

Thursday, February 21, 2008

## Panel to Examine Museum Ethics Flap

By [John Fleck](#)

Journal Staff Writer

A panel will convene today to take a fresh look at scientific ethics charges against a group of New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science researchers led by acting museum director Spencer Lucas.

Members of the museum's executive committee and two outside experts will meet in closed session to review allegations that Lucas and some of his colleagues took credit for work done by other scientists.

The review is the latest development in a controversy the museum's critics have dubbed "Aetogate," after the ancient crocodilelike aetosaurs at the heart of the argument.

Even before it starts, the inquiry is drawing criticism from members of the scientific community outside of New Mexico who have been observing the affair.

Lucas and his colleagues have denied the allegations. Reviews by state and museum officials last year found the charges "without merit."

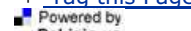
The new review was prompted by complaints that last year's inquiries amounted to "stonewalling." But the choice of reviewers has raised new criticisms.

One of the outside experts brought in to review the case, retired New Mexico Bureau of Mines geologist Orin Anderson, has collaborated with Lucas on scientific publications in the past.

The second outside expert is Norm Silberling, a retired U.S. Geological Survey geologist from Denver, according to Doug Svetnica, spokesman for the state Department of Cultural Affairs.

Jeffrey Martz, a Texas Tech graduate student and

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one of those whose complaints triggered the inquiry, called the choice of Anderson "puzzling," given his past connections to Lucas.

A credible review needs to be done by scientists from outside New Mexico with no connections to the museum, said Mike Taylor, a British paleontologist who has closely followed the affair and maintains a Web site documenting the complaints.

Anderson could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Svetnica said Anderson and Silberman were recommended as researchers with the necessary expertise to evaluate the issues raised in the case. Silberman was recommended by faculty at the University of New Mexico. Svetnica could not say Wednesday afternoon who recommended Anderson.

Martz is one of two scientists who have accused Lucas and his Museum of Natural History colleagues of appropriating their work in museum publications without credit.

Martz and Bill Parker of Northern Arizona University raised concerns last year after work the two researchers did as graduate students showed up, without attribution, in scientific papers published by Lucas and his colleagues describing aetosaur fossils found in New Mexico.

Museum collections manager Justin Spielmann, the lead author of one of the contested papers, and Lucas, the lead author of the other, denied the allegations. In each case, the museum scientists independently came to the same conclusions as Martz and Parker, Spielmann and Lucas said in separate interviews.

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