

Giant returns

The world's largest dinosaur skeleton is back on show with other spectacular remains in Berlin's Natural History Museum after decades of neglect of a building damaged by bombing in the Second World War. Its reappearance marks the highlight of a 128 million euro renovation project to repair the building.

The skeleton, of a Brachiosaurus, which is more than 13 metres high, almost reaches the glass cupola of the main hall of the museum. The 150 million year old skeleton is the star of a new Evolution in Action show at the museum.

The Brachiosaurus was unearthed by German archaeologists in Namibia before the First World War and is the tallest dinosaur skeleton in any museum. It is now back on display with

the skeleton of a 150 million year old Archaeopteryx, found in Germany, and five other dinosaur remains from what is one of the world's most significant fossil collections.

The Brachiosaurus, whose femur alone weighs 300 kg, first went on display in 1937. But it is now being shown for the first time in what, according to latest research, is its authentic posture: instead of squatting on bent legs, the skeleton now stands with an elongated neck.

The Evolution in Action show bucks the trend for interactive displays and computer screens, by using real fossils to demonstrate the evolutionary process and its research.

Climate change, mountain formation and the impact of meteorites are presented as formative powers of evolutionary change. And the message is clear; everything is connected.

The Berlin museum has a vast reserve of material: it contains 130,000 bird specimens alone including 50 now mainly extinct examples collected in Hawaii during Captain Cook's third Pacific voyage. It also houses the world's largest collection of beetles. It has around one million mammals and 14,000 fish. The museum's directors hope most of the renovation will be complete by 2009 but the museum is still owned by Berlin's Humboldt University, which has insufficient cash.

The Evolution in Action exhibition is being paid for by Germany's state lottery and EU funds. The directors hope that the institution will be accepted for membership of the state-funded Leibniz Association which would give it recognition as a research organisation and an income.

Nigel Williams



Evolution's champion: Ever-popular dinosaurs are back on display as part of a new evolution exhibition in a newly funded project at the Natural History Museum of Berlin. (Picture: Natural History Museum of Berlin.)