

ROYAL TYRRELL MUSEUM

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*In the Royal Tyrrell Museum's 2021 – 2026 Strategic Plan, we outlined our organizational priorities and major goals. We set out to strengthen the Museum's position in six key areas: delivering scientific excellence; enhancing public value through relevant exhibits and programs; building mutually beneficial relationships; providing welcoming experiences and an exemplary level of service; expanding financial resiliency; and advancing strategic growth.*



It's a pleasure to report continued progress as the Museum moves past the mid-way point of our current Strategic Plan. In a tremendous act of support for the Museum's mission and future, the Estate of William G. Mellett provided a bequest of \$100,000 to the Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society in 2023. We were honoured to receive this generous and deeply meaningful gift.

We reached two incredible attendance milestones this year. In the spring, we celebrated the arrival of the Museum's 15 millionth visitor, Ben Pike, who visited with his partner Stephanie and their grandchild Hawken on March 28, 2023.

By the end of the calendar year, we had completed our second consecutive year of record-breaking attendance. After welcoming more than 500,000 visitors in 2022 (for the first time since the Museum started charging admission in 1991), we surpassed that total again, hosting over 526,000 visitors in 2023!

Some visitors travelled to Drumheller to see Canada's best-preserved *Triceratops* skull, on display for the first time as part of our *Fossils in Focus* exhibit. Some sampled our newest programming options for adults, such as our *Badlands Adult Hike* and our very well received *Fossils After Dusk* event.

Others encountered fossils from our Collection in Toronto. We loaned some tyrannosaur specimens, including our original "Black Beauty" *Tyrannosaurus rex* skull, to the Royal Ontario Museum. The fossils were part of the temporary exhibit *T. rex: The Ultimate Predator*, which ran from March 11 to September 4, 2023 and attracted 238,000 visitors.

Many of our staff have been busy developing our new *First Life* gallery, in preparation for a May 2024 opening. The exhibit covers the evolution of life on Earth spanning 3.5 billion years.

You will read about several exciting research and fieldwork highlights in the pages ahead, including the publication of a study on the first known occurrence of prey remains found preserved within the stomach cavity of a fossilized tyrannosaur.

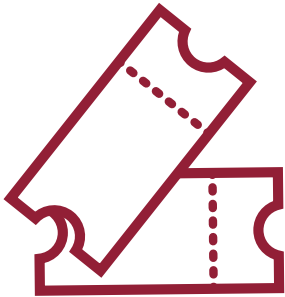
We are grateful to all of the Museum's supporters.

Thank you.

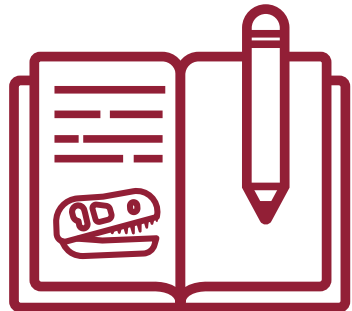
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Lisa Making". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Lisa Making, Executive Director**  
Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology

# 2023 IN NUMBERS



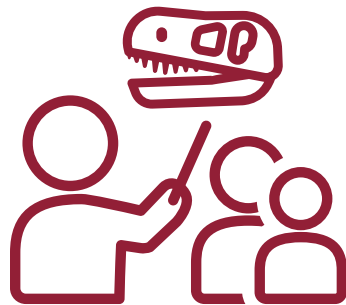
Welcomed  
**526,340**  
visitors



Published  
**17**  
peer-reviewed  
scientific papers



Delivered public programs to  
**31,400+**  
onsite participants



Reached  
**11,000**  
participants in  
**280+**  
Distance Learning  
programs



Social media engagement:  
**646,800**  
actions  
**550,000+**  
video views



Social media reach:  
**12.9+ million**

# 2023 PROGRESS ON OUR STRATEGIC GOALS





# BE A CENTRE OF SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE

Partial remains of two small dinosaurs were preserved inside the stomach cavity of this gorgosaur specimen.

