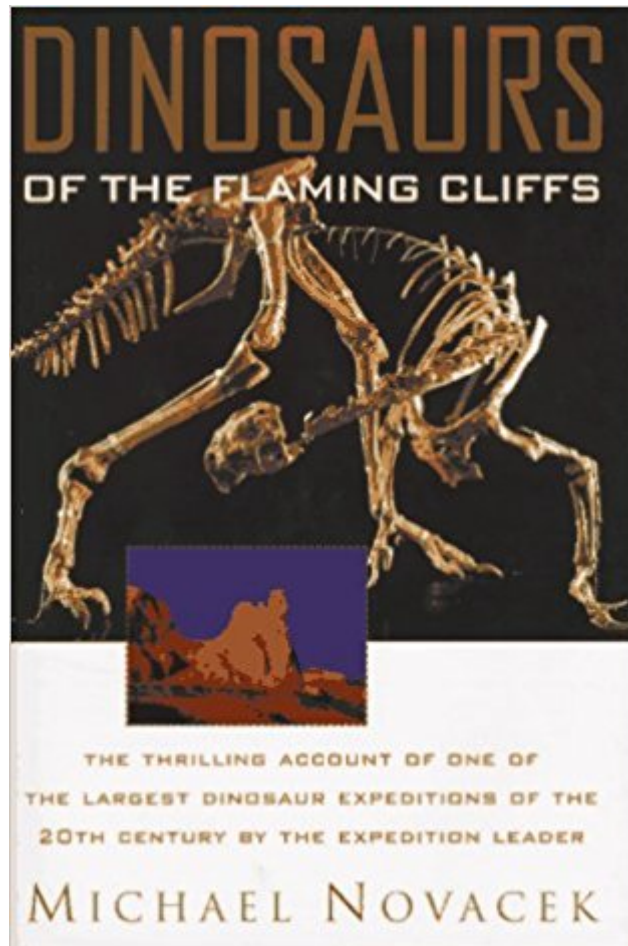




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# Dinosaurs Of The Flaming Cliffs



## Synopsis

Over the past six years, Michael Novacek, Dean of Science at the American Museum of Natural History, has led a team of international scientists to Mongolia's Gobi Desert on the greatest dinosaur expedition of the late twentieth century. Closed to the West since the 1920s and opened only to Michael Novacek's team, the remote sands of the Gobi Desert constitute the richest fossil site in the world. In *Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs*, Novacek takes the reader along with his team as he re-creates the day-to-day drama of field exploration over the last six years and recounts the remarkable discoveries that he and his colleagues unearthed. Following early years of relative disappointment, in 1993 the expedition discovered the richest Cretaceous dinosaur site ever found, excavating fossils that have helped to reshape our understanding of the dinosaur and early mammal era. Interweaving the adventure of field research with chapters that offer in depth discussions on contemporary dinosaur research and science, *Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs* makes for the best kind of science--an engrossing narrative that brings compellingly to life the thrill and excitement of scientific discovery.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the fields of study opened up by the collapse of Communism is, oddly enough, that of the distant past: Western archeologists have for the first time in six decades been allowed to explore the Gobi Desert in Mongolia. This is the region explored in the 1930s by the famed Roy Chapman Andrews of the American Museum of Natural History. It is also the region wonderfully described in this stirring book by Michael Novacek, the current curator of the museum's department of vertebrate

paleontology, who led the recent expeditions onto the high desert and into the heart of the Cretaceous Period in Asia. In 1993, Novacek's expedition found an astonishing trove of fossils in a wasteland called Ukhaa Tolgod, not too far from the Flaming Cliffs where Andrews made his most important finds. But, as with all great travel adventure stories, getting to Ukhaa Tolgod is the real tale.

In 1990, a team of paleontologists from the American Museum of Natural History and the Mongolian State Museum began to explore the Gobi Desert for fossils; nearly 70 years had elapsed since the last American expedition, under Roy Chapman Andrews. Team leader Novacek, provost of science and curator of vertebrate paleontology at the American museum recounts six years of fieldwork in a paleontological paradise. The banner year was 1993, when the team found a trove of dinosaurs, eggs, nests and early mammals, some new to science. It is an exciting story of adventure and discovery. The Gobi Desert is one of the earth's most hostile environments, with sandstorms and extreme heat, causing dehydration and exhaustion. Novacek interweaves chapters on the expedition with discussions of the importance of the fossil record; he takes us into the Cretaceous (140 million to 65 million years ago) in brief vignettes. In addition to his account of the expedition, Novacek has given us a brilliant introduction to paleontology. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

If dinosaurs are of interest to you this is an excellent book. Novacek also writes of all aspects of dinosaur skeleton hunting and for the most part you feel like you are there with him and his crew. But most interesting, and not the usual fare, Novacek writes about interpretation of dinosaur finds over the many decades of fossil hunting and brings you right up to the present. Lots of information, well written and the excitement of fossil hunting - what more could you want?

excellent

Like the author I grew up reading All About Dinosaurs. This is a great read and retells the story of Roy Chapman Andrews as well as the compelling story of the authors own expedition to the flaming cliffs of the Gobi desert. A good arm chair read with enough science to keep you focused.

