



Osteology and variation of *Brachylophosaurus canadensis* (Dinosauria, Hadrosauridae) from the Upper Cretaceous Judith River formation of Montana
by Albert Prieto-Marquez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Earth Sciences
Montana State University
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Abstract:

The recovery of an adult articulated, complete skeleton and more than 1,300 specimens from a bonebed of the hadrosaurid dinosaur *Brachylophosaurus canadensis* allowed a reexamination of the morphologic features of this taxon. The fossils were recovered from Upper Cretaceous (Campanian) Judith River of northeastern Montana. The bones were first described element by element in order to produce a complete redescription of the whole skeleton. Secondly, a systematic analysis of the morphological variation present in each element was conducted. Finally, a revision of the systematic position of this taxon was undertaken.

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by

Albert Prieto-Márquez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

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in

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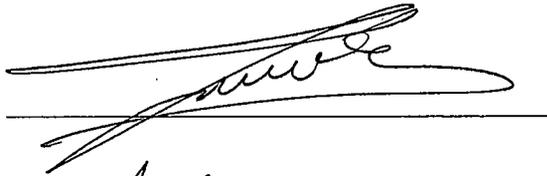
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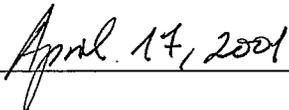
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
General Geologic Context.....	3
Location and taphonomy of the bone-bearing strata	5
Material and Methods	6
2. SYSTEMATIC PALEONTOLOGY.....	10
Revised Diagnosis	10
Referred Specimens	11
Locality	12
Horizon.....	12
Discussion	23
3. OSTEOLOGIC DESCRIPTION.....	15
General Description of the Skull	15
Maxillary complex.....	19
Premaxilla	19
Maxilla	23
Nasal	28
Jugal.....	32
Lacrimal	35
Prefrontal.....	38
Postorbital	43
Quadrate	46
Quadratojugal	49
Squamosal	51
Neurocranial Complex	55
Frontal	55
Parietal	58
Braincase. General Description and Neurovascular System.....	62
Presphenoid	67
Orbitosphenoid	67
Laterosphenoid	70
Prootic	73
Opisthotic – Exoccipital.....	76
Basioccipital	79
Basisphenoid	81
Parasphenoid	83
Palatal Complex	84
Palatine.....	84
Pterygoid	87

Ectopterygoid	91
Mandibular Complex	95
Prementary	95
Dentary	99
Surangular	105
Angular	109
Splénial	112
Articular	114
Dentition	117
Accessory Elements	121
Hyoids	121
Sclerotic Plates	123
Axial Skeleton	125
Cervical Vertebrae	126
Dorsal Vertebrae	136
Sacral Vertebrae	141
Caudal Vertebrae	145
Cervical Ribs	148
Dorsal Ribs	149
Chevrons	151
Ossified Tendons	152
Pectoral Girdle	155
Coracoid	155
Scapula	157
Sternals	160
Pelvic Girdle	161
Ilium	161
Pubis	165
Ischium	168
Forelimb	172
Humerus	172
Radius	176
Ulna	178
Carpals	180
General Description of the Hand	182
Metacarpals	185
Metacarpal II	185
Metacarpal III	187
Metacarpal IV	189
Metacarpal V	190
Phalanges on Manual Digit II	191
Phalange II1	191
Phalange II2	192

Manual Ungual II.....	193
Phalanges on Manual Digit III	193
Phalange III1	193
Phalange III2	195
Manual Ungual III	195
Phalanges on Manual Digit IV	196
Phalange IV1	196
Phalange IV2	197
Phalanges on Manual Digit V	198
Phalange V1	198
Phalange V2	198
Phalange V3	200
Phalange V4	200
Hindlimb	201
Femur	201
Tibia.....	205
Fibula	209
Astragalus.....	211
Calcaneum.....	214
The Foot and the Distal Tarsal	218
Metatarsals	220
Metatarsal II	220
Metatarsal III.....	222
Metatarsal IV.....	225
Phalanges on Pedal Digit II.....	226
Phalange II1	226
Phalange II2	229
Phalanges on Pedal Digit III	231
Phalange III1	231
Phalange III2 and III3.....	232
Phalanges on Pedal Digit IV	233
Phalange IV1.....	233
Phalanges IV2, V3 and IV4	235
Pedal Unguals.....	237
4. VARIATION	240
Individual Variation.....	240
Skull.....	240
Prementary	240
Dentary	240
Surangular	241
Splénial	242
Prenaxilla.....	242

