

On Wednesday, 4 May 2022, Warren CAT Equipment Rentals of Lubbock donated the use of one of their backhoes for a most unusual cause. The personnel of the Lubbock Lake Landmark ([LLL](#)) required a backhoe to dig up the bones of ... a rhinoceros! Unlike the typical digs that take place at the LLL, however, these bones are not thousands of years old. The post-cranial skeleton (all but the head) was that of a South-central Black Rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis minor*, that had died of natural causes at the Fort Worth Zoo in 2004. It had been donated to the Museum's Natural Science Research Laboratory ([NSRL](#)) so the skeleton could be archived in the NSRL's Mammal Collection. Tissue samples from the rhino's liver also were archived in the NSRL's Genetic Resources Collection.

Typical skeletal materials within the NSRL's vertebrate collections are much smaller, so processing the rhino posed an unusual challenge. Much of the carcass was disarticulated and frozen almost immediately upon receipt, allowing the NSRL to have time to experiment with different methods for defleshing the large skeletal elements. Portions of the ribcage and pelvic girdle were left exposed to the elements, while smaller pieces of the skeleton were processed by dermestid beetles kept by the NSRL in aquaria. It was then decided that the remaining skeletal elements would be buried in order to deflesh them. In 2014, the Lubbock Lake Landmark collaborated with the NSRL Curators to bury those parts of the carcass on the LLL property. The burial allowed the natural processes of decomposition and cleaning of the bones by soil invertebrates to take place over a period of time.

So how did Warren CAT become involved? Dr. Robert Bradley, Director of the NSRL, contacted his friend Jacob Bartholomae, Regional Operations Manager at Warren CAT, about the task of excavating the skeletal remains. Mr. Bartholomae and Koley Schaffer, Machine Sales Rep, were happy to support the Museum by donating the use of a Warren CAT backhoe, which they delivered to the LLL. Scott Trevey of the LLL then used the donated backhoe to carefully remove the four feet of soil above where the rhino had been buried. The Museum Science students and employees of the LLL, led by Lila Jones and under the supervision of Dr. Eileen Johnson, then methodically brushed away the remaining soil and carefully removed the bones. The bones are now at the NSRL, where Heath Garner, Curator of Collections, will oversee the process of getting them fully cleaned, tagged, and housed for future research and exhibition purposes.

The Museum of Texas Tech University sincerely thanks Warren CAT, Jacob Bartholomae, and Koley Schaffer for their generous donation of the equipment that made this project possible.



View the KCBD news story and videos about this event [here](#) and [here](#)!