

# No words: Dinosaur-worshipping college student finds Triceratops skull

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Level **660L**



Image 1. Harrison Duran, a fifth-year biology student at the University of California, Merced, with the triceratops skull he discovered during a paleontology dig in North Dakota. Photo by: University of California, Merced

A dinosaur's mouth is opened wide in a photo. Its sharp teeth look ready to chomp down. A young Harrison Duran calmly drapes his arm across the creature's jaw.

Duran now goes to the University of California Merced. He posed for that photo years ago. However, he gets just as excited about dinosaurs as he did as a child. Especially since he just uncovered one — Alice the Triceratops.

He said it is hard to put into words how excited he was when he uncovered the skull. The skull is the large head bone. He has been interested in learning everything he could about dinosaurs since he was a kid. That is why this find "was a pretty big deal," he said.

Duran is learning about biology, the study of living things. He decided to go on a two-week paleontology dig in North Dakota. He went with Michael Kjelland, a professor from another school. They set off for a well-known dinosaur fossil site called Hell Creek Formation. Fossils are the remains of plants and animals that lived long ago. They are found mostly in rock.

Kjelland thought that he and Duran would find only plant fossils. He did hope that a bigger find would come their way.

"You never know what's going to happen," he said.

They started their dig on June 1. They chipped away at the rock and dirt in hopes of finding some treasure. By the fourth day, Duran got lucky.

They uncovered part of the skull of a 65-million-year-old triceratops. They named the dinosaur Alice after the owner of the land they were on.

### **Horn, Eye, Beak, Cheekbone**

They found the horn first, Duran said. Then they found an eye, the nose horn and the beak. Later, they found the cheekbone.

"That's when we knew we had something special," Duran said. "So every day, the more you dig down, the better it got."

Duran and Kjelland also found plant fossils. They were from the Cretaceous period. This time period was more than 60 million years ago. The plant fossils help them to know what the environment was like when Alice was alive, they said.

It took a week to dig the skull out of the dirt. Duran and Kjelland covered the skull with a special glue. This helped hold together any broken pieces. Then they covered the fossil with a cast-like material, and lifted it onto a box they made.

### **Skull Stored In Secret Place**

They wrapped Alice in a memory-foam mattress for protection. They moved the skull to a secret location until they could bring it to Kjelland's lab. Dinosaur fossils can be valuable, Kjelland said. People might try to steal them. That is why he will not say where the skull is kept now.

Duran plans to go back to North Dakota soon to help Kjelland get Alice ready to show. Kjelland said he hopes the skull will move to many locations. He would like lots of people to learn from it. He and Duran also want to make a cast of the skull. That means they can make copies of the fossil. That will allow Duran to share his discovery with his school.

Maybe one day, he'll even get to bring in the real thing.



## Quiz

1 Look at Image 2 and read the selection from the introduction [paragraphs 1-8].

*A dinosaur's mouth is opened wide in a photo. Its sharp teeth look ready to chomp down. A young Harrison Duran calmly drapes his arm across the creature's jaw.*

How does Image 2 support the information in the selection?

- (A) It shows what Duran and the dinosaur looked like.
- (B) It shows what Duran named the dinosaur.
- (C) It shows where Duran took the photo with the dinosaur.
- (D) It shows who took the photo of Duran and the dinosaur.

2 What does Image 1 show?

- (A) Duran at the University of California, Merced
- (B) Duran at Hell Creek Formation
- (C) Duran at Kjelland's lab
- (D) Duran at a paleontology museum

3 Which selection from the article helps the reader understand that Duran and Kjelland found more than just Alice the Triceratops?

- (A) They chipped away at the rock and dirt in hopes of finding some treasure. By the fourth day, Duran got lucky.
- (B) They uncovered part of the skull of a 65-million-year-old Triceratops. They named the dinosaur Alice after the owner of the land they were on.
- (C) They found the horn first, Duran said. Then they found an eye, the nose horn and the beak. Later, they found the cheekbone.
- (D) Duran and Kjelland also found plant fossils. They were from the Cretaceous period.

4 Read the section "Skull Stored In Secret Place." Which selection explains why the skull's location had to be a secret?

- (A) They wrapped Alice in a memory-foam mattress for protection. They moved the skull to a secret location until they could bring it to Kjelland's lab.
- (B) Dinosaur fossils can be valuable, Kjelland said. People might try to steal them.
- (C) Duran plans to go back to North Dakota soon to help Kjelland get Alice ready to show. Kjelland said he hopes the skull will move to many locations.
- (D) He would like lots of people to learn from it. He and Duran also want to make a cast of the skull.