Being an avid dinosaur fan and having done a lot of reading on the subject, I was delighted to learn about some new discoveries.

.....Only once in a great while does a book appear which makes a great leap forward in our understanding of paleontology and the per-history of the planet, and dinosaurs in particular. Such a book is "Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs." It is an account of the American Museum of Natural History/Mongolian expeditions to the Gobi desert in 1990-95, a place first explored by Roy Chapman Andrews of the AMNH in the 1920s, where the first scientifically studied dinosaur eggs were discovered.....Dr. Michael J. Novacek, the expedition leader and Sr. Vice President and Provost of Science for the Museum, gives us a riveting first-person account of these explorations, alternating with detailed chapters on the paleontological discoveries which they made. Moving from collections of bones to an appraisal of how the animals (reptiles and mammals) lived and died, he gives us a new understanding, based on discoveries still being analyzed, of the implications to existing life on the planet, including homo sapiens. Including in his analysis all of biology as well as geology, Novacek gives us pause to consider what will survive on earth after a similar passage of time. All this without leaving out the human element: 1990s Mitsubishis are just as prone to getting stuck in the mud or sand as were 1920s Dodges!.....The expeditions start at the Flaming Cliffs in Mongolia's Gobi Desert, where the Andrews/Granger expeditions made their most important finds, and go on to desert locations, mountains and canyons such as the Nemegt Valley, with names like Tugrugeen Shireh, Kheerman Tsav, and Ukhaa Tolgod. This last location they called Xanadu, after Kubla Khan's famous "pleasure dome," because it was such a treasure trove of new discoveries. And they were not only dinosaurs, but often tiny mammals, our true ancestors.....Dr. Novacek presents us with the greatest assemblage of new paleontology discoveries currently available to the average reader, beautifully and amply illustrated by Ed Heck of the Museum staff.....No one interested in paleontology and dinosaurs can afford not to read this book. Nor can anyone interested in the course of life on planet earth. Dr. Novacek and his colleagues' work is still going on.....This book is highly recommended for everyone from high school to old age. Public libraries should have it in their science collections. And don't neglect "Time Traveler," a later book also by Dr. Novacek.....We can only hope that explorers like this will keep on going (to use Roy Chapman Andrews' phrase) to "the ends of the earth," and come back to tell us about it!

Growing up in New York with the American Museum, I was an early dino fan. I made my parents get all the dinosaur books I could find, and they all had three pictures in common. The first was a poor Brontosaurus being killed by an Allosaurus (preferably squashing said Allosaurus in its death throes). The second was a Tyrannosaurus and Triceratops locked in combat through eternity (said Triceratops

preferably avenging the death of an innocent duckbill at the jaws of said Tyrannosaurus). And the third was always a Protoceratops defending its eggs from a vicious Oviraptor - the third in the unholy carnivorous dinosaur trinity, because we had never heard of Velociraptor/Utahraptor. This was only twenty years ago, and recent discoveries have turned this whole third scenario on its head. The American Museum's expeditions to Mongolia have changed everything we know about Oviraptor. This one is a must for all dinosaur fans, taking us through what the expedition has learned about Mongolian dinosaurs since the seventies and describing the harrowing conditions that the expedition had to face.

Michael Novacek's *Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs* is an excellent introduction to paleontological fieldwork and expeditions AND to the science of paleontology. The chapters alternate between the trials and tribulations of each new field season and the basics of geology, paleontology, and evolutionary theory. There is the occasional minor error [which I cannot relocate and since I just read a copy of the hardback, I cannot say if those errors have been corrected in the paperback], but these do not distract from the overall excellence of the book. This book predates the confirmation of the discovery of the end of the Cretaceous impact crater in the Yucatan, so the discussion on the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous will seem a little out of date to the knowledgeable reader. I look forward to reading *Time Traveler*, Novacek's newest book. I highly recommend *Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs* to any fan of paleontology.

If you don't have the money for a fantastic adventure to the Gobi desert to search for fossil dinosaurs, do not despair. Turn up your heat, throw some sand in your face, and read Dr. Novacek's book. Though scientific at its heart, *Dinosaurs of the Flaming Cliffs* is funny, rich, and engaging. Whether you're a dinosaur enthusiast or an armchair traveler, you will find a delightful read and learn a few things to boot. (And not just that the Gobi is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there.

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