## We will strengthen our position as a centre of excellence for palaeontology, and a leader in advancing research, knowledge, and palaeontological stewardship.

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The Museum's Preservation and Research team added more than 2,000 specimens to our Collections in 2023. Our crews excavated and collected two well-preserved specimens from Dinosaur Provincial Park: a tyrannosaur, and an ornithomimid (an ostrich-like relative of *Albertosaurus* and *Tyrannosaurus*). Helicopter assistance was required for their extraction, as well as to collect a beautifully preserved petrified tree stump near Wayne, AB. Technicians also collected a maxilla of a tyrannosaur that was discovered by a member of the public near Tolman Bridge.

Our preparation teams were called out to investigate several industry discoveries in 2023. We collected a plesiosaur specimen from Syncrude's Mildred Lake mine site near Fort McMurray, and a large mosasaur from the Enchanted Design ammolite mine near Lethbridge.

In the Preparation Lab, technician Ian Macdonald completed preparation of the best-preserved, most complete *Triceratops* skull known from Canada, after seven years and 6,500+ hours of painstaking work. The Preparation Lab staff also cast and painted a replica of a multi-taxic track site discovered along the St. Mary River. Both of these specimens were unveiled in the latest installation of our *Fossils in Focus* exhibit.

Our 2023 research highlights included a range of illuminating peer-reviewed scientific publications. Dr. Christopher West and Dr. Caleb Brown were among the co-authors of a study that provided new insights into the feeding behaviour of the armoured dinosaur *Borealopelta*, supported by sampling of Early Cretaceous northern Alberta plant fossils. Dr. Craig Scott published a paper describing new ancient primates from the Calgary area. Curator Emeritus Dr. Don Brinkman published a paper describing a new sturgeon from the Horseshoe Canyon Formation. Dr. François Therrien and co-authors published research detailing the last meal of a juvenile gorgosaur from Dinosaur Provincial Park—the first fossilized tyrannosaur to be found with stomach contents preserved in place.

A photograph of four hikers on a trail, viewed from behind. They are standing on a grassy ridge, looking out over a valley. The hiker on the far left is wearing a plaid shirt and dark pants. The hiker next to them is wearing a blue shirt and khaki shorts, with a large black backpack. The hiker in the center is wearing a purple shirt, a wide-brimmed hat, and light-colored pants, with a blue backpack. The hiker on the far right is wearing a white shirt, light blue jeans, and a yellow fanny pack. The background shows rolling hills under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A large orange triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'STRENGTHEN PUBLIC VALUE'.

# STRENGTHEN PUBLIC VALUE

Participants in our new *Badlands Adult Hike* explore the amazing flora, fauna, and fossils of the Drumheller Valley.

**We will continuously enhance the Museum's public value by ensuring our exhibits and programs are widely accessible, regularly evaluated, and updated with new content to reflect recent scientific research.**

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Our *Fossils in Focus* exhibit, updated every fall with all-new specimens and stories, features significant fossils from the Museum's Collections, highlighting recent discoveries and new research. The 2023 edition includes two exceptional ceratopsian skulls. The most complete, best-preserved skull of *Pachyrhinosaurus*, collected from Horsethief Canyon, was generously donated to the Museum by the Badlands Historical Centre. 'Calli,' the exquisite *Triceratops* skull that got its name from the Callum Creek location where our teams collected it in 2015, went on display for the first time ever.

Behind the scenes, our team has been engaged in completely redeveloping the Museum's Precambrian and Cambrian exhibits. The new *First Life* galleries, opening in spring 2024, will explain how life on Earth evolved—from its earliest beginnings, to the major diversification of complex life forms known as the Cambrian Explosion. Construction began in fall 2023.

The Museum's Exhibit Steering Group and Program Steering Group both opened up submissions in 2023, embarking on processes to assess needs, refresh development plans, and confirm priorities and next steps.

