



Barnum Brown: The Man Who Discovered *Tyrannosaurus rex*, by Lowell Dingus and Mark A. Norell, 2010, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 384 p., USD 29.95, hardback, ISBN: 9780520252646.

Once again the Gilbert-and-Sullivan-esque team of Dingus and Norell bring us an entertaining and captivating book. This time the subject is the larger-than-life fossil-hunter Barnum Brown—noted fossil hunter, world traveler, ladies’ man, spy, oil geologist, and field methods innovator. Many of my generation learned of Brown from Ed Colbert’s “Men and Dinosaurs: The Search in Field and Laboratory” (1968, Dutton). But Colbert, who succeeded Brown at the American Museum of Natural History, presented a sanitized version of the great man. No so with Dingus and Norell. They give us Brown warts and all, and in the process put a very human face on the man. It is difficult to know how Brown would feel about this biography taken from his own unpublished autobiography, and heavily supplemented by material from his daughter, two wives, court records, and the Museum’s archives. He would undoubtedly be pleased with being referred to as “the greatest dinosaur collector the world has ever known,” but he might not be pleased with having some of the personal and family “skeletons” brought to light. I agree with Dingus and Norell that the fact that Brown flunked out of Columbia and did not get a Ph.D. there made him feel inferior around others with degrees, because I have seen that in my non-degree-bearing contemporaries; however, I also think that this sense of inferiority was what drove him to be what we would call today an overachiever. We can see this in the way that he continually pushed himself even when ill, as recounted by Dingus and Norell.

The book is laid out in 16 chronological chapters, from his birth in 1873 until his death in 1963. Too young to have participated in the first Golden Age of dinosaur discoveries (1877–1890), he played a leading role in the second and greatest age (1898–1936). Brown succumbed early to the siren of fossil collecting when he abandoned classes in midterm at the University of Kansas for the opportunity to collect for the American Museum of Natural History in 1896 (he was 23 at the time). He seems to have never passed up an opportunity to head for the field, especially if doing so would fill gaps in the Museum’s collections. His longest time in the field lasted over four years as

he traveled around southern Asia. Fieldwork was so important to Brown that he continued with it well into his eighties.

One important but under appreciated collection made by Brown in his later years was the sauropods from Howe Quarry in Wyoming, United States. For reasons I have never been able to discover, these sauropods are referred to as *Barosaurus*. If the specimens excavated by the Saurien Museum (the “Swiss firm” mentioned on page 263) are the same taxon as those collected by Brown, then I have my doubts as to the identification. The specimens are clearly diplodocid in having long whip tails; however, the elongate midcaudal vertebrae lack the deep ventral excavation characterizing *Barosaurus*. Instead, the centra somewhat resemble those of *Apatosaurus*, as do the rather robust humeri. The cervical and dorsal vertebrae and the scapula, however, more closely resemble those of *Diplodocus*. If all this material belongs to a single taxon, then the Howe Quarry sauropods may represent a new diplodocid that is the sister to both *Apatosaurus* and *Diplodocus*. One sad note for me in reading the chapter on the Howe Quarry (Chapter 14) was learning that Ed Lewis was part of Brown’s crew. Lewis was the vertebrate paleontologist at the US Geological Survey in Denver when I knew him. I kick myself for missing the chance to have Lewis, before his death, tell me stories of working for Brown.

In reading the book, I was amused at how some things never change. Brown’s experiences related in “Chapter 12—Samos: Isle of Intrigue” were repeated for Nikos Solounias and me (as a lowly undergraduate) in 1976. Like Brown 50 years before us, we were under surveillance by the locals. Nikos’s suspicions that the workers he had hired to pick microvertebrates were reporting to the mayor of Mytilinii (Mytilinos in the book) were confirmed when he overheard two people talking about it as we were walking away from an outdoor café. Several times we were accosted by people who were convinced we were actually plundering gold from archaeological sites. They were partially pacified by showing them samples of specimens we had collected. Still, some of them were convinced that the fossils were a ruse. One farmer, after watching us wash matrix in the ocean, asked us to

help him find gold on his land. Once, Nikos was summoned to the city of Kokkarion by the island's archaeologist. He demanded that Nikos produce the gold and other archaeological artifacts we were supposedly finding. He finally dismissed Nikos in disgust when all he was shown were microvertebrate fossils. One big difference between the experiences of Brown and us were the distant explosions we occasionally heard when goats wandered into the minefields facing Turkey (I do not know if they are still in place).

I give the authors high marks for converting expenses to current equivalents. These help to put Brown's finances into perspective and show that his fieldwork was not cheap. The book is not without its mistakes, however. For example, *Pachyaena* is misspelled *Pachyama*, and *Hesperopithecus* is mistakenly interpreted as the first anthropoid ape in America, rather than

a western ape. One humorous mistake is the statement that the "buttes and ridges of the Hell Creek Formation were formed 66 million years ago..." (p. 87). If true, those are remarkably resilient geomorphic structures!

Overall, the book is excellent and an enjoyable read. It is a great companion to the biographies of Williston, Mathews, Scott, Colbert, and others. Even with 43 photographs, I freely admit to being greedy and wishing there had been more.

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