

**DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT: QUARRY EXHIBIT HALL, SPLIT MOUNTAIN VIEWPOINT, AND SWELTER SHELTER
PETROGLYPHS AND PICTOGRAPHS**

On our drive back through Utah from Rocky Mountain National Park, we had a couple of hours to stop at the Dinosaur National Monument after driving out of RMNP through the Trail Ridge Road. Best known for the huge wall of dinosaur fossils, protected by a large and enclosed building, which visitors can see by taking a shuttle bus from the main visitors center, this national monument also has a surprising collection of amazing rock formations. Unfortunately, we did not have time to see much of the monument, but there are many paved, dirt, and 4WD access roads to overlooks of the Green and Yampa Rivers, petroglyphs and pictographs, slot canyons, and historical cabins. After visiting the Quarry Exhibit Hall, we briefly checked out the Fossil Discovery Trail, then continued on to an overlook of Split Mountain and the Green River. We had considered continuing along this road to see more overlooks on the way to the Josie Morris Cabin, but we didn't have enough time, and therefore only were able to stop at the Swelter Shelter petroglyphs and pictographs.

The views from Trail Ridge Road on our drive out of Rocky Mountain National Park were a little different on such a clear day; this is Sundance Mountain pictured below:



There was still quite a bit of snow on the peaks, making for good photography again:



Looking over towards the Gorge Lakes (in the valley to the left, with Arrowhead Lake visibly iced over and Highest Lake located just below the two smaller peaks that are between the two largest peaks seen in the photo) and the small chain of lakes just to the right of them:



Another view from further along the road, looking over at this valley to the right of the Gorge Lakes; there doesn't appear to be any maintained trails or use trails to these lakes, so hikers must tramp cross-country to see them:



Panorama from my favorite of the Trail Ridge Road Viewpoints, the Gore Range viewpoint:



Looking into the valley formed by the Cache la Poudre River, with Specimen Mountain just right of center in the photo (tallest peak):



There were a lot of peaks that we saw in the Never Summer Mountains from the road on the drive down which looked interesting to hike:



We knew when we were approaching the Utah/Colorado border, as the rock formations began to look different:



In the part of the Blue Mountains area located between the two Dinosaur National Monument visitors centers, there looked to be some interesting canyons; they had the appearance of slots at the entrance, though from looking at topographical maps they probably just became steep and didn't have any narrows:



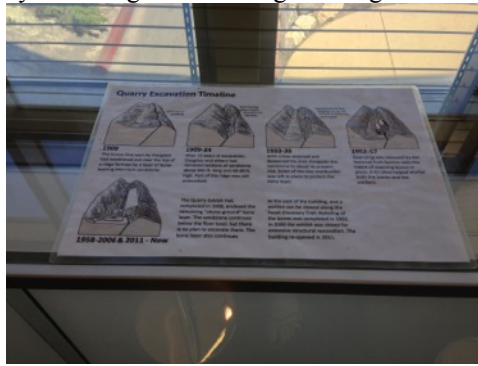
Another view of two of the canyon entrances which looked most likely to have narrows:



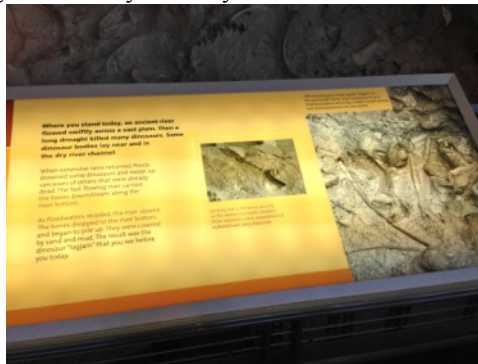
Our first view of Split Mountain, in Dinosaur National Monument, from the road in to the Quarry Visitors Center :



After arriving at the visitors center, we took the shuttle up to the Quarry Exhibit Hall; it seems to me to be a really great idea to help protect the fossils from weathering and theft by enclosing them in a big building:



The informative signs explain the most likely reason why so many dinosaur fossils ended up in this one place:



It's incredible to stand here and see just how many fossils have been uncovered here:



There are about 500 dinosaurs worth of fossils just in this one part of the park:



