

Make no bones about it: dinosaurs are him

kid Peter May swears he
ssed the day his teachers
linosaurs. It must have
er he left Oldham, a city
nchester, England, and
he began Grade 4 at
n's Lloyd George ele-

one a bit of catching up.
clear when you enter
warehouse on Union
Beamsville, the one
fake rock outside in-
with Mayan art and
us sign that reads
Flintstones script.
on't find a tabloid



ROB FAULKNER

newspaper anywhere inside.
This day's reading is the book
Creating Life-Like Animals in
Polymer Clay. A humpback
whale skeleton lays in a steel
frame. Glance up and a towering
Allosaurus bares finger-long

serrated teeth as if the Jurassic
period's come back to life.

Jurassic giants: photo feature Go 14

It has for the 48-year-old.
After graduating from Barton
Secondary he studied sculpting
at University of Guelph. Then
came stints at the Royal Ontario
Museum bookending his work
on the founding of the Royal
Tyrell Museum of Palaeontol-
ogy in Drumheller, Alta.

DINOMAN: A8

ASTRONOMY

Stars align for group even when it's -18 C

BY JENNIFER MORRISON

ne-chilling temperatures aren't enough to deter dozens of amateur astronomers from setting up camp and gazing up into the sky through a telescope at the planet Saturn Saturday night.

clear and crisp night sky is the ideal conditions to get a good look at the gas giant planet while its rings are just out as close to maximum tilt as they're going to get.

"Man that's sweet," said Kenneth, as he gazed up into the sky through a long lens.

An avid astronomer who usually does his star gazing in his back yard, Smith was at Bayfront Park in Hamilton with his two grown children, Megan and Cameron, equally enthusiastic.

packed out in their warmest winter weather gear, stargazers of all ages gathered to get a view of the planet through a variety of powerful telescopes provided by members of the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers.

urn, which looks like a bright light high up in the sky when you're not looking through a telescope, is bright during periods of opposition which means the earth is only in between Saturn and the sun. This won't happen again until 2005.

urn wasn't the only attraction to be seen.

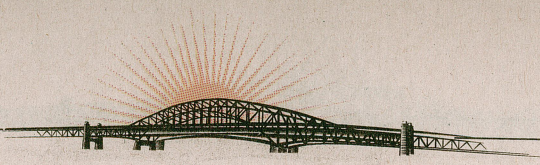
you look long and hard through the lens, several other constellations, stars and constellations are well within your site — Venus and the moon, to name a few.

"The planets are actually very easy to see," said club president Glenn Muller, pointing up at the sky. "Saturn is particularly bright."

club's last public party was in August, when hundreds of members and curious on-lookers gathered to take a peek at the planet on the occasion of its closest appearance to Earth in 60,000 years.

Hamilton Amateur Astronomers meet monthly. Anyone is welcome, from beginner to professional. Their next meeting is Feb. 13. Check out amateurastronomy.org.

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DINOMAN:

One of the world's top dinosaur builders

Continued from A1

In 1987, faced with requests for plenty of outside work while at the ROM, he founded Research Casting International. Now, it's one of the world's top dinosaur builders.

"We have the highest free-standing dinosaur in the world," May says on a tour of the 18,000-square-foot building he expanded into in 1998. He's talking about the five-storey-tall Barosaurus he built for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Poised on its back legs to defend its young, it stands 15 metres tall and 24 metres long. It weighs a tonne — a fraction of what it would in real life.

Over the past 25 years, May has helped build more than 400 dinosaur skeletons for museums in Canada, the U.S., Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. And RCI — the museum side of May's \$5 million or so theatre-prop-and-dino-skeleton empire — even built skeletons for Steven Spielberg's movie Jurassic Park.

As May talks, his staff polishes and then packs a long-necked Diplodocus and its Allosaurus attacker into wood crates bound for Mokpo City Hall in Korea.

Korea's given him lots of work recently, about 15 to 20 dinos in total.

On another job, May was in China about four times, and has done lots of work in Japan.

With 17 employees — largely fine arts grads, even a blacksmith — RCI mounts actual fossils, bones or moulds of bones made with a strong, lightweight polymer.

