever to inhabit the planet.

The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt Details

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Kris says

Sadly there isn't a lot of information about dinosaurs from Egypt in this book. The book is more of a semi-historical account of an expedition to search for dinosaurs in the early 1900s and a later one in 2000. Much of the time the book annoyingly reads like a documentary script and I kept hearing Barbara Felden and Kenneth Branagh alternating in the narration. Also the author never really lets us get close to the living people, we learn far more about Ernst Stromer than about the modern paleontologists and geologists that make up the cast.

Not a bad read, just don't expect to really learn anything from it.

Troy says

My one-phrase rundown: Trying to make geological, archeological, or paleontological work sound exciting is very difficult.

To be fair, these scientific pursuits can really be very exciting, as I remember from a time in my life when I almost gave up biology for paleontology. The quintessentially American exploits of Marsh and Cope are an instructive example. Imagine, if you can, a combination of old-west dinosaur hunting, academic spy intrigue, and a circus of publicity hounds worthy of any modern reality TV show. Likewise, Jack Horner's tales about the discovery of *Mayasaura*'s nesting behavior and the changing face of *T. rex* are also excellent reading, though without the Barnum and Bailey-style hijinks. And face it folks, without paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews there would be no Indiana Jones.

We should all recognize that, much like pro baseball and football players, anyone who gets to work with dinosaurs is living the life countless kids dream of. But there is the reality that this work takes place in two spheres: the lab and the field. The Field = months of digging. And brushing. And digging. And scraping with dental implements. The Lab = months of more scraping with really expensive dental implements. It's hard to glamorize this stuff.

Unfortunately for this book, the same goes for the mental exercises it requires for a group of dyed-in-the-wool academics under the leadership of Smith, including a PhD student with an encyclopedic knowledge of dinosaur systematics and a visionary geologist with insomnia to collectively understand the importance of not only the fossils that the group *found*, but *why* they found them.

Overall, I congratulate the crew and celebrate their contributions. The story itself, though, suffers in the telling. The mystery of the missing sand? Geological nonconformity? Flaser bedding? Fossilized mangrove plants which would appear to the uninformed as xerophiles? These things even bored me, and I kinda like this stuff!

The inclusion of Stromer's detailed Egyptian itineraries are of debatable value. However, describing Stromer's (honorably) aristocratic resistance against Nazi Germany, the RAF's trial-and-error development of low-level bombing techniques, and the rivalry between British officers involved in the bombing of Munich in 1994 (?) left the impression that the main storyline simply wasn't enough to fill a book.

In conclusion, these people succeeded despite adversity and made some valuable contributions to science. While it would have been cool to participate, I didn't overly enjoy reading about this particular dig. I'll have to check out the documentary and see if that flows better.

Lee says

The sed/strat and the bio about Stromer was more interesting than the "OMG 3 HUGE MEAT EATERS!" narrative. Over all, this book did well with the geology and human history, but the paleobiology is a bit flat

Annie says

This was not my book. In general, I found it to remain tangential to paleontology throughout. It was constantly more interested with the various researchers and their challenges in the field than with the dinosaurs themselves. This is not necessarily a negative, but it was not what I wanted from the book. Additionally, if the book did choose to focus more on the researchers, I would have wanted it to delve deeper into the history of paleontology than it actually does. Also perhaps expand upon the blatantly rude or racist statements it quotes when discussing the past. Personally I also found it hard to get past the fact that one of the main paleontologists, Josh Smith, recently left his position at U of Washington after allegations of sexual misconduct. Finally, as an archaeologist, I found it really annoying how the book uses archaeologist and paleontologist correctly but never explains the difference. I only find this important to do as many people are confused about what each person studies, as is abundantly clear in the reviews of this book. I would suggest this only if you have a passing interest in the subject and want a very boiled down and publicized reading of this discovery.

Alex Telander says

One would not think it that surprising to discover that dinosaur fossils had been discovered within the Sahara Desert of Egypt, considering the immense history this country already has, but apparently from an archaeological perspective, this is pretty rare. What is even more amazing is that these dinosaur fossils were actually the largest ever found. Yet they remain relatively unknown due to the stupid efforts of archaeologists and patrons during the early twentieth century when they were discovered. Sadly, this book lacks in that it could be a third shorter and pertain more to the actual subject at hand than going on fictional tangents. It creates a question of what is real and what is not, most important in the study of fossils many millions of years old.