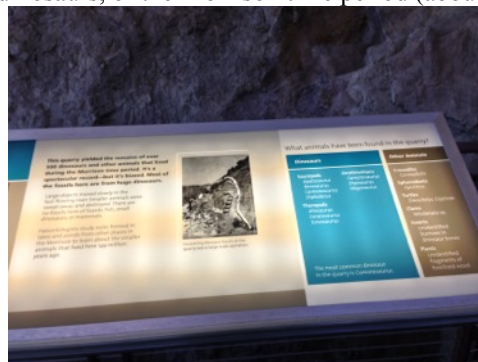
Many of the fossils are at the top of the wall:



Zooming in on a fossilized skull and neck :



Most of the fossils here are from the bigger dinosaurs, of the Morrison time period (about 149 million years ago):



Looking along this incredible wall of fossils, with the great view of the park through the glass windows:



It seemed to me that the best way to capture how gigantic this fossil wall is would be to take a panorama; the wall is perfectly straight (the apparent distortion is in the panorama):



This is the thigh bone of a Camarasaurus dinosaur (the most common dinosaur whose fossils are found at this quarry) from the Jurassic period:



This is the fossilized skeleton of a young Camarasaurus:



This skull, forearm, and foot bones are from an Allosaurus:



Skulls are the rarest fossils to find:



There were many fossils and casts on display at the Quarry Exhibit Hall:



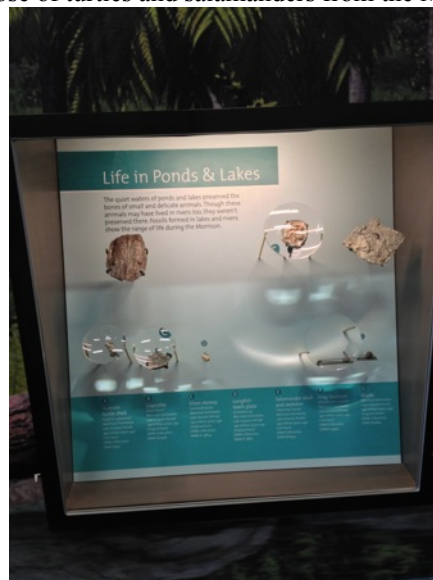
The Quarry Exhibit Hall was originally built in 1958, and it was rebuilt in 2011:



There are fossils located elsewhere in the monument, in the Morrison rock formation:



Other fossils have been found here, such as those of turtles and salamanders from the Morrison period:



Among other things, there is a fossilized piece of wood, showing the growth rings, which is on display at the museum:



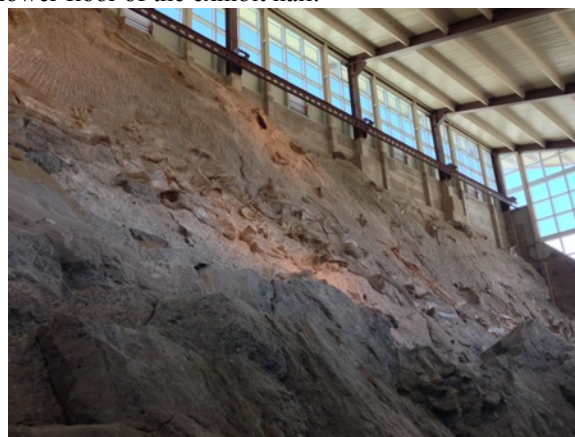
The fossils of smaller critters are no less interesting than those of the dinosaurs:



This is a fossilized salamander skeleton:



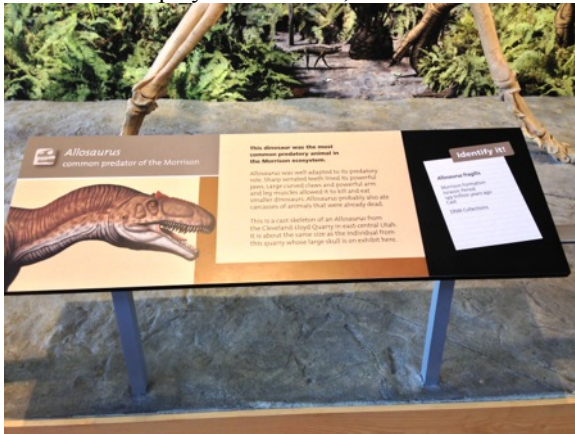
Looking up at the quarry wall from the lower floor of the exhibit hall:



