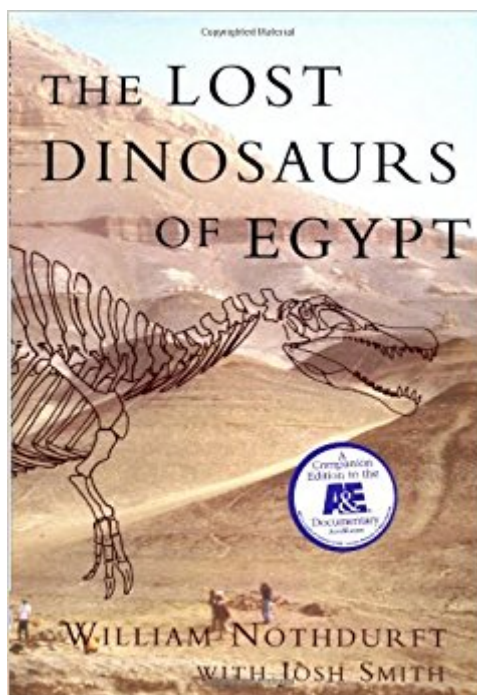


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# The Lost Dinosaurs Of Egypt



## 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.

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## Customer Reviews

Between 1910 and 1914, Ernst Stromer, a little-known German paleontologist and explorer, unearthed a wealth of dinosaur fossils in Egypt's Bahariya Oasis. Thirty years later, Stromer's discoveries were destroyed in a WWII Allied bombing raid, and the oasis lay neglected for decades until Josh Smith, a Penn State doctoral candidate in paleontology, decided to retrace Stromer's footsteps in 1999. Based on Stromer's detailed but rather dry journal entries and vivid, often humorous, testimonies from Smith and his research team, this lucid account highlights Stromer's discoveries (which include, among others, the bones of three predatory dinosaurs) and chronicles recent findings by Smith and his colleagues that set the science world buzzing. When Smith's entourage arrived in Bahariya after months of negotiating with MPH Entertainment, their primary financial supporter, and Egyptian officials, they were amazed to find fossils literally "floating" on the dry, sand-packed surface. Weeks later, the team uncovered its landmark find a 67-inch humerus, or upper arm bone, belonging to a new genus of dinosaur, which measured an impressive 80 to 100 feet in length and weighed between 65 and 70 tons. This discovery was compounded by the newsworthy conclusion made by field geologist Ken Lacovara that millions of years ago Egypt's western desert looked much like Florida's Everglades do now. Nothdurft, coauthor of the *Ghosts of Everest*, gracefully interweaves the team's exploits with Stromer's own Bahariya experiences and provides just enough scientific background to keep lay readers afloat. An engaging mix of history and desert drama, this Indiana Jones-type adventure is first-rate popular science. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This is a great story: grad student Smith joins a team of scientists, led by renowned paleontologist Peter Dodson, that tracks Ernst Stromer's momentous 1911 expedition to the Bahariya Oasis. There they find a new dinosaur called *Paralititan stromeri*. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

and the finding was recounted in such a manner so as to be attention holding for a non-scientist. I enjoyed the humor interspersed with the factual and scientific matter. Including personal anecdotes and details about the scientists and the non-scientists they encountered transformed what could have been a very dry (no pun intended) Egyptian expedition into a delightful story and the resurrection of a long forgotten paleontologist.

Quite a good story of adventure and retracing the steps of a very interesting man. Can't say I enjoyed the parts about the modern palaeontologists so much to be honest. They get talked up a bit, and weren't of much interest to me personally. I loved the story of Ernst Stromer. I just wish there was a bit more information on the dinosaurs they found in Egypt, and less on the events of the modern team's expedition. That being said, I would have loved to be among them travelling to some remote oasis in Egypt and searching for dinosaur bones. Even more amazing was how Stromer's team made it all the way out there without the modern comforts. Recommended if you have interests in history and palaeontology, but not enough detail on the palaeontology side, for my liking anyway.

Well written, and educational. If you are into paleontology, then you will want to read this book.

Book received in a timely manner and as described. The book itself was a non-fiction, scientific book written in a manner that was understandable and easy to read for us "regular", non-scientific people. Very interesting!

