Overview:
The Natural History Museum of Utah opened the Rio Tinto Center on the campus of the University of Utah in November, 2011. Located on the foothills of the Wasatch Mountain Range, the 163,000 square-foot facility serves as the state’s new natural history museum building. In a debut of the Museum’s changing exhibition gallery, the exhibit *From the Ground Up* is an interactive and multimedia glance that details the artists, the photographers, the architects, the exhibit designers, the exhibit fabricators and the construction workers who were an integral part of realizing the Museum’s trek into the Rio Tinto Center. It condenses 25 years of planning into a 2,000 square-foot exhibit, allowing visitors to learn about the process and the people behind the project.

A timeline that begins on the floor of the exhibit hall lobby immerses the visitors in the journey culminating in the Rio Tinto Center, and it is marked by milestones and achievements as it guides people through the different exhibit content elements. The lobby also features a 2-minute time-lapse movie of the construction process. The free-standing walls used throughout the exhibit are recycled wooden pallets used to move the Museum’s collection from the George Thomas Building to the Rio Tinto Center.

Uniquely Utah:
Visitors enter the exhibit hall to discover the geographical diversity of Utah and enjoy expansive photos of the site and the shoreline trail prior to groundbreaking. Utah’s rich record of the deep past, its amazing and varied landscapes, and its abundant range of healthy ecosystems make it an ideal place to discover the natural world and our place within it.

The Museum is perfectly situated to launch that process of discovery. Its extensive views, trails and terraces, and an enormous array of visitor experiences encourage exploration both inside and outside the building.

Design
The immense amount of brainstorming and inspiration that launched the design process is articulated with detail in the “Design” content area.

It began with a trip throughout the state of Utah, to expose the design team and Museum staff to the geological, biological and cultural diversity of Utah. From that trip, the ideas began to flow, and the art in this section depicts it. Several line-art drawings of early building concepts cover the walls, and a half-dozen concept models plus the final scale model are on display in this section.
Visitors can enjoy first-hand accounts in interviews from the design team, Museum staff, and construction partners; early exhibit mock-ups; computer-generated models of different building ideas; and the hands-on time-lapse movie allows people to watch the 18-month construction process unfold at any speed.

**Collections**

The Museum cares for more than a million-and-a-half objects: systematically catalogued plants and animals, shells and fossils, rocks and minerals collected to help us understand how natural systems work and how they change over time. Climate controlled and seismically engineered, our spaces have been outfitted with state-of-the-art cabinets to house the Museum’s vast collections.

This content area conveys the breadth and depth of the backbone of the Museum, its collections. It gives visitors an inside look at what the collections areas are like and what they do. Visitors see graphs that not only breakdown the collections by research areas, it also details the how the building anticipates collections to grow. Line-art sketches from the exhibit designers demonstrate initial ideas on presenting the objects in the exhibits, and a multimedia station features interviews with the design team, Museum staff, and construction partners relaying their favorite feature in the Rio Tinto Center.

**Construction**

The “Construction” content area reveals many of the fine details that visitors can ponder as they make their way through the Museum’s 10 galleries.

From the construction workers who poured concrete, to the mount makers, artists and exhibit fabricators, the process from concept to building involved a lot coordination, effort and workmanship. This content area shows the diversity of expertise and skill that resided within the team that built the Rio Tinto Center.

Here, visitors will find photos of the workers: testing many of the interactive found in the galleries; working on the construction of the Rio Tinto Center; and installing the Past Worlds exhibits. Additionally, visitors can observe original artists’ mock-ups of the art that is installed throughout the galleries, helping convey the story of each of the exhibits.

Touch specimens are riddled throughout the “Construction” content area. Visitors can: pump water on pervious pavement and watch the water matriculate through the porous concrete; touch copper specimens like those hanging on the façade of the Museum, touch the board-form concrete and the corresponding mold that made it; thumb through architectural blueprints used for the project; and see all the samples of paints, textures and fonts used to decide how the Museum would present its content in the exhibits.
The Natural History Museum of Utah at the Rio Tinto Center, University of Utah

The Natural History Museum of Utah is one of the leading scientific research and cultural institutions in the country. Established in 1963, the Museum's collections contain over 1.2 million objects and offers innovative exhibitions and educational programs to thousands of residents and visitors each year, including traveling and permanent exhibits, special events and other programs. With an expected attendance of 180,000 visitors a year, the Museum also offers a variety of outreach programs to communities and schools throughout Utah, reaching every school district in the state annually. The Museum has an active science program with more than 30 scientists and 10 field expeditions each year.