Maxilla.....	242
Jugal.....	243
Lacrima.....	243
Nasal.....	244
Postorbital.....	245
Prefrontal.....	245
Quadrate.....	246
Quadratojugal.....	247
Squamosal.....	247
Pterygoid.....	247
Palatine.....	247
Ectopterygoid.....	248
Frontal.....	248
Braincase.....	249
Axial Skeleton.....	250
Vertebrae.....	250
Ribs.....	250
Appendicular Skeleton.....	251
Scapula.....	251
Coracoid.....	251
Sternals.....	252
Ilium.....	252
Pubis.....	253
Ischium.....	254
Humerus.....	255
Radius.....	255
Ulna.....	256
Metacarpal II.....	257
Metacarpal III.....	257
Metacarpal IV.....	257
Metacarpal V.....	258
Manual Digit II.....	258
Manual Digit III.....	259
Manual Digit IV.....	259
Manual Digit V.....	260
Femur.....	261
Tibia.....	261
Fibula.....	262
Astragalus.....	262
Calcaneum.....	262
Distal Tarsal.....	263
Metatarsal II.....	263

Metatarsal III.....	263
Metatarsal IV.....	264
Pedal Digit II.....	264
Pedal Digit III.....	265
Pedal Digit IV.....	265
Pedal Unguals.....	265
Ontogenetic Variation.....	266
Skull.....	266
Dentary.....	266
Surangular.....	266
Splénial.....	267
Angular.....	267
Articular.....	267
Hyoids.....	268
Prenaxilla.....	268
Maxilla.....	268
Lacrimal.....	269
Postorbital.....	270
Prefrontal.....	270
Quadrato.....	270
Quadratojugal.....	271
Prefrontal.....	271
Pterygoid.....	271
Frontal and Nasal.....	272
Parietal.....	272
Braincase.....	273
Axial Skeleton.....	274
Cervical Vertebrae.....	274
Dorsal Vertebrae.....	275
Sacral Vertebrae.....	276
Caudal Vertebrae.....	276
Cervical and Dorsal Ribs.....	276
Chevrons.....	277
Appendicular Skeleton.....	277
Coracoid.....	277
Scapula.....	277
Sternals.....	278
Ilium.....	278
Pubis.....	278
Ischium.....	279
Humerus.....	279
Radius.....	280
Ulna.....	280

Carpals.....	280
Metacarpal II	281
Metacarpal III	281
Metacarpal IV	281
Metacarpal V	281
Manual Digit II	282
Manual Digit III.....	282
Manual Digit IV.....	282
Manual Digit V	283
Femur	283
Tibia	284
Fibula	284
Astragalus.....	284
Distal Tarsal.....	284
Metatarsal II.....	284
Metatarsal III	285
Metatarsal IV	285
Pedal Digit II	285
Pedal Digit III.....	286
Pedal Digit IV.....	286
Pedal Unguals.....	286
Dimorphic Variation.....	287
Morph A.....	287
Referred Specimens.....	287
Distinct Features.....	287
Morph B	288
Referred Specimens.....	288
Distinct Features.....	289
Interpretation	289
5. PHYLOGENETIC POSITION OF <i>BRACHYLOPHOSAURUS CANADENSIS</i>	292
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	295
REFERENCES CITED	299
APPENDICES	305
APPENDIX A: LIST OF SPECIMENS.....	306
APPENDIX B: MEASUREMENTS.....	329
APPENDIX C: PHYLOGENETIC DATA	376

