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PROJECT EXPLORATION’S DINOSAUR EXPEDITION 2005 BRINGS SERENO NIGER EXPEDITION TO THE WEB – AND PROVIDES A WINDOW ONTO SCIENCE IN ACTION.

Starting September 1, visitors to Project Exploration’s website will be able to follow paleontologist Dr. Paul Sereno’s 2005 expedition to the Sahara as his scientific team investigates one of the most important Neolithic-age fossil human sites ever discovered in the Sahara. The free-access online expedition, available at www.projectexploration.org will run from September through November.

While it normally takes months or years for the details of a scientific expedition to come to the public’s attention, Project Exploration is working to change that. “Dinosaur Expedition 2005 will let people witness cutting-edge science in the making, and learn about how discoveries happen,” said Gabrielle Lyon, executive director of Project Exploration and a veteran expedition member. “Science doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We want to help people understand the ongoing decisions we make in the field – and help them get to know Niger as well.”

Expedition Mission: Document and Preserve

The archaeological site that is the primary focus of Sereno’s 2005 Expedition to Niger includes hundreds of fossilized human skeletons, tools, jewelry, habitation materials, and remains of the animals these ancient humans lived with. The paleoarchaeology component will be headed by Dr. Elena Garcea, one of the world’s foremost Africanist archaeologists. The six-week expedition has a special mission: to document and make a plan to preserve the site, which is at risk of surface erosion and pillaging.

A team lead by Sereno discovered the site in 2000; the team returned in 2003 and made a preliminary site map. “During this second visit we realized how large and important the site is regarding the record of Neolithic pastoralists in the Sahara,” said Sereno. The team encountered tools and pottery as well as diverse faunal remains including domesticated animals – cows, asses, and goats – and wild animals including elephants, hippos, crocodiles, and catfish.

Sereno says, “This may constitute the greatest accumulation of Neolithic human remains and artifacts ever discovered in the central Sahara. Judging from our observations in 2000 and 2003, the site is at serious risk of erosion. A primary objective is to conduct preliminary work and initiate a multi-year project. We are extremely lucky to have someone as knowledgeable as Dr. Elena Garcea to collaborate with.”

Sereno has put together an experienced, international team of fieldworkers that includes paleoanthropologists, archaeologists, and geographers, as well as veteran dinosaur expedition team members – with one exception.

EDUCATION • EXHIBITS • DISCOVERY

Young Student Out to Make Discoveries – and History

Shureice Kornegay, a 21-year-old African American fourth-year anthropology student from Northern Illinois University will be traveling to the Sahara for the first time. While this trip will be her first adventure outside of the United States, it will not be her first expedition.

Kornegay was first introduced to scientific fieldwork as a freshman in high school through Project Exploration, a nonprofit science education organization dedicated to making science accessible to the public – especially minority youth and girls. Kornegay participated in Project Exploration programs throughout high school and traveled to Wyoming and Montana on dinosaur expeditions. Kornegay credits Project Exploration with introducing her to the possibilities of a career in science and to encouraging her to graduate high school and enroll in college. Now she is participating in a scientific endeavor that many well-heeled archaeologists would be jealous of.

Kornegay not only hopes to be one of the first female African American paleoanthropologists, she also hopes to impact the lives of others with her work. “I know that the kids who are having a hard time believing that they can be successful are the ones who need help to learn how to tap into their potential. I hope that my experience on this expedition – and the experiences I will be able to share online – will inspire others who are just like me.”

Online Expedition Brings Science to Life

In addition to the daily field work and research required by the 2005 Expedition to Niger, Kornegay will be Project Exploration’s primary field correspondent; she will collaborate with National Geographic photographer Mike Hettwer to create *Dinosaur Expedition 2005* online.

Field updates and photography by Kornegay, Sereno, and other team members will answer questions such as: “What does it take to go on a scientific expedition to the world’s largest desert?” “How does the team decide where to look?” Other website features include a message board that allows website visitors to send messages to the team and a photo gallery that enables visitors to create their own postcard. Extensive educational resources for students and teachers – including classroom activities and annotated bibliographies, support Project Exploration’s goal of making the science accessible – and the website useful – to a broad audience.

“We’re not only following a scientific team in the Sahara, we’re using science – solar panels for electricity, cutting edge satellite technology – to communicate with people around the world who may never have the chance to live this kind of experience themselves. It’s one of the reasons we’re so glad the site is free to access,” said Lyon.

Cofounded by Lyon and Sereno in 1999, Project Exploration is a nonprofit science education organization dedicated to making science accessible to the public – especially minority youth and girls.

The *Dinosaur Expedition 2005* is possible with generous support from communications sponsor, Telenor Satellite Services. “Telenor Satellite Services is proud of its long-standing partnership with Project Exploration,” said Tom Surface, director of media and public relations for Telenor Satellite Services. “Telenor’s high-speed data satellite communications provide Project Exploration researchers a real-time link to the outside world for their daily reports and internet connections to teachers, students and classrooms halfway around the globe.”

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