

Museum History

The Museum of Western Colorado is the largest multi-disciplinary museum between Salt Lake City and Denver. Over the past forty years it has grown to include three major museum facilities, three active outdoor paleontology sites, an educational center, and a respected research library. The museum offers a multitude of programs and services featuring dinosaur expeditions, extensive educational programming, and historic and cultural trips and tours, ranging from local to international. Annually, over 117,000 visitors participate in museum programs and enjoy its facilities. This number includes approximately 17,000 western slope K-12 students who experience high-quality site tours, programs and outreach activities.

In 1971, the museum became the 28th museum in the nation to be accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM). Periodic re-evaluation by AAM is required to maintain the prestigious designation, and regularly scheduled evaluations in 1982 and 1996 determined that the museum continually met or exceeded the highest professional standards and expectations. Currently, the museum is undergoing the fourth such evaluation. With a fourth accreditation designation, which is expected in the next few months, the museum will be among the top 5% in the United States.

Dinosaur Journey is a dynamic facility showcasing the plants and animals common in the area 140 million years ago. Exhibits include articulated skeletons, robotic dinosaurs, fossils, hands-on activities, and a working paleontology laboratory. It also serves as a repository for national institutions such as the **Bureau of Land Management**, and **The Carnegie and Smithsonian Museums**.

The Museum of the West recently completed a major remodel of its facility, providing a broader, updated regional perspective that highlights the area's history and culture. Exhibits focus on western Colorado and include extensive, one-of-a-kind firearms and Native American pottery collections as well as many interactive exhibits. The site also includes the renowned Loyd Files Research Library, the Whitman Educational Center and the administrative offices for the Museum of Western Colorado.

The original 4.3 acres of Cross Orchards Historic Site were acquired by the museum in 1980, following a community-wide fund raising campaign to save the last vestiges of the former Red Cross Land and Fruit Company from demolition. The historic barn and packing shed are now on the National Register of Historic Places. Ongoing restoration has returned to the farm, now comprising 25 acres and several ancillary exhibits, to an early 20th century appearance. Special events, costumed interpreters, guided tours and historical demonstrations bring the site to life.

Outdoor paleontology areas are operated by the museum under a signed cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to co-manage three outdoor sites. These sites include the Mygatt-Moore Quarry, The Fruita Paleo Area (which also offers an interpretive trail system to visitors) and Riggs Hill (the *Apatosaurus* bone found at this site in 1901 has been a popular exhibit in the Field Museum in Chicago for many decades). In addition, the museum is the repository for all cultural and fossil material found on BLM-administered land.

The Western Investigations Team (W.I.T.) was formed in 2005 as a cooperative venture between Mesa State College and the museum. The goal of WIT is to use history, archaeology, and all forms of science to solve unanswered questions and mysteries in regional history. Among other projects, WIT has worked extensively to prove the innocence of Alferd Packer the famed "Colorado Cannibal" **and has been**

featured in a History Channel documentary, "Cannibals," in 2005. It has also been covered by the Discovery Channel, National Public Radio and the BBC.