



A Triceratops Hunt In Pioneer Wyoming: The Journals Of Barnum Brown & J.p. Sams : The University Of Kansas Expedition Of 1895

Barnum Brown

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One June morning in 1895, five men made their final goodbyes on a platform in Lawrence, Kansas.

The men a politician, a professor, two students, and an interested citizen were leaving town for the summer. They would live among the grasslands, badlands, dry, white-bottomed creek beds and Cretaceous rocks of eastern Wyoming, which they hoped to find rich in dinosaur bones.

Two of the students Barnum Brown, and Elmer Riggs would go on to lead two of the most important American careers in dinosaur paleontology of the twentieth century. Their professor, Samuel Wendell Williston, was just reaching his prime. For his new museum at the university, Williston wanted the skull of a Triceratops the enormous-headed, three-horned, rhino-like dinosaur of the Cretaceous Period, the first of which had been described for science only six years before. What would come to be called the Kansas University Expedition of 1895 would succeed in finding just such a skull.

Two accounts of the expedition survive, and both are offered here. Neither is heavy in scientific obscurities. Both offer fascinating snapshots of the West at a time when it was changing fast. The first journal was kept by Brown on his wagon journey from Kansas to Wyoming. The second and far more extensive journal was kept by James Polk Sams, a middle aged Kansas farmer, former probate judge, and member of the Board of Regents of the University of Kansas. Sams was pious, humorous, teetotaling, curious and kind. The editors have put the diaries in context with footnotes.

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