Land of Extremes

**ROCK TALKS**

Behind the scenes of new exhibit

**BY NEAL V. HITCH**

On March 50, the Desert Museum began unloading and installing furniture for the new, permanent exhibit. One of the most common questions we are now being asked is: “When will we open again?” Here’s a look behind-the-scenes of building what we believe will be one of our literature exhibit designs and how our opening plans are developing.

**Installing an exhibit**

Phase 1 and phase 2 of the Land of Extremes permanent exhibit contains exhibits on archeology, wildlife, storage, a lake, Cabo San Lucas, and other visitor services area. These arze will be defined by large reproduction rock elements.

Each of these fake rocks are based on real rocks you would find hiking in the Imperial Valley and were custom-made for our museum. They will contain panels that we are calling “Rock Talks” that have detailed interpretations and directions of places you can go and see.

The rocks throughout the desert, in the Alvord-Pah-Log-UNA-mas mountains are Mountainous formations that formed deep in the earth. They are part of the same massive batholith that forms the core of the Sierra Nevada. A batholith is a large mass of igneous rock formed from cooling magma. In the case of our mountains, the molten rock overwound upward and cooled just beneath the surface.

Groundwater then percolated through the rock, creating a protective shell around the core. The entire design must be built, then rebuilt at the final destination, then rehauled like the pieces of a puzzle. “It’s really fun,” Nocella added. “It’s almost like working in a museum exhibit.

**How will we open?**

“When will we open?” is a question we have been getting a lot lately. Currently, we are installing the casework for phase 1 and phase 2 of our exhibit. This will take three weeks. Though it is a lot of installing furniture, it is big furniture and just like at your home, it also requires a lot of painting and wall-papering. After all installation, museum staff will have three weeks to complete painting, put back exhibits, and do a deep cleaning. After the rock and casework are installed and the museum cleaned up, we will be installing interactives, media and software. This entails setting up computers and LED projectors in specific cases. We are not taking the traditional approach to opening a new museum where visitors don’t see anything until a grand unveiling. We have had people come in the building throughout the process and many have seen the behind-the-scenes process that goes into building a permanent museum exhibit.

Neal V. Hitch is director of the Imperial Valley Desert Museum in Ocotillo.

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Phases 1 and 2 of the exhibit will interpret two components of our museum. These components will be rock elements in the new Land of Extremes exhibit at the Desert Museum.

**COURTESY PHOTOS**

Rock sections carved out of styrofoam in the Weldon Exhibit studio in San Francisco at www.weldon.com

**LEFT:** Rock sections after installation painted in museum.

**BELOW:** Rock Talk panels will interpret the rock elements in the new Land of Extremes exhibit at the Desert Museum.

**COURTESY PHOTO**

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