

Show livens up solemn museum

Dinosaur exhibition reveals some important discoveries

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

"Come on, come on," dozens of children cheered, surrounding a sweaty boy who was riding a fitness bike and racing against a dinosaur on a screen in front of him.

Another round of joyful acclamations sprang up from the crowd when "You win!" showed up on the screen.

"Fantastic and breathtaking," said Gao Qianfeng, 12, who was still immersed in the victory. "I was 'eaten' by the dinosaur the first time around, but I beat it on the second try!"

The cheerful laughs and cries of children kept hovering over the grand hall, giving the visitors an illusion that they'd arrived at an amusement park, rather than the Beijing Natural History Museum.

The game, called "racing against dinosaurs," is just one of the spotlights in the new palaeontological exhibition of the museum entitled "The Track of Life," which opened to the public on Monday.

With valuable fossils of dinosaurs and other ancient creatures as well as vivid exhibition boards, the 1,550-square-metre exhibition hall is decorated with bright colours, comfortable lights and in a trendy style, dazzling the visitors.

The staff of the museum has spent over a year and 6 million yuan (US\$730,000) to prepare for the brand new exhibition.

A total of about 380 fine fossils are on display, among which 90 per cent have been put on show for the first time, according to Li Jianjun, who was in charge of the renovation.

"It has been a long time since we last saw such bustling scenes in our museum," said Li.

"A museum will lose its glamour if its face is always cold and aloof. Our key target is to stimulate people's interests towards nature and life — making fun out of supposed-to-be boring knowledge through our exhibition."

No longer a stuffy place

For years, the name of the Beijing Natural History Museum often evoked the same image: grand hall, marble ground, exhibits being put behind thick and huge glass cases with accurate and profound subtitles in both Chinese and Latin.

All this gave a very serious atmosphere inside the museum, said Rao Chenggang, curator of the museum.

"Our museum used to be like an aloof teacher with a cold face who wanted to infuse visitors

with professional knowledge in a systematical way," said Rao.

The previous palaeontological exhibition was designed in 1984 and there had been no major changes in nearly two decades, while Chinese scientists have made so many new discoveries during this period.

Though the largest museum of such kind in China, the museum gradually lost its attraction to visitors in recent years, despite the fact that the artefacts kept there form a great encyclopaedia of nature.

"People got bored with the dull and dreary exhibitions. No wonder they would not come," Rao said.

Far from its old image, the new exhibition offers an entirely new world to visitors, which is divided into four main themes including "origin of life and its early evolution," "birth of the invertebrate," "the evolution of dinosaurs," "great development of the vertebrates."

Large and vivid fossil specimens of more than 10 types of dinosaurs, including a 26-metre-long fossil of lamenchisaurus jingyuanensis, the longest dinosaur fossil ever found in China, as well as the footprints of dinosaurs and the dinosaur eggs, are placed in the centre of the museum.

Only a thin thread "secures" the precious fossils.

The thick huge glass cases are gone now substituted by small pieces of glasses protecting the surface of the relatively small fossils, allowing people to closely watch them. In some areas, visitors are able to touch some fossils.

By creating this brand new exhibition, the curators hope to shorten the distance between visitors as well as possible, according to Li Jianjun.

Li studied a year in the British Natural History Museum between 1989 and 1990, where he had chances to touch and taste of museum shows personally.

He wrote all the interpretations with vivid, easily-understood words, which anyone at school level education would comprehend.

Besides "racing against dinosaurs," other such as "weigh dinosaurs," "pie dinosaur with its bones," "search fossils among rocks" are found around the museum.

Li Jianjun said he would be "funny" to combine the word "amusement" on the exhibition.

"The museum should be a place that offers people happiness at the same time it deserves more



Curiosity: Children carefully read an introduction to the dinosaur skeleton.

Photos by ZHANG WEI/China Daily

than one visit, a place that intrigues people's curiosity about nature and life."

The swarms of visitors on the first two days are enough to prove the success of the new attempts.

Bian Zhihui, a teacher at the Jingzhonglu Primary School said she was surprised that her students, around 200, were so happy there when visiting the museum on the first day the new show opened.

To expand students' scope of knowledge, the school organized its students to visit the museum each year since late 1990s, Bian said.

"But it's the first time that the students don't want to leave even after a whole morning visit and smiles are on their faces all the time."

Children love the brisk environment here. Games are their favourite. I believe they would like to come back again. That's a good start of study," she said.

State-of-the-art show

The exhibitions are not just designed for children, of course, said Li.

"It's also designed to attract professionals."

The displayed fossils specimens are among the best and the most precious collections of the museum and are very rarely seen, according to Zhang Baokun, another palaeontologist at the museum.

Among the rare fossils, Archaeofructus sinensis, a 125-million-year-old fossil of the oldest flowering plant found so far on earth, was unearthed in Northeast China's Liaoning Province.

There is also the unique feathered dinosaur fossil that belongs to the 130-million-year-



Knowing by touching: A boy touches the fossil of dinosaur eggs.

old Jehol Biota in Liaoning. It gives the support to the hypothesis that birds originated from dinosaurs.

