

Frilly-horned dino found on 'Lost Continent'

Two species found in Utah were once part of dino enclave



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Two spectacular new species of horned, triceratops-like dinosaurs have been found in southern Utah, report paleontologists. The ornately frilled rhino-sized dinos are more than just eye candy, however. They are deepening a mystery about a long lost island that supported a seemingly impossible number and variety of dinos at the same time.

The giant plant-eating *Kosmoceratops richardsoni* and *Utahceratops gettyi* were found in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in rocks that were once part of a long island called Laramidia, which was separated from the rest of North America by a wide, shallow, north-south running seaway.

"It's a freaky dinosaur," said Matthew Lamanna, assistant curator at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, commenting on *Kosmoceratops*. "If it were made into a kid's toy, it'd be a very popular one."

Among the things that make *Kosmoceratops* stand out are the strangely folded frill of horns on the top edge of its head and the horns that stick out sideways from above the eyes — more like a longhorn steer than a dinosaur. The scientists are quite sure that none of these and other unusual features are artifacts of burial or damage after death for one simple reason:

"We actually have more than one skull," said paleontologist Scott Sampson, research curator at the Utah Museum of Natural History and lead author of a paper describing the new dinosaurs in the journal *PloS ONE*. Sampson is better known to children as "Dr. Scott," the host of the PBS Kids program, "Dinosaur Train."

Over the last few decades discoveries of Laramidian dinosaurs from Alberta to New Mexico have been revealing an unusually large number of both individuals and species living within a short span of time and varying from north to south.

For many years it was primarily the remnants of the northern end of Laramidia, found in Alberta, Canada, which were yielding great numbers of new dinosaur species from the late Cretaceous. Now the discoveries in Utah are beginning to catch up by representing the southern end of Laramidia.

Researchers have been surprised to find that instead of one or two species of dinosaur reaching across a large land mass — as is the case with large mammals today — there appear to have been many kinds of horned dinosaurs sharing the island.

Just how such large animals managed this is unknown, said Sampson. One possibility is that they had slower metabolisms than comparably-sized mammals, and so needed less energy and less food and space, Sampson explained.

As for what the ornate horns of the new dinos were used for, that's unknown, but the best best is they were all about looks.

"It was initially thought that they must be used as weapons," said Sampson. "It's much more likely it was used for show" to attract mates and/or repel competitors.

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