Their "great lizards" and mammals snap together on a springy framework of steel rods and interlocking keys that May developed. They cost \$2,000 to \$120,000 US to build, and take him on some great adventures.

Such as his first interview at the ROM, when he fell asleep after reading about paleontology in the Encyclopedia Britannica the night before. He knew next to nothing about dinosaurs but was intrigued by an interviewer who asked, "Do you like camping? Do you know how to drive a four-by-four?"

He began as a junior technician doing casting and moulding for the vertebrate paleontology department.

Or the odd calls, like the one he got in late 2001 about a beached Right whale that died on the Magdalen Islands. May had to get his crew out east quickly, to gut it, skin it and gather the rare whale's bones. All this, before a coming storm hit



Please see today's Journal page
in Go for a photo feature
on RCI's creations.

Go 14



SCOTT GARDNER, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Peter May is dwarfed by inside the skeleton of a humpback whale at his RCI warehouse in Beamsville. The company specializes in casting lifesize skeletons.

the beach and washed the animal back to sea. (Its bones, soaking in RCI's wading pool, will be part of a ROM marine exhibit several years from now.)

But there's another side to May's scientifically precise dino-building, an offshoot to the buttoned-down resumé that lets him sell world-class museums on a shopping list of turtles, crocs, rodents, mammoths and more than 40 types of dinosaurs.

Sure, May handled a rush in the museum world for T-Rex models after the world's largest and complete fossil, Sue, was found and sold for \$8.4 million US.

But the flashiest work he's done — the kind some museum curators bristle at — has to be the T-rex and Alamosaurus he built for Spielberg's 1993 blockbuster Jurassic Park.

In 1992, May read in the paper that Spielberg was making a movie about dinosaurs. "I sent a letter to Amblin (Spielberg's company) with our portfolio in case they needed us," May says. It turns out, they did.

So May went to Hollywood to mount the Tyrannosaurus attacking an Alamosaurus. He met Spielberg, found him pleasant and excited about dinos but quite busy with the shooting schedule. The models were rigged with explosives, cables attached to their rib cages and about five cameras trained on them to capture the scene.

It was the kind of exposure that would later put May's models in a Jurassic Park show at New York's natural history museum the same day as the movie's U.S. premiere. A second set of his great lizards toured overseas.

"It was a one-shot deal," May says of the film scene, which sent his massive models crashing to the floor in pieces during a hair-raising chase sequence.

Still, as a dinosaur-builder, the crash was something May doesn't want to cope with off screen. "It's certainly something you don't want to see."

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BRIEFS

Border traf backed up scare close Peace Bridg

BY JENNIFER MORRISON

Canada-bound traffic snarled to a standstill for a short time yesterday after the Peace Bridge closed when customs officers discovered what they believed were hand grenades in luggage.

Shortly after 3 p.m., customs officers discovered two hand grenades in an abandoned black backpack that had been left on a Toronto-bound bus that originated in New York City.

When the 14 passengers got off the bus at the border, no one claimed the backpack.

Canada Customs officers discovered the two grenades in the bag.

The Canada-bound bus was immediately closed and people ordered from building up with traffic backing up on the U.S. side.

A bomb detection dog alerted a sergeant with the bomb disposal unit responded.

It was determined that the grenades were dummy or practice ones.

They contained no explosive material and could not be detonated.

The bridge was reopened to traffic at 4:10 p.m.

The Canada Customs Intelligence Unit, in co-operation with U.S. authorities, has taken over investigation of the incident.

Woman who killed cat gets second chance

A Hamilton woman who killed her cat last May has received a conditional discharge after pleading guilty to charges of animal cruelty.

The Hamilton-Burlington SPCA says Caroline Ross strangled and killed her cat with a three-metre rope she wrapped around the cat's neck several times. She did it after being bitten twice over two days.

Animal Control called the SPCA in to investigate and, on June 24, Ross was charged with animal cruelty.

As part of her conditional discharge, Ross is allowed to keep the cat she presently owns, but is not allowed to have any other animals for the next two years. She also must surrender her cat to the SPCA should she feel there are any concerns.

The Hamilton Spectator