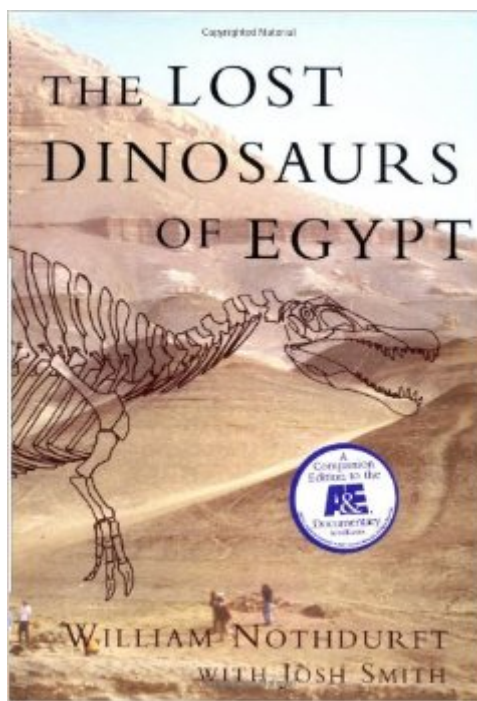


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The Lost Dinosaurs Of Egypt



Synopsis

The date is January 11, 1911. A young German paleontologist, accompanied only by a guide, a cook, four camels, and a couple of camel drivers, reaches the lip of the vast Bahariya Depression after a long trek across the bleak plateau of the western desert of Egypt. The scientist, Ernst Freiherr Stromer von Reichenbach, hopes to find fossil evidence of early mammals. In this, he will be disappointed, for the rocks here will prove to be much older than he thinks. They are nearly a hundred million years old. Stromer is about to learn that he has walked into the age of the dinosaurs. At the bottom of the Bahariya Depression, Stromer will find the remains of four immense and entirely new dinosaurs, along with dozens of other unique specimens. But there will be reversals—shipments delayed for years by war, fossils shattered in transit, stunning personal and professional setbacks. Then, in a single cataclysmic night, all of his work will be destroyed and Ernst Stromer will slip into history and be forgotten. The date is January 11, 2000—eighty-nine years to the day after Stromer descended into Bahariya. Another young paleontologist, American graduate student Josh Smith, has brought a team of fellow scientists to Egypt to find Stromer's dinosaur graveyard and resurrect the German pioneer's legacy. After weeks of digging, often under appalling conditions, they fail utterly at rediscovering any of Stromer's dinosaur species. Then, just when they are about to declare defeat, Smith's team discovers a dinosaur of such staggering immensity that it will stun the world of paleontology and make headlines around the globe. Masterfully weaving together history, science, and human drama, *The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt* is the gripping account of not one but two of the twentieth century's great expeditions of discovery.

Book Information

Hardcover: 242 pages

Publisher: Random House; 1 edition (September 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375507957

ISBN-13: 978-0375507953

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.9 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,814,278 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Paleontology > Paleozoology](#) #370 in [Books > Science & Math >](#)

Customer Reviews

"The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt" is the fascinating account of the rediscovery of the work of a German paleontologist in Egypt. Just prior to First World War, Ernst Stromer, a Bavarian aristocrat, made a remarkable discovery in a particularly inhospitable region of Egypt: the fossil remains of three different huge carnivorous dinosaurs. Painstakingly reassembled in Munich, they were destroyed in an Allied bombing raid in 1944. In 2000, a group of young American scientists returned to the area where Stromer had worked, unvisited by paleontologists in the intervening nine decades, and there discovered bones of what is believed to be the second-largest dinosaur ever, an 80 ton plant-eating behemoth. The book juxtaposes these two stories in an entertaining and informative way. Ernst Freiherr Stromer von Reichenbach of Nuremberg arrived in Egypt and headed off to his dig with four boxes of water, a handful of camels, a Bohemian assistant who was not feeling very well but knew about collecting bones, an Egyptian in charge of the camels and their drivers and a cook. Stromer was looking for evidence of early mammals but instead stumbled onto an unknown and important dinosaur graveyard. He was correct and precise and meticulous and quite brilliant. With his little band he made amazing discoveries but the coming war overshadowed everything. The Bohemian assistant died and the cases of fossils, damaged by inept handling, did not reach the now-impooverished Stromer until 1922. For the next twelve years he wrote up wonderful monographs on his Egyptian dinosaurs. One of them, Spinosaurus, looked like a giant T-Rex with a sail on its back. But only the monographs survived the bombing raid. Stromer was a respected man of science but did not suffer fools.

If you pick up a copy of The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt (Random House), you will find, quite appropriately, that it bears a photograph of a desert setting on which a skeletal outline of a dinosaur is superimposed. But if you open it up and start reading, there seems as if there is something wrong: "Wing Commander G. Leonard Cheshire arrived at the Royal Air Force's aerodrome at Woodhall Spa on the morning of April 24, 1944 ..." It is a surprising start to an amazing story, written by William Nothdurft, with a co-author credit to Josh Smith, the leader of the most recent expedition to find the Egyptian dinosaurs. That expedition repeated the hunt in the area in 1911 by Ernst Stromer, a German physician who had caught the paleontology bug. Throughout the book, Stromer's story is interwoven with Smith's, in a narrative that is more exciting than that about fossil

hunting has any right to be. Stromer's makeshift expedition was heroic. He traveled to the Bahariya Oasis in the Saharan desert, specifically looking for fossils of ancient mammals, and was unprepared to send back the monstrous bone specimens he found. He got back to Munich, but it was only after years of delay (the Great War didn't help) that he got all his specimens. Eventually, as a result of British bombing raids in 1944, and because no one would heed his warnings that his fossils needed special protection, the specimens were lost when their museum was bombed. No paleontologists returned to the uninviting Bahariya for decades, until Josh Smith, a graduate student, got the idea of going. The book has an excellent account of the trip, the politicking for funds, the dangers of the field, and the excitement of making a scientific difference.

The search for dinosaur fossils amid sandstorms and desert heat is anything but dry in this lively story of the excavation in January, 2000, of a site in the western Egyptian desert, partially excavated by Ernst Stromer in 1911, but untouched since then. Nothdurft, a professional writer, working in concert with Josh Smith, the young paleontologist who was the team leader of the January, 2000, dig, tells the stories of both the 1911 and the 2000 excavations, along with the fossil discoveries made by each group. Stromer, a German aristocrat and meticulous paleontologist, found the fossils of four unique, 95-million-year-old dinosaurs in Bahariya in 1911, spent twenty years analyzing them, and then supervised the fossils' installation at the Bavarian State College of Paleontology and Historical Geology in Munich. In April, 1944, everything was lost in the allied bombing of Munich. The story of Stromer's efforts, now almost forgotten, alternates with that of Smith and his group of young Ph.D's from the University of Pennsylvania, who hope to find additional fossils in the same area in January, 2000. Financed by a Los Angeles film company making a documentary, the crew ultimately unearths a 80 - 100 ton new dinosaur species, discovering in the process that at least two other equally gigantic dinosaur species shared space with this titan. How this desert area could support three such huge species becomes the question for the geologists on the trip, a mystery which Nothdurft imbues with immediacy and great excitement as they examine the confusing strata for clues. Nothdurft excels in characterizing the paleontologists and geologists so that the reader can easily imagine participating in the dig along with them.

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