

Dream come true: College kid goes on dig, finds Triceratops skull

By The Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.16.19

Word Count **431**

Level **500L**



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

In a photo, a dinosaur's mouth is opened wide. A young Harrison Duran lays his arm across the mouth. He is smiling.

Duran posed for that photo years ago. Now he goes to school at the University of California Merced. He gets just as excited about dinosaurs as he did as a child. He just found one. He calls it Alice the Triceratops.

Duran is studying biology. It is the study of living things. He went on a two-week trip to North Dakota. He traveled with Michael Kjelland, a professor from another school. They wanted to dig up fossils. Fossils are the remains of plants and animals that lived long ago. They are found mostly in rock.

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

They started their dig on June 1. They chipped away at the rock and dirt. By the fourth day, Duran got lucky.

65-Million-Year Old Skull

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

Duran said it is hard to explain how excited he was. He has been interested in learning about dinosaurs since he was little. This find "was a pretty big deal," he said.

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

The More They Dug, The Better It Got

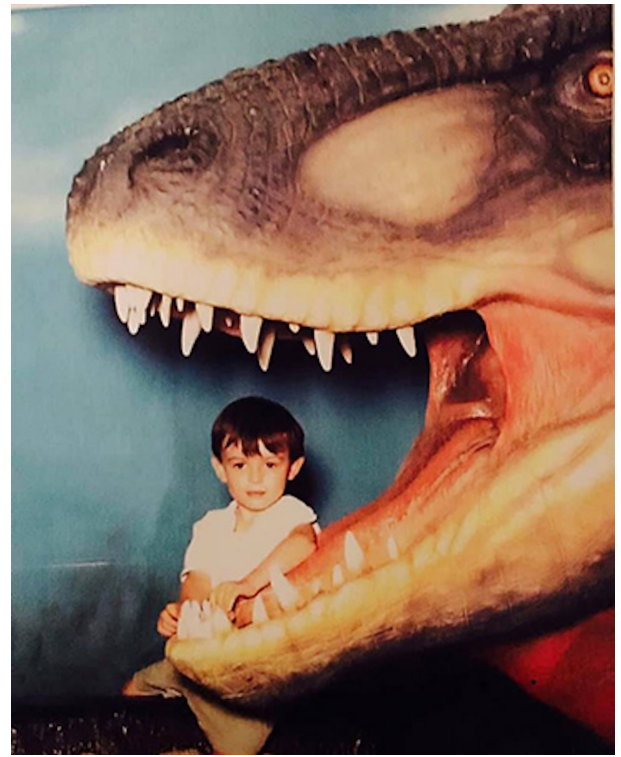
"That's when we knew we had something special," Duran said. "So every day, the more you dig down, the better it got."

The scientists also found plant fossils. They were from the same time period as the skull. The plant fossils help them know what the land was like when Alice was alive.

It took a week to dig the skull out of the dirt. They wrapped Alice in memory-foam to protect it. They moved the skull to a secret place. Dinosaur fossils can be valuable, Kjelland said. People might try to steal it.

Duran plans to go back to North Dakota soon. He plans to help Kjelland get Alice ready to show. Kjelland hopes lots of people will learn from it. He and Duran also want to make copies of the fossil. That will allow Duran to share it with his school.

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



Quiz

- 1 Look at Image 1.
- Based on the Image 1 caption, where is Duran in the photo?
- (A) in a university
 - (B) in California
 - (C) in North Dakota
 - (D) in a museum
- 2 What does Image 2 show?
- (A) young Duran on a dig for fossils
 - (B) young Duran posing with a dinosaur
 - (C) the place where Duran and Kjelland stored the fossils
 - (D) the skull that Duran and Kjelland found
- 3 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-5].
- Select the sentence from the section that explains when the dig began.
- (A) He went on a two-week trip to North Dakota.
 - (B) They wanted to dig up fossils.
 - (C) They started their dig on June 1.
 - (D) By the fourth day, Duran got lucky.
- 4 Read the section "The More They Dug, The Better It Got."
- Select the paragraph that explains what Duran and Kjelland want to do with Alice.
- (A) "That's when we knew we had something special," Duran said. "So every day, the more you dig down, the better it got."
 - (B) The scientists also found plant fossils. They were from the same time period as the skull. The plant fossils help them know what the land was like when Alice was alive.
 - (C) It took a week to dig the skull out of the dirt. They wrapped Alice in memory-foam to protect it. They moved the skull to a secret place. Dinosaur fossils can be valuable, Kjelland said. People might try to steal it.
 - (D) Duran plans to go back to North Dakota soon. He plans to help Kjelland get Alice ready to show. Kjelland hopes lots of people will learn from it. He and Duran also want to make copies of the fossil. That will allow Duran to share it with his school.