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Dinosaurs in the Attic is a chronicle of the expeditions, discoveries, and scientists behind the greatest natural
history collection ever assembled. Written by former *Natural History* columnist Douglas Preston, who
worked at the American Museum of Natural History for seven years, this is a celebration of the best-known
and best-loved museum in the United States.

Dinosaurs in the Attic: An Excursion into the American Museum of Natural History Details

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Natural History Douglas Preston**

From Reader Review Dinosaurs in the Attic: An Excursion into the American Museum of Natural History for online ebook

Sheila says

This book is a fun punch bowl of facts about one of my favorite museums. But, there is one turd swimming around in it: a casual attitude about the racism built into institutions of this type. Example: in the introduction, the author boasts that the AMNH includes in its collection "...100 complete elephants, and the largest skeletal collection of Manhattan aborigines, among others." Try substituting the word "Jews" for "Manhattan Aborigines" and you can imagine the uproar that would understandably follow such insensitivity. Keep in mind that whites would sometimes cut the heads off Native warriors fallen on the battlefield and sell their heads to museums.

While Preston writes extensively about how a white scientist went unpunished for the murder of his Indigenous guide in the Arctic, he sweeps the dirty story of the Museum's treatment of a little Inuk boy under the rug. In 1897 Robert E. Peary deposited six Indigenous people from northern Greenland at the Museum - living specimens for "scientific" study AND public display. Minik's father was among the four who died within the first year, and the Museum lied to the 7 year old Minik about what they were doing with his father's remains. See the book "Give Me My Father's Body" <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1...>

The statue in front of the Museum - Teddy Roosevelt (who helped decimate the elephant population of Africa) depicts the President astride a horse, with a Native American and an African standing (sans horses) next to him. This says it all: the white man uber alles. Native activists and their allies have demanded its removal. Getting rid of this statue would be an act of education and redemption. As well, the Museum should 'fess up to its crimes, return the sacred remains of the Indigenous peoples it has callously harvested along with insects, monkeys, and rocks, and apologize profusely and publicly for its role in the suppression of Native peoples and people of color around the globe. It's a great place for learning, the Museum, and it needs to learn a few lessons itself. Preston's book is not a help in this regard.

Dustin says

Fun read for a fascinating museum. Preston gives the detail and history to some of AMNH's most prominent items that you would otherwise not get. But also the behind-the-scenes look at the work being done at the museum on a daily basis.

it'chy says

what joy it would be to visit the actual museum

Frank says

A really interesting and enjoyable look at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. This was written by Douglas Preston who worked at the museum for seven years and is also the author along with

Lincoln Child of one of my favorite series of thriller novels, the Pendergast stories. I can see now where Preston obtained a lot of his background information for the series and for some of his other novels such as *Tyrannosaur Canyon* and *The Ice Limit*. Of course, many of the Pendergast stories took place in the museum including *Relic*, *Reliquary*, *Dance of Death*, and *Book of the Dead*. The museum is also the setting for the popular movie *Night at the Museum* starring Ben Stiller and Robin Williams.

The book chronicles how the museum came to be and how its many collections were obtained. In its early years, the museum sponsored expeditions to obtain dinosaur fossils, acquire specimens from all over the world including Africa, South America, and Asia, and to explore uncharted areas of the earth like the Arctic. Much insightful and interesting information about the explorers and museum curators is included. One of the most interesting was Roy Chapman Andrews who was the real person who Indiana Jones was modeled after. He led an expedition for the museum to Outer Mongolia in search of dinosaur fossils and the missing link which was quite successful. Along the way he had to fight off bandits...he dressed with a gun at his hip and a rifle at the ready.

The book goes on to describe the museum's many collections including fossils, mammals, insects, birds, reptiles, anthropological exhibits, meteorites, and gems. Another interesting story related tells of the great jewel robbery of 1964 where many of the museum's priceless jewels were stolen (very reminiscent of *Dance of Death* by Preston & Child). Overall, I really enjoyed this and would recommend it to anyone interested in natural history or any fan of the Preston/Child novels.

Heather says

Dinosaurs in the Attic is split into two parts. The first part gives an overview of the history of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The second part is a collection of random stories about some of the museum's artifacts. The writing style is excellent. I found it hard to put the book down which is quite unusual for me reading a nonfiction book. It made me want to go visit the museum one day (which I just may be able to arrange very soon during a long layover in NYC on my way to Ireland). I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the behind-the-scenes of museums.

Patty says

Douglas Preston was on the staff of the Amer. Museum of Natural History and authored a monthly column on the Museum in "Natural History" magazine. This was his first book. Lincoln Child was the editor. This is how the team of Preston/Child became partners in mystery writing. Child became so interested in the American Museum of Natural History and all its many stories and secrets after reading Preston's book that he knew they had a winner if they could join forces and use the Museum in their mystery stories. Just the architecture of the building itself lends itself to the noir.

I was captivated by the many secrets and facts that Preston presents to the reader to explain how the American Museum of Natural History was started, how the collections were amassed and the importance of the Natural History Museum. He evokes a visit to the Museum to view the articles he tells the fascinating stories about.

This was a well written review of some of the authors favorite aquisition stories or what he feels are the most interesting items in the different halls of the museum. He researched, investigated and interviewed to collect his information. Then he presented it in a very enjoyable read.

