

For Immediate Release – June 23, 2009

**A FOSSIL PARADISE :
THE DISCOVERY OF THE BURGESS SHALE BY CHARLES D. WALCOTT OPENS JULY 6**

Banff, Alberta – The **Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies** is pleased to host an exhibition in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Burgess Shale. ***A Fossil Paradise: The Discovery of the Burgess Shale by Charles D. Walcott*** opens July 6, running through September 7.

One hundred years ago, Charles D. Walcott explored on horseback through Burgess Pass in the Canadian Rockies (located in Yoho National Park, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and discovered what would become known as the Burgess Shale. Fourth Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution when he discovered the Burgess Shale in 1909, Walcott visited the site regularly until age 74, collecting over 65,000 specimens.

The site preserves exquisite fossils of soft-bodied animals that roamed the oceans 500 million years ago, at a time (the Middle Cambrian period) when life did not yet exist on land. These fossils are considered one of the world's most important finds in paleontology. They provide crucial information about the origin and early evolution of animal lineages soon after their appearance in the fossil record.

This exhibition provides an intimate glimpse into the exploration of the Burgess Shale's early excavations. Included are vintage panoramic photos, site artifacts, and a profile of the man who made the great discovery as told by his personal field notes and letters.

This touring exhibition includes objects from the Smithsonian Institution, the Royal Ontario Museum and Parks Canada. Curator of the exhibition is Jean-Bernard Caron, Associate Curator of Invertebrate Paleontology, Royal Ontario Museum.

Unique to the exhibition at the Whyte Museum is the addition of 3-D scientific renderings of some of the animals from the Burgess Shale by Marianne Collins. Her illustrations appeared in Stephen J. Gould's book *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*. Also included in the exhibition are a selection of fossils from the Burgess Shale that were collected over the last 30 years by the Royal Ontario Museum (which holds the world's largest collection), under Parks Canada permits.

Special Events in Honour of the Burgess Shale Centenary

To commemorate the 100 year anniversary of the discovery of the Burgess Shale, several organizations present a number of activities this summer and fall. Here is a partial list:

Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

The Panorama Photographs of Charles D. Walcott

August 4, 8 PM, \$6 at the door, free for Museum Members

Charles D. Walcott created sweeping views of the Canadian Rockies to make scientific observations of the geology of the region in the early 20th century. This talk will describe Walcott's techniques and the conservation of the images for the exhibition *A Fossil Paradise*. Presented by Sarah Stauderman, Preservation Manager, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

International Conference on the Cambrian Explosion – Public Speaker Series

During this conference, held at The Banff Centre August 3 through 8, some of the world's leading researchers on early animal evolution will meet and share their latest findings. Some of these events are free and open to the general public. Learn more at www.burgess-shale.info.

Parks Canada – Yoho National Park

- Guided interpretive day hikes include Walcott's Quarry or the Mt. Stephen Trilobite Beds.
- A new interactive exhibit will bring the story of the Burgess Shale and its ancient marine creatures to life. Completion anticipated in fall 2009.
- Free family-oriented evening theatre programs about the Burgess Shale take place at Kicking Horse Campground.
- Learn more at www.pc.gc.ca/burgessshale.

Canmore Museum & Geoscience Centre

- Mary Vaux Walcott Exhibition, June 1 through September 8 – Mary Vaux was the third wife of Charles D. Walcott. She produced over 400 illustrations of wildflowers she observed during her trips to the Canadian Rockies. This exhibition, created from those illustrations, is hosted by the Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation, courtesy Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.
- At the Canmore Civic Centre Council Chambers, a number of presentations feature experts on the Burgess Shale and related topics. Learn more at www.cmags.org.

Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation

"The Fossil and the Astronaut – Exploring Earth from Inner and Outer Space," Dr. Roberta Bondar, July 14, 7:30 PM, Telus Convention Centre, Calgary. Tickets at www.ticketmaster.ca. Learn more at www.burgess-shale.bc.ca.

About the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies welcomes those who are drawn to the power and inspiration of these mountains. We are the gateway for experiencing and enjoying its art, culture and history in order to inspire and cultivate knowledge and the exchange of ideas. Visitors from near and far experience the Museum's galleries, programs, archives and library, heritage homes, museum shop, guided walks, tours and special events.

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For more information about this event, and the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, please contact:

Katie Daniel, Marketing & Communications Specialist
111 Bear St, Box 160, Banff, Alberta T1L 1A3
403-762-2291 ext. 316
kdaniel@whyte.org www.whyte.org