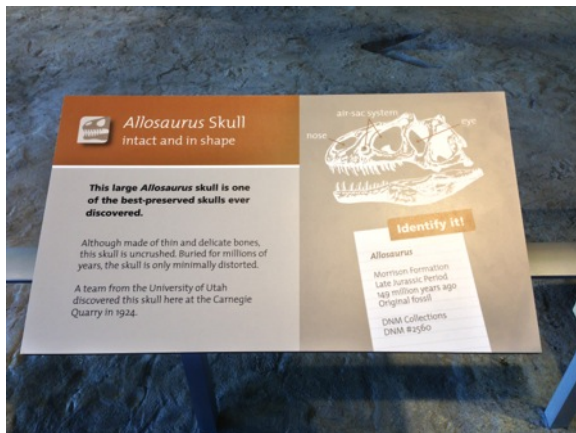
More small fossils on display:



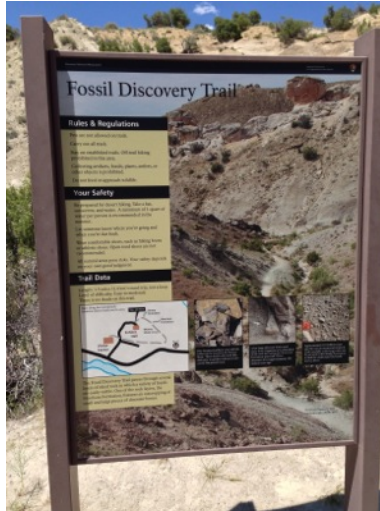
The biggest skeleton on display was this one, of the Allosaurus:



Here's a closer view of an Allosaurus skull:



After checking out the Quarry Exhibit Hall, we decided to briefly walk part of the Fossil Discovery Trail (we didn't have a lot of time to spend at the monument as we were driving from Estes Park to Park City):



The trail passes through some nice hills:



A short spur trail leads to an example of the Stump Formation:



Further down the trail is an example of the Morrison Formation, where the dinosaur fossils are found:



There are three main fossils here, though smaller ones can be spotted:



This is the best known of the fossils seen along the trail:



Here's another fossil:



This was one of the smaller fossils we spotted; note how it's a different color and texture than the rest of the rock and has a faint outline:



This is the last of the larger fossils which can be seen along the trail:



This was a particularly nice one of the smaller fossils:



Returning to the road into the quarry; there looks to be a lot of interesting hiking around here that is similar to other hiking in Utah, in addition to the fossils:



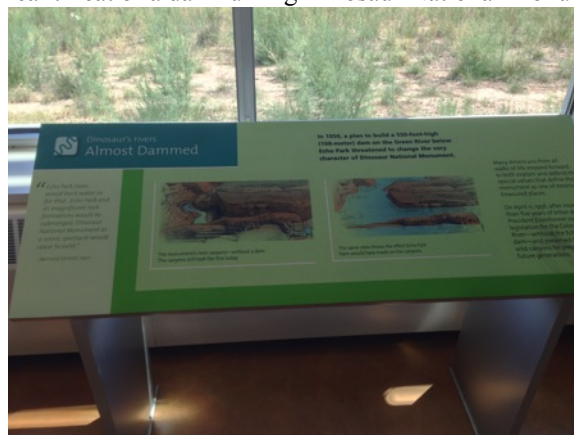
Panorama from an overlook at the parking lot for the Quarry Exhibit Hall, which shows part of the Fossil Discovery Trail below, Split Mountain at the center and in the back, and more of the monument off to the right:



From here, we headed down to the visitors center; there are also a lot of petroglyph sites in the area, though unfortunately we didn't have time to see more than one of the locations:



It's hard to believe that there was a very real threat of a dam ruining Dinosaur National Monument:



Panorama from the Split Mountain overlook:



Heading back towards the Swelter Shelter petroglyphs and pictographs turnout; it would be great to revisit this monument in a cooler time of year to do lots more hiking:



These petroglyphs and pictographs are about 1,000 years old:



We were visiting this area during midday, so my photos of the petroglyphs and pictographs didn't turn out as well as they could have:



Panorama of the Swelter Shelter rock art:



Looking over at the Swelter Shelter from the road:



Two last photos of this part of Dinosaur National Monument, which was our last big stop on our 2015 trip to Utah and Colorado:

