

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Discovery and Documentation

- Interview: Let's Meet a Dino's Mom
- Student Activity: Photography and Science
- Photo Essay: Shining Strands



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER-IN-RESIDENCE ENRIC SALA

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Let's Meet a Dino's Mom

"Yeah, it's true. They call me 'The dino's mom.'" Wavy fair hair, clear cheerful eyes, a huge smile — Tiziana Brazzatti looks very nice, so that it's easy to start the interview with her.

How did your story with dinosaur Antonio begin?

"It was April 25, 1994, and I was working on my geology dissertation. That's why I was wandering around a deserted quarry in Villaggio del Pescatore, a little seaside village near Trieste, a town in the far northeast of Italy. It wasn't my first time in the area, and I wasn't the first one to search it. In the 80s two people in love with fossils had found some specimen dating back to the reptiles age, probably dinosaurs.

Some years ago there even was a contestation about who discovered Antonio, as they declared to have been the first ones. I have always stated they were the first to signal the deposit of Villaggio del Pescatore, but I found Antonio's paw! And what an emotion!

Well, on that day of national holiday I was crawling alone among the prickly blackberry bushes, a compass in one hand and a little hammer in the other when I saw it. "But ... It's a reptile paw!" I burst out. I immediately understood it was going to be a big deal.

How big is Antonio?

Antonio is four meters long and about 130 cm tall. It took six months of field work and 3,500 hours of lab preparation to extract it. It was necessary to use particular methodologies to isolate a series of big rock blocks and later to dissolve the rock without damaging the specimen. It took all the ability of the technician from Stonage (now Zoic), a local firm, the only Italian one working on reconstructing big dinosaurs, lead by Giorgia Bachhia, called the Lady of Dinosaurs.



ALESSANDRO STUPER

Tiziana Brazzatti, above right, was a geology student when she discovered the leg of a dinosaur. A paleontologist and an archaeologist supervised the careful excavation of the intact, preserved bones deep in the rock.

Why was it named Antonio?

I certainly didn't. Being given the chance I would have chosen Louise, from the movie *Thelma and Louise*, even if we don't know what gender it is. But maybe it is Antonio because that's the name of the director of the excavations, and everybody kept calling his name.

You said we don't know if it was a male or a female, then?

In fact, Antonio is the only sample of its species, so there is no way to compare its pelvis bones with others so to discover about it.

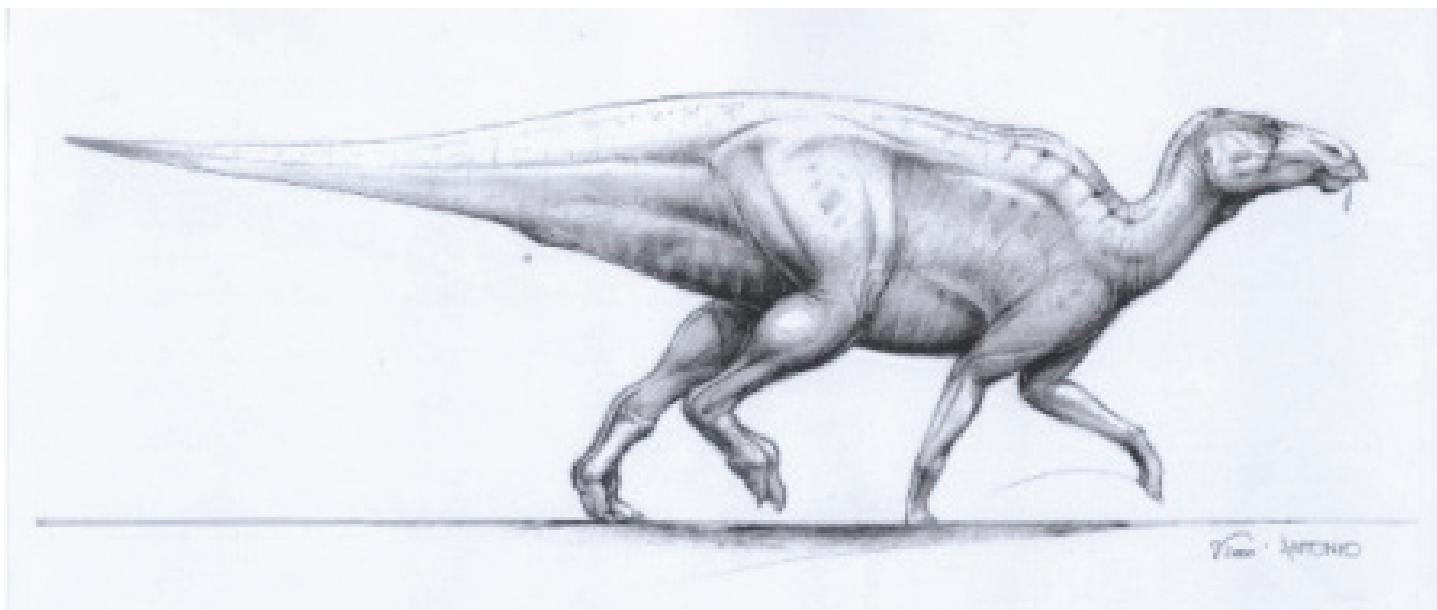
Can you tell us more about Antonio?

He has got a big stretched head, similar to that of a horse, three-fingered hands, strong hind paws probably fit for running, a thin tail — maybe it was an herbivorous. Its characteristics tell it apart from its American cousins, *hadrosaurids*, in spite of the common feature of the duck-bill.

Antonio probably lived about 70 millions years ago (during the Upper Cretaceous) on an island of what is believed to have been a marine or lagoon environment. It probably suffered from

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TULLIO PERENTIN

Paleoartist Tullio Perentin uses his knowledge and skill to bring Antonio to life. Antonio's bones indicate that the *Tethyshadros insularis* was perhaps five to six years old.

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insular dwarfism. Its fossil shows fractures at all four paws and maybe that prevented it from finding food, so taking it to death.

So it is an important discovery!

Very much so! It not only is the only sample of its species with all parts of the body connected, but it's also the most complete. We have got 98% of its body, only missing a tiny bit of its tail.

You seem to be very proud! Did your dream come true?

I have dreamt to be a paleontologist from the very day, when I was 8, my mother gave me a book about fossils. Nowadays I teach Science and Math. Paleontology field isn't easy to work in, but I keep taking care of Antonio. It is at Trieste Natural History Museum, but I work with other volunteers on the site where he was discovered. There we found other fossils of dinosaurs, fish, plants, shrimps and primitive crocodile.

Anyway, should I ever forget about my passion there is my son Raymond to remind me. One of his first words was ... dinosaur!

— Giulia Basili

*with the assistance of Alessio Colonna, Rocco De Rinaldis,
Chiara Di Candia, Andrea Fontanot and Maria Elena Pais
for the editorial staff of Muja Littlerary Review*



GIULIA BONIN

Teacher Lilia Ambrosi in front, colleagues Renzo Fornasaro and Valentina Marchesan, and students from four third-year classes at Scuola Nazario Sauro di Muggia, a little town near Trieste. These students, who are interested in journalism, conducted the interview of Tiziana Brazzatti.