



Mike McCollum

Chelsea Lopes, coordinator of the Santa Cruz Museum Association, recoils in mock terror at the

appearance of one of the denizens of the Dinosaurs at the Beach exhibit opening today.

# Jurassic beach

Denizens of past promise to be a big hit at the beach

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A SIGN outside the new robotic dinosaur exhibit at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk warns that "young children may be frightened by the life-like dinosaur models in this exhibition."

Inside, next to a reed-circled pond, the fearsome Allosaurus rears up, turns its head, opens its huge jaws, and gazes down on a crowd of school children with an menacing red eye.

"He needs to go to the dentist," says Daria Beresford-Grubb, 10, who is visiting the exhibit with 30 or so schoolmates from Gateway School in Santa Cruz. "His teeth are dirty. And I think they're too big. And I think he needs some of them pulled out."

Most of the children attending the preview of the "Dinosaurs at the Beach" exhibit in the Boardwalk's arcade building viewed the 15 life-sized, full-color dinosaur replicas with interest rather than terror.

Developing that interest is one of the goals of the Santa Cruz City Museum of Natural History, (in addition to raising funds to expand the museum), which is presenting the show in association with the Boardwalk.

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The exhibit highlights two periods of the Mesozoic Era: the

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Jurassic, when dinosaurs were at the peak of their diversity, and the Cretaceous, which ended 65 million years ago with the extinction of the dinosaurs.

The mechanical creatures, powered by air pressure and pistons, inhabit about half of the exhibit hall. In each of the nine scenes — three of them with multiple moving dinosaurs — potted plants, ferns, rocks and sand give a strong illusion of reality, aided by roars, groans, and hoots from the dinosaurs.

In the other half of the hall, educational panels hang from the walls, fossils and dinosaur bone casts and replicas sit in glass cases, and several interactive displays offer visitors a chance to use their hands.

Next to the "Rub-a-Dino" crayon table, several children are gathered around a pit filled with sand, busily digging for fossils protruding from beneath. "I got a jaw, I got a jaw," one boy says. "That's a tooth," says a little girl. Another girl reaches into the sand and takes hold of the smooth white object in question. "This is not a tooth," she says. "This is part of a fin."

Unfortunately for the children, none of the 80 docents who will

help educate visitors during the exhibition were present, and they left with the matter unresolved.

Organizers predict the interactive display of a Dimetrodon (a mammal-like reptile that preceded the dinosaurs) will be most popular among young visitors, who will be able to manipulate the sail-backed robotic model with a joystick, says Chelsea Lopes, natural history museum coordinator.

Scattered throughout the hall are exhibits which ask questions of visitors. A "What is it?" display shows pictures — a claw, a crested dinosaur head, a tail with spines — that can be lifted up to reveal an explanation of what it is. Such exhibits are intended to prompt further questions, as viewers learn about part of a subject and want to find out more, says Stephens, who wears a blue tie decorated with a large Tyrannosaurus rex.

In front of each dinosaur exhibit is a panel containing pictures and information about what is going on in the scene. The panel describes known habits and behavior of the dinosaurs, and provides scale with clever illustrations, such as indi-

cating size with a picture of the particular dinosaur on top of a school bus, and showing weight with an illustration of the dinosaur sitting on one end of an even balance beam, with various numbers of stacked rhinos, elephants, or walruses on the other end.

Perhaps the most striking of the exhibits is titled "Sandstorm Struggle." Closely modeled on an actual fossil find, the scene shows a Protoceratops, a mustard- and brown-colored dinosaur with an armored shield ringing the back of its head, defending its hatching eggs from two blue-headed, sharp-toothed Velociraptors.

As one Velociraptor holds an egg aloft and watches from a rocky perch, the Protoceratops pins another Velociraptor to the ground. While the bloodied reptiles struggle, a young Protoceratops is emerging from its egg into the sandy desert, and two remaining eggs begin to wobble.

"Dinosaurs at the Beach" officially opens today, and will run until January 23. The exhibit is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Adult tickets are \$5, students and seniors pay \$4, children 12 and under pay \$3, and children three and under get in free.

The 220 slots for school and youth groups are nearly all filled, says Julia Sauer, dinosaur-docent coordinator. Cost for school and youth groups is \$2 per child or adult.