Other rare fossils are selected from the 530-million-year-old fossils of Chengjiang Fauna, a discovery in Southwest China's Yunnan Province. The discovery has helped move the history of the most primitive vertebrates further back another 50 million years.

"The past two decades have witnessed the quickest development of Chinese palaeontology as many tremendous discoveries have been made in China like

Jehol Biota and Chengjiang Fauna," said Zhang.

"We ought to share the advance of current palaeontology with the public."

The state-of-the-art knowledge is also demonstrated in lively ways. Virtual animation reconstructs the bloom scene of "Cambrian Life Explosion" — the Chengjiang Fauna.

The exhibition area of the Jehol Biota is decorated with bright yellow and red.

"I hope that we would be successful to attract people with fun," said Li Jianjun.

Stolen fossil vet to be recovered

A recent burglary in Australia has put the Beijing Natural History Museum into the global media spotlight.

A 110 million-year-old Psittacosaurus sinensis fossil was stolen on July 20 from the Newcastle Regional Museum in New South Wales, Australia.

The 60-centimetre-tall fossil was among more than 50 dinosaur bones and birds, including 13 complete dinosaur skeletons, on loan from the Beijing Natural History Museum.

The Australian museum had been exhibiting the fossils for nearly one year. The stolen fossil — one of only 10 of this type in the world — was taken on the day the relics were due to be returned to Beijing.

The thieves climbed a 2.4-metre-tall fence and broke a security-glass window to enter the

museum. Although they triggered the alarm, it took them no more than 7 minutes to steal the fossil and escape before the police arrived, according to early local reports.

Local police are heading the investigation, but have so far failed to find the thieves or recover the precious fossils.

The Newcastle Regional Museum has offered a reward of A\$5,000 (US\$3,267) for the fossil's return.

If the museum and police fail to find the fossil within one month, compensation of A\$40,000 (US\$26,500) will be paid to the Beijing Natural History Museum under an insurance policy taken out by the New South Wales government, according to the contract between the Beijing and Newcastle museums.

China Daily news

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic & Magic Shows

Chaoyang Theatre specializes in Acrobatics by top acrobatic artists from all over the country.

Time: 7:15-8:30 pm, nightly

Magic Shows

Time: 6:00-7:00 pm; 7:30-8:30 pm, nightly

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuai Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

EXHIBITIONS

Group show: The Wanfung Art Gallery is holding a group exhibition of paintings. On display are at least 100 works by about 20 young, middle-aged, and veteran artists. Among them are masters of Chinese ink painting Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian; specialists in Chinese ink figure painting Hu Yongkai, Wang Mingming, Liang Yan, and Shen Daohong; Chinese ink landscape painters Feng Linzhang, Du Yingqiang and Liu Maoshan; bird and flower painters Feng Dazhong, Lin Decai and Liu Jibiao; realistic watercolor painters Huang Youwei and Yu Jiantao; and oil painters Ai Xuan, Liu Baomin, Xiao She and Xin Yi.

Time: 10 am-5:30 pm until September 15

Place: 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District

Tel: 6523-3320

Ancient treasures: The National Museum of China is holding a special exhibition on 179 valuable cultural relics, some of which have been inscribed on the national treasures list of China.

The exhibits, including examples of bronze ware, ceramics, lacquer ware, jade artefacts, as well as

gold and silver articles, have been carefully preserved in warehouses. Selected from more than 300,000 pieces in the museum collection, they range from prehistoric times to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The mysterious bronze masks discovered in Sanxingdui, Southwest China's Sichuan Province, will form part of the show. The masks shed light on the ancient kingdom of Shu some 3,000 to 4,000 years ago.

Visitors to the exhibition can also see delicate porcelain ware from the most renowned ancient kilns of China.

Time: 9 am-4 pm until December 30

Place: East side of Tian'anmen Square

Tel: 6512-8321

Tibetan relics: An exhibition with hundreds of precious cultural relics from Tibet's past and present development is on at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in downtown Beijing. Co-sponsored by the United Front Work Department, the Information Office of the State Council, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Tibet Autonomous Region government, the show presents pictures, relics and files chosen from the collection of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities.

Time: 9 am-4 pm until August 30

Place: Cultural Palace of the Nationalities

Tel: 66024433

CONCERTS

Season opening: The China National Symphony Orchestra will open its 2003-04 season at the National Library Concert Hall. Under the baton of its chief conductor Li Xiaolu, the programme includes Berlioz's "Le Corsaire Overture," Bruch's Violin Concerto No1 and Respighi's "Pines of Rome." The concert will also feature violinist Kurt Nikkanen from the United States.

Time: 7:30 pm, August 31

Place: 33 South Zhongguancun Road

Tel: 8854, 5501 8854, 5731 6428, 5270 6420, 9692 (English)

Piano prodigy rising young pianist recital at the Poly downtown Beijing. Lang Lang learned to play the piano at five and won top prize at

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

In "Look Back in Anger," John Osborne wrote, "The whole point of a sacrifice is that you give up something you never really wanted in the first place."

This week's deals have featured sacrificing the first trick in positions where it looked natural to win. Is today's another in the pattern, or is it finally time to take the opening salvo?

