Indiana Jones exhibit whips up archaeology

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Unfurly your whip and dust off your fedora, for Indiana Jones has finally returned. The legendary archaeologist, who is perhaps better known than his non-fictional archaeology contemporaries, has made the Toronto World of Science his newest excavation site with the arrival of Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology, a touring exhibition that aims to put the spotlight on the wonders of archaeology.

While the popular hero lends his name to the exhibit, it contains much more than just movie props. Boosting an impressive collection of priceless real-world artifacts from all across the globe, Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology brings visitors through nearly 7,000 years of civilization. And, this is all done while simultaneously entertaining with nostalgia for the films with considerable props and costumes. For Alan Nussbaum, President and CEO of the Telus World of Science, Edmontonians are in for an exciting archaeological experience.

"In this exhibition you see real archaeology in action. We have gold jewellery that is millennia old, a clay Mesopotamian map that is 3,500 years old and Egyptian papyrus hieroglyphics, among others," he says.

And if the ancient displays (all loaned from the University of Pennsylvania Museum) aren't enough to leave you in impression, surely the original costumes and props used in all four Indiana Jones films will satisfy you. Straight from Lucasfilm's Archives, objects like the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Grail, and the Crystal Skull serve to highlight each film individually. But what is it about Indiana Jones the character that has enchanted him to millions?

"He's the ultimate adventurer, you can identify with him because he's good and noble and about knowledge and learning, but he's pretty badass. You'd want to go for a beer with this guy," Nussbaum says.

Indiana Jones has become one of the most recognizable, profitable and popular symbols of Hollywood since he first appeared in 1981, says co-curator of the exhibit and archaeologist with the National Geographic Society, Fredric Hiebert. The character and franchise has also had a considerable influence on real archaeology. He says, Donating a trademark Jones fedora, he explains with a smile that while Jones isn't exactly like real archaeologists, he has shed a very positive light on the discipline of archaeology:

"Sometimes we (archaeologists) laugh at the films, but we always think that it may have inspired a generation of kids who might not have ever opened a history book, who might not naturally go to a museum, who might not think that archaeology could be the coolest thing," he says. "When I first taught introductory archaeology, 90 out of 100 students would raise their hands and say 'I came here because of Indiana Jones.'"

Certainly many can admit that they first thought of archaeology as a legitimate field of study through the films, but Hiebert is grateful and honoured to have his life's work appreciated and associated with such an iconic figure.

"We're often thought of as a very dusty profession, and he's made it really exciting," Hiebert says, chuckling.

With the Adventure of Archaeology attendees can expect a total film and archaeological experience. With its combination of genuine artifacts and the beloved set pieces from the films, it's an exhibition that has something for both ultimate Indiana Jones fans and people simply interested in movies and ancient history.

"You'd have to walk through the entire British Museum to see something like this," says Hiebert.

But unlike Indiana Jones, visitors won't have to dodge snakes and rolling boulders to marvel in the treasures around them.