



Fall is For FOSSILS

Fossil Posse owner Billy Doran shares his passion for paleontology with Eagle County.

By Laura Lieff



Fossil Posse campers arrive ready to dig for all kinds of prehistoric treasures.



(Right) Located in Wolcott, Fossil Posse is a place for kids to immerse themselves in the history of Eagle County dinosaurs.



(Right) Some of Billy Doran's best fossil finds have been right here in Eagle County.



Who doesn't love dinosaur stories? Longtime local Billy Doran has an endless supply—and his storytelling methods are grabbing the attention of adults, kids, locals, and visitors all over Eagle County.

Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, Doran moved a lot as a child because his father worked for the government. He spent time living all over the country, but went to high school in Virginia and graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in Art History. His fascination with dinosaurs began at age seven when his father took him to see dinosaur footprints along the Connecticut River in Massachusetts.

"I was captivated by those footprints and the fact that my dad had to know where to look in order to find them," says Doran. A year or so later, Doran visited the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. and was mesmerized by the dinosaur fossils on display.

Although his fascination with prehistoric creatures never changed, dinosaurs haven't always been part of Doran's career. He's lived in Colorado on and off for over 30 years, but during the late 1990s he spent time living in Los Angeles where he worked

as a movie, television, and theater actor. "I wanted to give acting a shot so I bought a 1972 Volkswagen bus, packed my stuff, and lived in the bus on and off for three years," remembers Doran.

During his time in Hollywood, he studied under actors like Colin Firth and Eric Stoltz at the famed Lost Studio. Doran's stories about mixing it up with actors, musicians, and artists could be its own separate article—especially since he enjoyed working on set and learning his craft—but he realized that the business side of Hollywood was not for him so he returned to Colorado.

DIGGING DEEP

After spending time living the "ski bum life-style," in 2011, Doran found himself ready for something new—which meant going back to his roots and studying dinosaurs. He educated himself on paleontology, dinosaur history, where to find fossils, and how to know what to look for in the rocky cliffs of Colorado. He went on a few digs and found some exciting fossils all over Eagle County, but especially in Wolcott. While he was teaching himself and exploring, he put his acting skills to use working for Good Morning Vail, TV8, and Plum TV—and that's

when the Denver Museum of Nature & Science called.

"After I discovered dinosaurs in Eagle County, the museum called me about doing an interview with the head curator," Doran explains. "Then they started inviting me on expeditions with their paleontology team. During one of the excavations, I found myself in the middle of Utah with all these paleontologists and asked why I was there. They said intuition and instinct."

Over the last ten years, that intuition and instinct has led to exciting fossil finds and to giving dinosaur presentations at various schools and libraries in Eagle, Gypsum, and Edwards, as well as opening Fossil Posse Adventures in 2015. An explorer camp for kids, Fossil Posse's



Created to instill an appreciation of paleontology, Fossil Posse is a fun, interactive, and education-based adventure.



PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF FOSSIL POSSE

Families continue to enjoy Fall fossil hunting with Doran (right).

“It is an honor to be a steward of Eagle County’s prehistoric history and to have the opportunity to bring that history out of the rocks and show it to residents and visitors.”

mission is to instill an appreciation of natural sciences, specifically paleontology and the prehistoric world, by providing a fun, interactive, and education-based adventure for children and families. Through the end of September, kids ages six and older can hold and examine real fossils—such as teeth, skulls, and bones—at Doran’s Wolcott dinosaur bone quarry. For younger kids, and throughout the year, Doran hosts private sessions and birthday parties.

FAMILY BUSINESS

In 2016, with the exponential growth and popularity of Fossil Posse, Doran’s wife Lily took over the administrative side of the business. “I see his passion and how much he loves what he does,” says Lily. “He wants to contribute to the community so it’s a no-brainer for me to help support that.” For those who have seen Doran live, his acting skills clearly inform his presentations. Adults and kids alike gravitate to him as he is knowledgeable, compelling, and genuinely excited about sharing his

expertise. “Most scientists are passionate but can’t always deliver the information the way Billy can,” adds Lily. “He’s unique in that he’s an actor and an expert and therefore able to convey his knowledge in a way that people enjoy.” Although Doran is not a paleontologist (such a designation requires a PhD), he is definitely a dinosaur expert. In fact, the number of hours he has spent in the field digging and excavating throughout the west has gotten him to where he is today. “I call myself a ‘play-eontologist’ because I love teaching kids about dinosaurs and making it fun,” says Doran. “I never thought I was smart enough to be a paleontologist because I wasn’t a great test-taker and there were aspects of school that were tough for me.” Instead of shoehorning himself into a paleontology job (which a professional in the field told him was a waste of time because the job options are so few and far between) he created his own with Fossil Posse and as the Executive Director of Dinosaur Junction.

DOWN VALLEY FOSSILS

As for the Fall season, Doran explains that September through November (weather permitting) is an excellent time for fossil hunting. “Rocky hillsides are very hot in the summer so cooler temperatures make fossil hunting much more enjoyable and you can be out there longer.” He points out that Eagle County has thousands of fossils—from shark teeth to shells to claw scrapes and bones—just waiting to be found. Some of his most significant down valley finds include Mosasaurus fossils, as well fossils from giant crocodiles, sharks, and ancient turtles. “It is an honor to be a steward of Eagle County’s prehistoric history and to have the opportunity to bring that history out of the rocks and share it with residents and visitors,” Doran says. “Paleontology saved me. It gave me a life I never thought I’d be able to achieve.” **MTN**

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INTRODUCING ALI ROBINSON

Ali was raised in Memphis, TN and moved out to the Vail Valley in 2021. She has always had a passion for skin care and helping people feel their best, which is what led her to quitting her desk job and starting her aesthetics career. Ali joins Evolve as a Licensed Aesthetician after completing her internship hours at the spa this Spring.

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