You are South, the declarer in three no-trump. West leads the spade five. How would you plan the play?

West led fourth-highest from his longest and strongest. Thinking that this was away from the king and seeing three spade tricks in his future, South did the "natural" thing and called for dummy's four. However, East won with the king. Then, realizing that returning his partner's suit was a waste of time, East

found the killing spade. Declarer drove out West led his remaining took four tricks in the South shouldn't he had won the first spade ace and play would have established spade, three diamonds and the ninth trick. And the ninth trick. South's trick-one contract.

Finally, note that lead the heart seven must play low! If queen and plays two suit, declarer discards ace and has nine tricks. East has three diamonds and four clubs.

The China National Orchestra is launching a new music season with Mahler's work.

Yu Long, a pianist will accompany Lang Lang and baritone Mo and baritone

New season: National Philharmonic Orchestra to launch a new music season with Mahler's work.

Yu Long, a pianist will accompany Lang Lang and baritone Mo and baritone

Concert series: The "2003 Open the Door of Music," organized by the Beijing Municipal Cultural Bureau, will hold its closing gala performed by the Beijing Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Tan Lihua at the Forbidden City Concert Hall inside Zhongshan Park.

Time: 7:30 pm, August 30

Place: Inside Zhongshan Park

Tel: 65598285, 66052493, 65598306

Lang Lang, a piano prodigy, will give a recital at the Poly downtown Beijing. Lang Lang learned to play the piano at five and won top prize at the second

North

♠ A J 4

♥ K 9 8

♦ J 9 6 4

♣ Q 5 2

South

♠ Q 9 3

♥ J 10 4

♦ A K J 10

♣ A K J 4

Dealer: South

Vulnerable: Both

Opening lead: ♠ 5

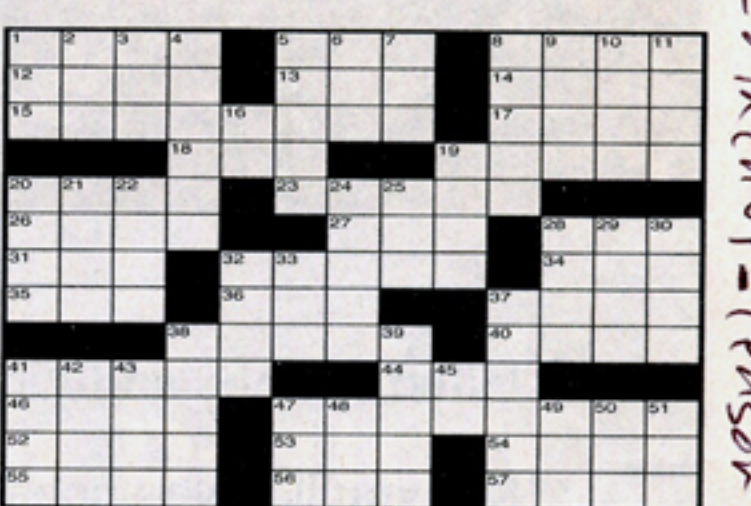
CROSSWORD (No 6980)

ACROSS

- 1 TV's
- 5 Hawkeye
- 8 Pudgy
- 12 Not foolish
- 13 Apple skin
- 14 Lupino of films
- 15 State firmly
- 16 Did better
- 17 Spotted animal
- 18 Funny
- 19 Charlotte
- 20 Platoon
- 23 Pub brew
- 26 Temporary trends
- 27 Fish-to-be
- 28 Dear Abby's sister
- 31 Coal alternative
- 32 Brick worker
- 34 Average guy
- 35 Furtive
- 36 Lennon's Yoko-

DOWN

- 2 Gorilla
- 3 Superman foe
- 4 Winter mo.
- 5 Storm warnings
- 6 Cuba's -Castro
- 7 Lemon drink
- 8 Thin cookie
- 9 Dreaded czar
- 10 Bastos
- 11 Fish-eating bird
- 16 Per Harold of the comics
- 20 Sci-fi vessels item
- 22 Lazily



- 24 Fire chief's suspicion
- 25 Gunk
- 28 Opened a crack
- 29 Swelling
- 30 Famous Loch
- 32 Drop anchor
- 33 Nurses org.
- 37 Swains
- 38 Helms or Owens
- 39 Framed (2 wds.)
- 41 Gobble (down)
- 42 Ayla's creator Jean-
- 43 Park feature
- 45 "Say what?"
- 47 Computer key
- 48 " - Ramblin' Man"
- 49 Stadium cheer
- 50 Pride
- 51 Flower droplet

Solution to No 6979

TIP SHOD FORD

ROO GURU RATE

ATE TRELISES

MATES GLAD

RM ROY AIDA

BAY TIN DYLAN

LG AVG HAS LO

TEEMS SOY TEN

SERE ITT AH

NICE ALONG

OMNIVORES MAE

SPIT NEDS APT

UGLY SOON SAS

HK NT bureaus est. 1980 300,000 circ. free in hotels Online 4 million hits

Flood strike Law filed - could appear in 4 hours if fast track! Main meeting can be postponed.

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