I found little in this ....maybe my expectations were somewhat higher when I was about to purchase this read than when I finished

"Any fossil is a miracle" (p157). One of the best things about a book club is in reading things that you never would pick up otherwise. Notwithstanding that it didn't exactly have the action of "If you loved Indiana Jones, you'll love this tale of two dinosaur hunters..." as exclaimed on the back cover, *The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt* is a delightful and enjoyable book with as much credit going to William Nothdurft's writing style as to the story itself. Nothdurft gives us intertwining stories. Josh Smith and fellow graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania head to the Egyptian desert in 1999 to look for fresh evidence of Spinosaurus, a finned dinosaur first uncovered in the Bahariya Oasis by German scientist Ernst Stromer in 1916. Stromer's collection of Spinosaurus bones, displayed in a Munich museum, was demolished in a 1944 Allied bombing raid. In alternating chapters the reader follows both Ernst Stromer and Josh Smith to a remote hot location with days-long brutal sandstorms (p118) and a good deal of governmental red tape. Life for these field paleontologists consist of long hot days examining "float" and chipping rock. That's the price for the highlights: discovering one of Stromer's sites (p126) and two Aha moments in the discovery of the large humerus (p166). Jen Smith describes the emotional aspect of the dig. "It's hard to watch these

dinosaur guys ... they find something and it's the greatest thing ever. Then, by the end of the day, it stinks, it's worthless. They go up and down, up and down like they're on a roller coaster. I'm glad I'm a geologist. From one day to the next, the rocks are still just the rocks, telling you stories."

p137"There is nothing inherently interesting about a rock," Nothdurft says on page 151. He then proceeds to give a grand description of rocks, sedimentary layers, tectonic plates, methods of looking at the earth and tools of geologists. Cone-shaped Gebel el Dist has as much character as any human in the story. How is a fluvial geologist like Sherlock Holmes? "When you have eliminated what cannot be, whatever is left, no matter how improbable, is what must be." (p161). Ninety-one million years ago the deserts of western Egypt looked like the Florida Everglades! The many delightful side stories in the book include the red flags (p120), Stromer's Nazi era political struggles (p114), and the basic problem of dinosaur coexistence with humans (p38). Translating ancient clues into current visions is a whole other matter. These sauropods had long necks to reach laterally rather than vertically so they would not have to move their 70 ton bodies while eating 2000 pounds of angiosperms per day. The riddle of Stromer's three giant carnivorous dinosaurs is resolved just pages from the end (p193). Many of us readers did not know that we were solving a riddle, but it all hangs together in a very satisfying way.

"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-impoorished 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. It appears that his opposition to the Nazi regime came with a heavy price as two of his three sons died in the war, and the third son was a Russian POW for six years. He himself was twice threatened with deportation to a concentration camp for urging the removal of the natural history collection in Munich to a safer location. After his death in 1952, he and the wonderful dinosaurs seem to have been forgotten. The time, but not the scene, switches and we enjoy reading about the antics of a group of enthusiastic young Americans, paleontologists and geologists, who decided to mount an expedition to the same Bahariya Depression where Stromer went. But this is an expedition in a different century, and the group travelled with Land Rovers and GPS equipment and a film crew and actually stayed in a rustic hotel near the dig rather than in a ready-to-blow-away tent that served for Stromer. But besides their somewhat better equipment-it still seems to come down to picks and shovels and hard physical labour-the group brought an interdisciplinary approach and the advantages of nine decades of additional science and understanding. Part of the interest in the newer story is the importance that the group places in trying to understand what kind of environment the dinosaurs of the time faced. The book conveys the excitement of an expedition very well. First there is the hassle of fund-raising and then the irritation of all the paperwork and the physical discomforts and the fruitless searching. But then there are breakthroughs, sometimes lucky, and then there is the ultimate detective work of adding up all the little shards and scraps and a 5 foot long humerus and some rock profiles and coming up with an answer to what this all means. One of the great riddles posed by Stromer's finds was how three large types of carnivores could co-exist. This discovery of the huge herbivore answered this question nicely. But the book also makes the important point that very little is really known about dinosaurs since the fossil record is so incomplete. I was astonished to learn that fewer than 500 species of dinosaur have been definitively identified, amazingly few for the millions of years they existed on earth. As a comparison, there are about 330 known species of in the parrot family alone! The authors do not mention that fact that the number of field paleontologists is minute and that the startling discoveries of the last decades have been the result of dedicated work by only a handful of people around the world. "The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt" tells an exciting story while recognizing the accomplishments of the past and would be a fine addition to the library of any student considering a career in this field. To digress, this is not a book for specialists but that is not to condemn it in any way. "Popular science" is a genre that is often sniffed at but there is a huge demand to be filled. At a time when 18 percent of Americans 18-24 years of age cannot even identify where the United States is on a map,

anything that arouses intellectual curiosity should be welcomed. That this book is simply-written and provides a summary of the history of paleontology is a good thing; that it was filmed and turned into a television documentary even better. It is to the credit of the team of Americans that they have recognized the achievements of their predecessor in the desert in a particularly apt way. The prepared bones of the giant herbivore will return to Egypt, where they will be displayed with the creature's newly-assigned name: Paralititan stromeri.

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