

Weather-related ceiling collapse causes damage at Clemson geology museum

Official says museum to be closed 'for weeks'

BY JASON EVANS
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — Damage from a ruptured pipe from cold winter temperatures has caused extensive damage to the Bob Campbell Geology Museum on the grounds of the South Carolina Botanical Garden at Clemson University.

Garden director Patrick McMillan said the museum will be closed for weeks for repairs to the damage. He added it is too soon to know the cost of the repairs.

"The building is insured. The collections are insured," McMillan said. "We're still answering questions for the insurance adjuster."

"Getting back to 100 percent is going to be our biggest challenge," he added. "We're going to be closed for a while."

The rupture happened around noon on Tuesday, McMillan said.

"We had condensation in our sprinkler system, which froze overnight Monday," he said. "It developed a leak and eventually ruptured."

The break caused a "pretty sudden collapse" of the ceiling over the museum's fossil wing.

The collapse crushed a full-size casting of a Dimetrodon, the flying reptiles exhibit, some of the fossils and fossil casts. Display cabinetry was also extensively damaged.

McMillan said the Dimetrodon and the flying

reptiles are "a total loss." He said replacing the

castings will cost "tens of thousands (of dollars)."

An exhibit containing fossil remains of a triceratops from a dig in North Dakota was directly under where the ceiling came down, he said.

He said he wasn't all that worried about the damage to the exhibit to the triceratops exhibit.

"Getting wet doesn't hurt it," McMillan said. "It may come apart, but these things have been sitting in the ground getting rained on for 60 million years."

The castings are popular, he said.

"They draw a lot of people," McMillan said.

"They're really cool stuff."

The damage comes at an

especially bad time of the year, as the museum becomes "the anchor" of the garden during the winter months, McMillan said.

"The garden slows down considerably over the winter months, unless it's a really pretty day," he said.

But not being able to have visitors while repairs are done comes with a cost.

"We have a really tiny budget," McMillan said. "We're dependent on visitation, donations from the public. Loss of support from the community, that'll be our biggest challenge."

He said museum curator Adam Smith has done "a great job of updating and expanding" the museum in recent years, "making

it more popular, more user-friendly, more educational."

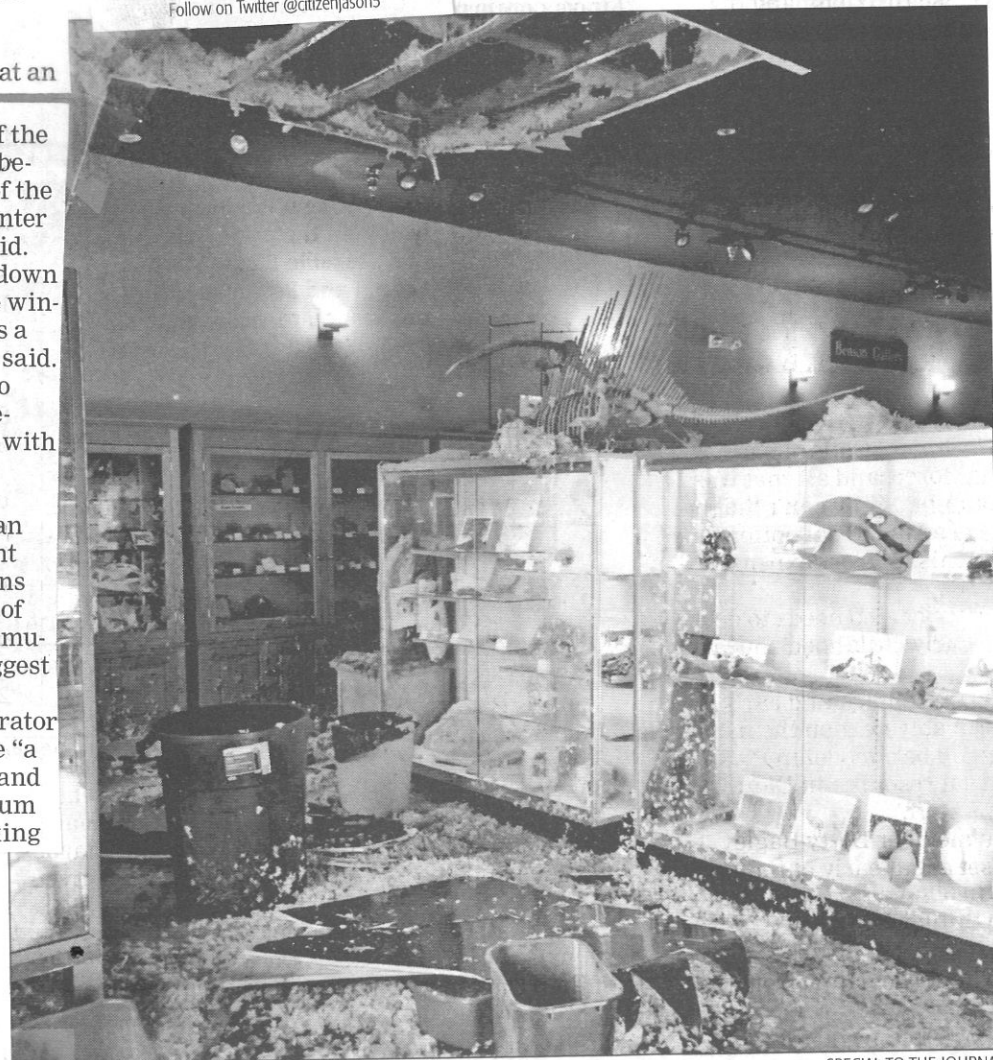
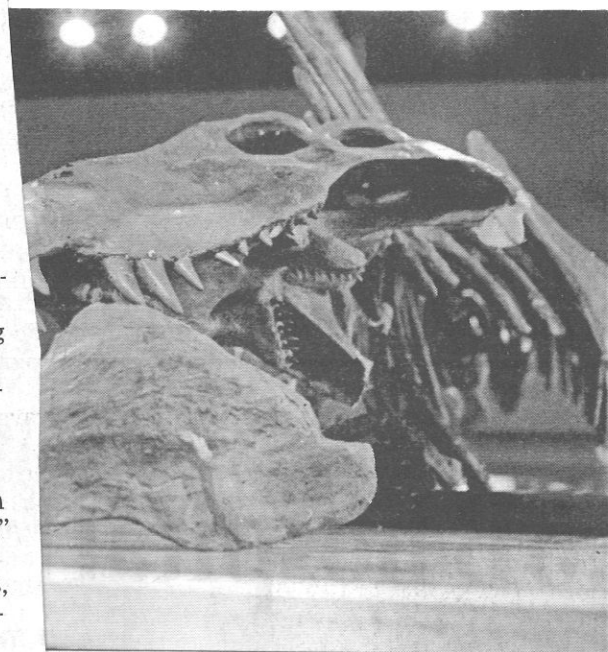
"Visitation at the museum has gone way up," McMillan said.

The museum is home to Clemson University's active paleontological research program and is visited by more than 25,000 people per year, according to McMillan. It also provides specimen identification free of charge.

"This time of the year it's the main thing that people are going to see in the garden on a cold day," he said.

For updates on repairs, visit the museum's Facebook page.

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South Carolina Botanical Garden director Patrick McMillan said it is too soon to know the cost of repairs to the Bob Campbell Geology Museum after this week's ceiling collapse.