On the programming side, evaluation and feedback resulted in adjustments to the Museum's offerings to best serve our audiences. By changing the timing of our popular *Kidosaurus Club* (ages three to five), and opening up a second session to meet local demand, we dramatically increased participation. We successfully launched our new *Junior Palaeo Club* in October for kids ages six to nine.

We continued to expand exclusive programming for adults as well. *Fossils After Dusk*, a well-attended event at the Museum in February, treated participants to a crash course with a palaeontologist on badlands fossils and how to identify them. Our new *Badlands Adult Hike*, developed in consultation with peer organizations, was also very well received; educators led this paid public program daily through the summer, and on weekends in the fall.



# BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Ian Macdonald (left) prepared Canada's best *Triceratops* specimen. Joe Sanchez and former technician Ben Borkovic found it in 2014.

**We will connect palaeontology to relevant scientific and cultural matters. Our relationships and partnerships will bolster our efforts to achieve mutually beneficial strategic goals.**

Relationships with journalists help the Museum get the word out when we have something to celebrate. Several staff were interviewed in October about the opening of our 2023 *Fossils in Focus* exhibit and the unveiling of 'Calli' the *Triceratops*. Most of Alberta's major media outlets reported on this story, including CBC, CityNews, CTV, Global, and the *Calgary Herald & Sun*.

Research released by Dr. François Therrien and coauthors in December received significant national and international media coverage. Their paper, published in the journal *Science Advances*, examined a *Gorgosaurus libratus* specimen collected from Dinosaur Provincial Park by Royal Tyrrell Museum staff. The specimen was preserved with partial remains of two young, bird-like herbivorous dinosaurs of the species *Citipes elegans* within its stomach.

Relationships between the Museum's science educators and teachers support the success of our educational offerings. Consultation with teachers informs our program development and helps ensure we are meeting the needs of our audiences.

Teachers have an important role to play, from providing input and feedback to facilitating participation of students in program pilots. Our educators collaborated with teachers in 2023 to test and launch *Badlands Unboxed*, a new school program for grades six to nine, and to revamp our *Virtual Visit* Distance Learning program.

The Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society and the Drumheller & District Chamber of Commerce provide critical support to the Museum's research initiatives, exhibits, and educational offerings. The Museum is a unique pillar of Alberta's visitor economy; collaborations with Travel Drumheller and Travel Alberta capitalize on our position as an anchor attraction within the badlands destination zone. Strong relationships with all of these valued organizations bolster the Museum's outreach and public engagement efforts, and enhance our presence within our communities.



# BE DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND INCLUSIVE

Visitors on the Museum's front plaza in summer 2023.

## We will provide an exemplary level of service and experience to ensure all feel welcome.

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Creating outstanding visitor experiences is central to our work. From Visitor Services, the Museum Shop, Education, and our Gallery Experience Officers, to the full team contributing behind-the-scenes to the development of exceptional and relevant exhibits and programs, all of our staff strive to serve and engage the Museum's audiences. We were thrilled to reach two major attendance milestones in 2023 that are a testament to the high quality of service we provide to visitors. In March, we welcomed the Museum's 15 millionth visitor! Our total attendance for the year was over 526,000 visitors from 150 countries, surpassing our previous record for paid attendance.

As part of Alberta's Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, we continue to work with our Division on ensuring access for all Albertans to our culture and heritage sites. The Museum waived admission fees for more than 15,500 visitors in 2023, on Family Day and the Alberta Culture Days weekend, which are free admission days throughout the Ministry's network of museums and historic sites.

Funding through the Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society's Fee Assistance Program enabled 155 underprivileged people to visit the Museum in 2023.