Drew says

I have a whole new appreciation for the museum now. First of all, they is so much more there than I ever realized. There are 2 million butterflies, the skeletons of 100 elephants, 60,000 fish in jars of alcohol, a grasshopper found on the observation deck of the Empire State building, 4,000 Asian shadow puppets, 8 million anthropological artifacts, and the list goes on and on. A tiny fraction of all that's housed in the museum is out on display, which is shocking considering how much is on display.

Not only is there an overwhelming amount of items at the museum, but I had no idea just how much work and devotion went into the collections. The dirt on the ground of any one of the many stuffed animal displays is the *actual* dirt from where than animal was collected. The entire scene is an exact replication, down to the way the tree branch is bent and the way the smoke from the volcano is billowing in the background.

I had also always assumed that the museum just gather up collections from other people. I didn't realize just how much of the collection was gathered by the museum itself. The first half of the book is filled with tales of adventure from museum sponsored expeditions.

In short, this is a fun read with lots of random tidbits. If you've been too, or plan to visit the American Natural History Museum, it's well worth a read.

John Lester says

Surprisingly a interesting read. This not what I had first suspected when I ordered this eBook. It has tons of facts and figures but they are backed-up with the stories of how they came about. Amazing stories how much people will risk to procure items for collections.

Megan says

Definitely an interesting read, although I was a bit underwhelmed at how much of the controversy surrounding the anthropology collection was brushed aside. There would have been space to delve a bit more into the ethical questions raised by museum collecting practices (particularly in the early days), so parts come across as being a bit tone-deaf. Whether or not this was the author's decision or an editorial choice is unclear, as he certainly addresses these issues in his fiction set in the museum. Otherwise, definitely a fun book for museum lovers.

Vanessa says

Great read, if a little outdated. Some of the halls he mentions (like the Hall of North American Birds) sadly, don't exist any more at the Museum. As a former volunteer, it was great to read about some of my favorite

artifacts and how they got into their respective exhibits.

Elizabeth K. says

Now this was satisfying from nearly beginning to end. It's a look at New York City's natural history museum, split into two parts. The first is a more straightforward history of the institution, both how it came about as well as how the philosophy of managing an enormous natural history collection developed over the years. The second half is a look at some of the specific pieces in the collection, selected to illustrate various aspects of the mission of the museum. And, let me stress, it had A LOT of Ripley's Believe It Or Not type trivia facts. Isn't that what really sparks the interest of a six year old kid in a museum in the first place? And did you know there are broken plaster casts of dinosaurs buried in Central Park? Coincidentally, this book was written in the mid 80s, which was about the time I first became very familiar with the AMNH, and shortly before the explosion of brightly colored and loud interactive displays at museums. I know I'm a curmudgeon, but I cannot express how much I hate that trend in museums. Oftentimes, the display is broken to begin with, and even if it's not, I'm put off by how manky all the buttons and screens are after having been touched by countless grabby people, many of whom would seem to have recently eaten greasy food. In addition to being generally informative, I loved this book because it created such a vivid picture of the natural history museums I remember. Museums where you were supposed to be quiet and contemplative and smell like floor polish. If you need me, I'll be yelling at kids to get off my lawn.

Grade: A+

Recommended: To armchair naturalists, fans of natural history museums, and people who enjoy reminiscing about New York City cultural touchstones.

2008/11

Gregory D. says

A fascinating, surprisingly fast-paced read from the author of *The Lost City of the Monkey God*. Much like the early history of archaeology, early paleontology and natural history was one part science, one part the work of gentlemen adventurers and one part hucksterism...all which played a part in creating one of the greatest natural history collections in the world. I was surprised at how interesting this book really was!

Don LeClair says

I have loved Douglas Preston for all of his fiction writing over the years. This was a fascinating book on the American Museum of Natural History in New York. I wish I had read this before his novel *Relic*, as it provides a great perspective on the size and scope of the museum, that hosted parts of several fiction books later in his life. Having sections to talk about some of the discoverers and collectors before he talks about the major departments really helps to bring the whole place to life.

I have not been to the museum for a few years, but now I really want to get back!

Kate says

A fun romp through the American Museum of Natural History which provides the reader with a history of the museum itself, some of its more interesting acquisitions and some of the colorful people who have been associated with the AMNH since its inception.

Diane says

As a kid I read any story I could get my hands on about archeological expeditions, survival under harsh conditions and intrepid explorers. I devoured drama in the Gobi desert; pack ice and bitter cold above the Arctic Circle and in Antarctica and more. *Dinosaurs in the Attic* is the adult version of those tales. The 1st half of the book details some of the expeditions underwritten and staffed by the U.S. Museum of Natural History; the 2nd part dives into some of the lesser known collections. Who knew a single, obscure species of bug could be so important? Best of all, *Dinosaurs in the Attic* shows these expeditions, these collections are valuable not just for the artifacts or numbers of species brought back to the Museum, but how they allow research into natural history and vanished cultures to continue and expand as new scientific analysis tools develop. Groundbreaking research was done on animal or insect species when the collections were first assembled; now new research can be done using DNA analysis, providing amazing new insights.
