

Bones of a new breed

Professor discovers Plesiosaur after five years of searching

BY SOLOMON FIZER
THE PARTHENON

A professor in the Marshall University College of Science will be credited with the discovery of a new kind of Plesiosaur that was found during his trip to Wyoming last summer.

Robin O'Keefe, assistant professor in the biology department, discovered the remains of a 185-million year old Plesiosaur during his trip to Wyoming Big Horn Basin located near Laramie, Wyo. O'Keefe consistently visited the site for five years before making the discovery.

"I wanted to go out in the desert and search for buried treasure," O'Keefe said. "The real payoff is knowing that you've made a contribution that's going to last after you do. People can talk about this thing 200 years from now but the name is *Tatenectes laraminensis* O'Keefe."

The name *Tatenectes laraminensis* originates from Laramie, a town in Wyoming near the location where the fossil was found.

The fossil was named in honor of Marion and Inez Tate who were benefactors of the Tate Geological Museum at Casper College in Casper, Wyo. *Tate-nectes* means "Tate's Diver".

A \$14,000 grant from National Geographic helped fund the project. This Plesiosaur is the first of its kind and National Geographic will credit O'Keefe for the discovery when he submits it for publication.

Hallie Street, graduate student from Arlington, Va., assisted O'Keefe with the discovery. Street began working with O'Keefe on

the project when she was an undergraduate at College of William and Mary three years ago. Street said that although the fieldwork can be tough, there's no other place she would rather be.

"It (fieldwork) is one of the main reasons I got into geology and from there paleontology," Street said. "Sometimes fieldwork can be tiring and tedious, I mean we're walking around in the desert of northern Wyoming in the middle of the summer, and it can be blazing hot."

"I remember one moment from fieldwork this past summer thinking, I'm burning up, we're not finding much of anything but there is nowhere in the world I would rather be at this moment."

O'Keefe said he is planning other trips to different locations to search for fossils. O'Keefe said he hopes that with this discovery he can receive more money from National Geographic to fund more trips.

"Everybody wants to go out and find fossils but you have to prove yourself," O'Keefe said. "We are going to Utah to do recon work to where good places are to find fossils. If we can find enough good stuff we can write a grant around it. Once I can bring these fossils to the lab then hopefully I can get more graduate students to come in and get these findings published."

O'Keefe received his Ph.D. in Evolutionary Biology from the University of Chicago.

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in O'Keefe sketches what the Plesiosaur he discovered may have looked like.

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