

The Southwest Museum, at Highland Park, Calif., was visited by arrangement with the director, Dr. Carl Denzel and the archaeologist-anthropologist in charge, ~~Bruce~~ Brian Bruce.

This is one of the largest museums of the American Indians in the United States, perhaps the largest, devoted exclusively to the American Indian.

The public entrance is through a tunnel, off Museum Drive, Ave. 45. Along the sides of this tunnel are arrangements of Indian scenes, small dioramas, lighted for effectiveness and representing the various Indian tribes. The tunnel terminates in an elevator which admits to the main museum building, three levels, on a ridge overlooking East Pasadena.

Through advance contact I drove up the employees' personal road to the top of the hill in the rear of the building and was there when they showed up for work at 8 (hours of various employees are staggered).

Dr. Denzel was very free with what information he could provide.

The dioramas are of various sizes, heights and arrangements in the various galleries. By pinpointing some of them we could determine the approximate price or cost. Some would have been impossible without an "auditing" search of records, since Dr. Denzel's tour of director has not covered the entire life of the museum, which was built in the 1930s.

A cost of \$1,000 is considered minimum for even a small display, and that with drawing upon artifacts and materials in repository in various vaults and store rooms.

One diorama, under consideration now, "walk-in" height and seven feet wide plus five feet deep, and drawing upon materials in storage, is running toward \$2,500 and is "not being pressed."

The cost has exceeded \$5,000 in some of the elaborate displays.

An "overlooked" but considerable expense is the glass.

Some of the displays were arranged at various times when the museum

employed staff artists, usually graduate ethnological students filling in summer or off-school hours time and they would work on several at the same time.

Others were made by the regular staff.

Some few have been commissioned. (No knowledge known as to this in former years).

In recent years the museum is finding that a "competent" school with suitable advanced art students is a satisfactory solution to a display. These are worked up at the school and installed at the museum, the museum paying costs of supplies and providing artifacts. Since the museum is a non-profit museum, and is open to school tours, courses of elementary studies, anthropological, naturalistic etc. this work is undertaken on the basis of a volunteer class project, the teacher sometimes receiving a minimum consideration for travel and "out of class" compensation. One full school term, and sometimes two, carried through with a later class and the same instructor, is required for a suitable diorama or display. Only rarely is it possible to obtain one in a matter of a few months.

Some of the displays and dioramas were carried out by the anthropologists and regular staff. These were field men, who because of museum status, would go into New Mexico, Arizona, California, or some section of California on a summer "dig." Sometimes these would last several summers under a grant or higher education fund, since the staff men were college professors, usually retired. Then in the off season they would make their own installation, drawing on their university training, and employing the assistance as needed of a museum staff artist when he is available. Sometimes two seasons are required to complete such a project or major installation. (The museum is closed for a vacation period and sometimes the work is completed at this time).

The trouble with school installations, a common difficulty also with even professional ones, Dr. Denzil says, is "they are too stiff."



they employ too many doll-like characters and animals.

The first consideration is to determine a scale. Then stick to accuracy. Most displays should be in "dust" proof containers that require the minimum of opening and re-sealing to clean figures, restore ones which crumble after several years or break down, etc.

Only schools with advanced art departments, virtual college level should be considered for professional type of displays and they should be carried under proper direction.

"Our dioramas are considered the finest of their kind in the country."

(Personally they did not appear superior or even equal to many I have seen in state parks, here and in California; and especially at Helena, Mont., in the state capitol, State Historical Society; or the studio museum of Bob Sriver, sculptor, at Browning, Mont.

In the case of the Helena State Capitol or Charles Russell museum, these are generally large "walk in" size dioramas. They were carried out by known artists. One is now head of the art department of the Missoula University or College; another is working professionally alone; a third has left Montana and been employed to do similar work for Smithsonian Institution. He is the sculptor, Weaver.

It required, as I recall I was told, more than 8 months to complete the large "Coming of Lewis and Clark" diorama in which figures are approximately 15 inches high and the cost was not known since others were involved.

I am told that recognition for the apparent outstanding western historical type displays are now carried out in the Cody Museum at Jackson, Wyoming. This is rated superior to Montana, excepting the Sriver studio-museum where lighting effects are predominate in a darkened display room.

The effect at the Scliver studio-museum is astounding. You enter the display room which is dimly lit. All the displays are back-lighted or top-lighted. The figures are about 7-8 inches high, or perhaps 9. (humans) and animals in proportion.

Scliver worked six years, and with a helper, sometimes two, most of the time. Most of the work was done during the closed season (September to June); and odd times during the June to September open season. He is able to add no more than one or two exhibits or displays a season.

The Southwest Museum is entirely different in character from the others, a little on the antiquated side because many of the displays have been in since the 1930s, but it is the accuracy, variety and their employment to augment the main display rooms.

The museum is arranged by various galleries. Hence, the plains Indian room will have a central arrangement of a regular tepee, and Indian camp (less figures) set up in the center of a room approximately 30 x 45 feet. Around this will be a "railing," in harmony with the central theme. The walkway is four to five feet wide, and around parts of the central display are cases facing the walkway with augmenting displays. Little dioramas, none over four feet long are built into the walls. And between the walkway and the walls, facing out and away from the central theme, are cases with augmenting displays.

Petroglyphs are displayed along the facade of one of the main entrances from the exterior of the building. These are encased in walk-in height cases about eight feet long and four feet deep. On one side are four "broken" or fragment rocks, about three feet high and two feet wide. They are set in broken white rock. The cases are framed in stainless steel or aluminum and the background is "framed."

Hall space, leading from gallery to gallery, corners etc. are utilized with dioramas complimenting adjoining displays or galleries.



One of the most interesting, approximately four feet high and three feet wide is built into the wall utilizing a space some eight or ten inches deep. It is a model of stratigraphy, illustrating how artifacts are found.

The natural earth is used and the display is marked:

Sterile (on top)

4 to 20 feet

28-30 feet

30-33 feet

Sterile

The various layers of earth show no artifacts; then the type found; and the types and artifacts found at the various layers, just as they would be exposed as cut through by a big knife.

The entire face is "sprayed" with a fixatif, and protected by glass.

This type of display shows one manner of handling a geological stratification of the Wanapum Dam site, or an exhumation (one burial) or the stratification of various cultures along the river. This is a fairly common presentation but was obviously interesting to the museum visitors)

The model of stratigraphy covered a depth of 33 feet in the four-foot opened section.

In all displays dealing with an exhumation, the figure or remains was not blatantly displayed, but in a subdued light, in a place somewhat isolated from adjoining displays and with no other explanation other than this simple inscription: "Here Lies a Woman Who took the Shadow Trail 2,000 years ago)x Now she sleeps away the years in this case. Tread lightly lest you disturb her."

The character of the soil and rocks, the background painting, speaks for the locale.

Indoor cases displaying rock paintings are shallow.

One entire hall is devoted to basketry, the various tribes of the American Indian being covered in taller than walk-in size cases, for displays.

These cases are separated by about 3 1/2 feet each. And into these built out separations are built in eye-level small dioramas, showing a typical village scene of a tribe represented in the adjoining basketry.

For instance the Klickitat tribe is represented. The diorama has a background painting of Mt. Adams, a foreground mat lodge, berrying baskets, hunters, salmon cooking etc.

Some cases contain only archaeological material.

By "consistent" walking and observation, with time out for coffee with the museum staff, it is required four hours of "fast" looking to see all the case arrangements and scan their contents. This would illustrate the extensiveness of the Southwest Museum exhibits.