The Royal Tyrrell Museum is proud to be part of the Canoo program, offered through the Institute of Canadian Citizenship. The Canoo App provides free admission to the Museum (and 1,400+ other arts, cultural, and outdoor destinations throughout Canada) for new citizens, as well as permanent residents in their first five years of residency. There are more than 300 Canoo partners. The app has served 500,000+ newcomers. The Museum is consistently one of the top-visited museums in Alberta, and ranks in the top 20 for the most Canoo member admissions in all of Canada. From July – September 2023, we hosted an average of 284 Canoo member visits per week. We were visited by Canoo members from 89 countries of origin; the top three countries were India, the Philippines, and China.





# EXPAND FINANCIAL RESILIENCY

Support from the Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society makes our annual *Badlands Science Camp* possible.

## We will ensure a robust, diversified, and high-performing portfolio of income streams.

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The Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society is a non-profit, charitable organization that plays a key role in helping the Museum achieve its mandate. Through proceeds from the management of the Museum Shop, memberships, and donations, the Cooperating Society provides essential ongoing support for the Museum's research, exhibits, and educational programming. On the individual giving front, the Cooperating Society collected donations totalling more than \$27,000 in 2023.

We are honoured to recognize a generous bequest of \$100,000 received this year from the Estate of William G. Mellett. We are deeply grateful to William G. Mellett, and all dedicated palaeontology enthusiasts who choose to secure the Museum's future in such a meaningful way.

The Royal Tyrrell Museum Shop generated sales of \$3.8 million in 2023, selling more than 285,000 individual items. The Museum delivered on our goal of continued collaboration with the Royal Tyrrell Museum Cooperating Society to implement store improvements in alignment with the Museum brand. Over 40 new products were added to the online Museum Shop. Nearly all of those were custom items, designed in the Museum's studio, and exclusively available through the Museum Shop. Museum Shop products were donated to over 20 local community initiatives for silent auctions and other fundraising efforts.

Highlights of the valuable support the Cooperating Society provided to the Museum in 2023 included funding for: work on the *First Life* exhibit; open access fees for scientific publications; staff travel costs for conferences and research trips; and hosting of colleagues, speakers, and visiting researchers. The Cooperating Society is also currently funding a Collections Internship in partnership with Young Canada Works.

To advance the Museum's financial resiliency, we have recently completed revenue forecasts and expense estimates for several public and educational programs. By analyzing the profitability of our programs, and adjusting our offerings accordingly, we are positioned for further successes in 2024.

# GROW STRATEGICALLY

Visitors explore our family-friendly *Learning Lounge* exhibit, which offers interactive displays and fun hands-on activities.



**We will work to ensure our physical, organizational, and technological capacities are aligned with our strategic plan, to enhance visitor experience, and advance core museological and research priorities.**

In late 2022, the Museum's Collections staff completed a major multi-year project to finalize and launch an upgraded version of our online collections database. In its first full year of operation, our eMuseum site is proving to be an invaluable resource—not only for our own staff, but also for visiting colleagues looking to identify specimens available for research. Observant visitors will note that some of the Museum's exhibit labels include the "TMP" specimen numbers of the fossils on display. Anyone looking for additional information about individual specimens can look them up on our eMuseum site to learn more!

The Museum's business and visitor services team has been investigating ways to improve the entry experience for visitors, for example by aiding in ticket purchases, increasing efficiency, and reducing congestion. We consulted with peer organizations across Canada and the U.S. in 2023 regarding ticketing and scanning procedures and admissions best practices. One solution we have implemented is to post a QR code for express checkout admission sales on the plaza on the Museum's busiest days.

Now when walk-up tickets are not available, customers are able to easily book tickets for later times, and this has provided improvements to the visitor experience. We are continuing to research and consider additional enhancements.

We have incorporated technological advances into our methods for collecting visitor feedback. Our recently implemented online system for visitor comments continues to provide efficiencies, with the added benefit of saving paper. Physical touchscreen kiosks make it easier for visitors to share their comments with us through targeted gallery surveys and the annual Cafeteria survey.

ROYAL TYRRELL MUSEUM

Alberta