



Barnum Brown: The Man Who Discovered Tyrannosaurus Rex

Lowell Dingus

Mark A. Norell

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The biography genre is an art form in itself. The author must balance hefty research with the storyline. It's easy for the book to founder. Too heavy on the facts and footnotes? The reader will lose interest. Too chatty? The book loses credibility. But occasionally, a biography strikes the perfect note between the two extremes. *Barnum Brown* brings the past to life in a way that educates the reader about a gripping time in American history, and the man who found himself at the forefront of the action.

Born a farmer's son in 1873, Barnum Brown became a hero for his work in the emerging field of paleontology. His best-known find was the complete fossilized skeleton of *Tyrannosaurus Rex* in the Montana Badlands—the crowning achievement of his lifelong dedication to the study of prehistoric life. At the peak of his career, “Mr. Bones” was one of the most famous scientists in the world. “People would flock to the train station when he arrived in the field to collect dinosaur fossils...In a sense, he became every bit as legendary as the dinosaurs he discovered.”

Drawing from field correspondence, letters, and Brown's unpublished notes, Lowell Dingus and Mark Norell offer a piercing look at the dinosaur-hunting craze of the early 1900s. They have rich soil to work, and it yields excellent fruit. Quotes from the original documents are seamlessly included in the text, giving a human voice to the research. Brown's letters (and those of his wife, Lilian) are often hilarious and give a lively portrait of their adventures. Lilian, describing a trip to Calcutta, said “everyone is binged and happy except B and I who remain horribly sober, and so everything gets on our nerves.” Later, she would remark on the “corking fine Britishers...[who] make life wonderful for a good-looking girl.”

Endnotes stud the text, but the index is geared towards academic interests. The academic aspect of the book may seem superfluous to the average reader but is a valuable resource for additional study. In-text citations are easy to follow, and many come from Brown's autobiography. Though the language tends to be high-flown, it is consistent with Brown's writing style—not an obstacle to a delightful, fast-paced story. In addition, forty-four black and white photographs and several maps provide visual interest.

The authors' judicious use of research mixed with anecdotes makes the Brown story accessible, while also providing jumping-off points for people interested in doing a little digging of their own. The exhaustive research pays off big for the reader, placing *Barnum Brown* in the upper ranks of well-written biographies.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (July / August 2010)

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