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Prehistoric sea creatures to inhabit The Mariners' Museum

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – The underwater world of the late Cretaceous period of more than 65 million years ago will be revisited for several months at The Mariners' Museum.

Savage Ancient Seas: Dinosaurs of the Deep, opening at The Mariners' Museum on May 24, 2014, will feature "sea monsters" on a scale one would expect only Hollywood could conjure. The exhibition includes "the T-Rex of the ocean," the 45-foot-long Tylosaurus, a serpentine reptile with two rows of sharp teeth; the 50-foot-long, 50-ton Megalodon and the fanged, vicious, 12-foot-long Xiphactinus, which swallowed its prey whole, headfirst.

Many are familiar with the story of the Tyrannosaurus, Brontosaurus and the like. *Savage Ancient Seas* explores their undersea counterparts, which populated the oceans at the same time dinosaurs roamed the earth. Most of the species in the exhibition disappeared from the earth at the end of the Cretaceous period, along with the dinosaurs.

"These animals, they're just as impressive as dinosaurs," said Mike Triebold, the paleontologist who created *Savage Ancient Seas*. "But people are not familiar with them... they didn't have as good a press agent."

Triebold began collecting fossils 30 years ago, mounting specimens for museums around the world. "I always make copies of the best," he said.

In time, Triebold said: "There was an opportunity to take the greatest collection of the greatest marine mammals on the road together."

All told, the traveling exhibition from Triebold Paleontology includes more than 20 large-scale skeletons and replicas of ancient marine reptiles. In addition to the likes of the Tylosaurus and Megalodon, the exhibition includes the Coelacanth, a species of fish long thought to be extinct, but rediscovered in the 1930s and an early form of the penguin called the Paleospheniscus.

Triebold said the exhibition – which is ever-changing – will mark several firsts when it comes to The Mariners'. He said it will feature the two largest sea turtles ever on display together, the Toxochelys and the Archelon – "Each one of these is the size of a luxury car" – as well as the first public showing of Enchodus, a 5-foot fish with two giant teeth in its upper jaw.

The gallery space will include massive skeletons suspended from the ceiling. There are touch-screen displays and fossil digs, and guests can pose for photos inside the jaws of a Megalodon.

“This exhibition is something a little different for The Mariners’ Museum,” said Priscilla Hauger, the Museum’s Director of Exhibitions. “These pre-historic marine animals are a part of the history of the sea and live today, as these huge skeletons, in our collective fascination with sea monsters and dinosaurs. “

The Mariners’ Museum run will feature extensive programming, including “Savage Saturdays,” a summer-months paleontology search for evidence of ancient sea creatures in The Mariners’ Museum Park. Programming also includes 3-D movies in the new Explorers Theater, Shark Week festivities, summer “Paleocamps,” a spelling bee and an overnight sea monster “Loch In - Dozin’ with the Dinos.”

The Members’ Preview Party for *Savage Ancient Seas* is May 23 from 6 to 9 p.m. The public opening is May 24, and the exhibition runs until Jan. 4, 2015. For more information, visit MarinersMuseum.org/Dinosaurs or call (757) 591-7715.

The Mariners’ Museum, an educational, non-profit institution accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is home to the USS *Monitor* Center, and is surrounded by the 550-acre Mariners’ Museum Park, the largest privately maintained park open to the public in North America. The Mariners’ Museum Library, housed at Christopher Newport University, is the largest maritime library in the Western Hemisphere. For more information, visit www.MarinersMuseum.org.