



The Evolution of an Exhibit

Bringing Robotic Dinosaurs to Life

This summer marks the fifth appearance of the wildly popular DINOSAURS!! at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. Delighting over 400,000 visitors in 2009, this year's seasonal exhibit will offer all new dinosaurs and a few old favorites too.

Now exactly how do you transport 20 larger-than-life beasts across the country and fashion them into a naturalistic display? It's no easy feat, but one the Zoo's Maintenance and Horticulture staffs have mastered since the first dinosaurs display at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo opened in 2003.

First, the dinosaurs are transported from the headquarters of Billings Productions in McKinney, Texas. They'll travel 1,200 miles on two 40-foot long tractor trailers, arriving at the Zoo in the early morning to be unloaded and placed in their summer homes along Waterfowl Lake.

Each dino weighs thousands of pounds and is removed from the truck bed by tow motor. A few, including the giant Tyrannosaurus rex, require the assistance of a giant crane to lift them to life.

Once the dinosaurs in are in place, they are juiced up with electricity and compressed air so they can move and roar. The compressed air forces tiny pistons to move inside each dinosaur bringing the animatronic beasts to life.

Next, the Zoo's Horticulture team works its magic. Hundreds of plants are used to create a naturalistic environment for the dinosaurs while also hiding the less attractive wires and tubes that make them work. Many plants, like huge ferns and succulents that are meant to represent their hardy prehistoric relatives, are flown in from Florida. Logs, grapevines and branches found in the Zoo are re-purposed as natural barricades to "protect" the dinosaurs from visitors.

The Zoo's Education staff interprets the natural history of each dinosaur with interesting signs. Education staff and volunteers are also available to answer questions and provide additional information.

The finished product is a life-like educational and fun display of prehistoric beasts that roar and move to the delight of dino-lovers of all ages. DINOSAURS! at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo opens May 6 through September 12 along the shores of Waterfowl Lake. Admission is just \$1 addition to regular Zoo admission. Kids under 2 and Zoo members are free.