Originally published on November 25th, 2002.

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Troy Blackford says

This was a riveting book, outlining the pioneering (and depressingly forgotten) work of German paleontologist Ernst Stromer, and the attempts of a group of modern paleontologists to rediscover his finds in Egypt. The science is interesting: these are some seriously cool dinosaurs. The history is fascinating: the loss of Stromer's fossil discoveries in the War helps remind us of the periphery costs of this terrible era in human history. The look into the fieldwork of the modern teams is great: it really gives you a sense of what it must have been like. In short, this is an exceptional look into some seriously worthwhile stuff in the realms of human history, scientific exploration, and dinosaur biology. If any of those topics, let alone all of them, interest you, this is worth your time.

Nick Cincotta says

although I'm well aware of the paleontological rebirth that has been happening all over the world, I found that the information presented regarding Stromer to be interesting. These people were standing on his shoulders and were influenced by his lost discoveries

PastAllReason says

Interesting book on "search and rescue" of dinosaur fossils in western Egypt. The book covers the work of paleontologists in the modern day and also the discoveries of a German paleontologists whose discoveries were destroyed in the Munich museum during WWII.

Lara says

Wow, I'm really kind of amazed that so many people rated this so poorly. The beginning of the book was a little rough, true--there's a lot of back-story, and there are a lot of people introduced, as well as the basic idea of what they're trying to do. The way the story is told reminded me a lot of David Grann's The Lost City of Z, where the narration goes back and forth in time between covering the original expedition and the modern one.

I will admit that I did sometimes have a hard time engrossing myself in the Ernst Stromer parts; his story is told in a much dryer way than is the story of the modern expedition, mainly, I think, because members of the modern expedition actually helped write this and the book includes quotes and first-person accounts of how things occurred and what their various thought processes were.

Another reviewer said that they like this stuff and still found the book really boring, but I did not. The same parts he describes as dull--the mystery of the missing sand, the descriptions of the environment at the time of the dinosaurs discovered and the way the team members were able to figure it all out I found really fascinating. But maybe I just like boring stuff? I'm kind of nerdy like that sometimes.

In any case, I thought this was a super interesting read, and I'm definitely planning on trying to track down a copy of the documentary and to do some more research on the subject.

Michael Reilly says

An interesting and detailed combination of history and research – in two time periods. A very enjoyable read about an important (lost) discovery and its considerable scientific value.

Marc N says

Enjoyed this book & wish I could find more like it.

Aimee says

A fascinating book about dinosaurs and the hard work to rediscover lost fossils.

Shannon Babb says

Is this the best science book I have ever read? No. Was this a good book to read while floating down the Nile? Oh, yes. While this book focuses more on the people versus the place, there is enough context about the locations that made reading this book in Egypt very enjoyable for a person with a background in geology.

Jonathan Anderson says

I did not expect to love this book quite as much as I did. I was somewhat familiar with the story of Ernst Stromer, I was definitely familiar with the story of how *Spinosaurus* was discovered, lost when the museum the bones were kept at was bombed in WWII, and now we've only just relaly solved that puzzle, but there turns out to have been much more to all of this than I could've imagined. It's a crazy, complex story with a lot of smaller mysteries involved, and the best quality of this book is that Nothdurft explores every facet of all of them in so, much, detail. I learned more about WWII, British bombing campaigns, and the German economy after the first World War than I did in some of my history classes in school. He also fleshes out the expedition with moments talking about the paleontologists' love of Star Wars, or how a couple of them are drummers who would go into the village they were staying in at night to play music with the kids. I see some people complaining about how this book's really not about the dinosaurs, and they've completely missed the point. This is about the people and the process, and it's one of the best books I've read in that category in a long while.

Josiphine/Tessa says

This was an interesting short read, but it could have been better. I enjoyed the parts about Stromer's expedition more. I would have liked more information about the dinosaurs--surprisingly, that was a bit sparse. Lots of evolution too.