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Skull MOR 794 in left lateral view	17
2. Subadult premaxilla MOR 1071-7-7-98-84 in anterodorsal view	21
3. Left maxilla MOR 1071-7-6-98-79 in lateral and medial views	24
4. Articulated nasals MOR 1071-7-7-86-98.....	30
5. Left jugal MOR 1071 7-16-98-248G in lateral view	34
6. Right lacrimal MOR 1071-7-10-98-171 in lateral and medial view.....	36
7. Left prefrontal articulated to lacrimal, in lateral and medial views.....	40
8. Adult frontals underlying (arrow) the nasal crest in PR 862.....	41
9. Right subadult postorbital MOR 1071-7-13-99-87-L lateral and medial views ...	44
10. Right quadrate MOR 1071-8-13-98-559D in lateral view	48
11. Right quadratojugal MOR 1071-7-15-98-28A in lateral and medial views.....	50
12. Subadult right squamosal MOR 1071-7-13-99-87-H in lateral view	53
13. Subadult right squamosal MOR 1071-7-13-99-87-H dorsal and caudal views...	54
14. Subadult prefrontals in dorsal view, MOR 1071-7-13-99-87I	56
15. Subadult parietal MOR 1071-7-13-99-87I in dorsal view	59
16. Braincase MOR 1071-7-7-98-86 in anterior view	62
17. Braincase of MOR 1071-7-7-98-86 in ventral view	64
18. Braincase MOR 1071-7-7-98-86 in lateral view	68
19. Braincase of MOR 1071-7-7-98-86 in occipital view.....	72

20. Subadult braincase of MOR 1071-7-13-99-87I in left lateral view	80
21. Right palatine MOR 1071-7-16-98-248-S in lateral and medial view	86
22. Right pterygoid MOR 1071-7-23-98-387 in lateral and mediocaudal views	89
23. Right ectopterygoid MOR 1071-8-13-98-559-E in dorsolateral view	92
24. Right ectopterygoid MOR 1071-8-13-98-559-E in medioventral view	93
25. Predentary MOR 1071-7-28-98-299 in dorsocaudolateral view	25
26. Predentary MOR 1071-7-28-98-299 in anterior view	97
27. Dentary MOR 1071 in lateral and medial views	100
28. MOR 1071 dorsal view and MOR 1071-7-15-98-216 medial view	103
29. MOR 1071 surangular in dorsal view	107
30. Left surangular MOR 1071 in lateral and medial views	108
31. MOR 1071 right angular in lateral and medial views	110
32. Right splenial MOR 1071-8-6-98-483 in lateral and medial views	113
33. Right articular MOR 1071-8-13-98-554-A in lateral and medial views	115
34. MOR 1071 dentary teeth in labial, labial, occlusal, and side views	118
35. Maxillary teeth MOR 1071 in lingual and side views and labial view	120
36. Articulated hyoids on MOR 794, ventral view of the skull	122
37. Left subadult hyoid MOR 1071-8-20-98-597-B in medial view	123
38. Pair of disarticulated sclerotic plates from the bonebed	124
39. Neck of MOR 794 in left laterodorsal view	125
40. Atlas of MOR 794 in right lateral view	126

41. Atlas of MOR 794 in anterolateral and posterolateral views.....	127
42. Axis of MOR 794 in anterolateral and left lateral views.....	129
43. Axis of MOR 794 in caudal view.....	130
44. MOR 1071--15-98-221, cervical vertebra in dorsal and anterior views.....	132
45. Cervical vertebra MOR 1071--15-98-221 in right lateral view	133
46. Anterior dorsal vertebra MOR 1071 in anterolateral view	136
47. Anterior dorsal vertebra depicted in figure 46, here seen in right lateral view...	137
48. Dorsal vertebra MOR 1071 in anterolateral view	139
49. Dorsal vertebra shown in figure 48, seen here in left lateral view.....	140
50. Dorsal vertebra shown in figure 48, seen here in left lateral view.....	142
51. Subadult sacral neural arch and spine, anterior view	143
52. Articulated tail of MOR 794 in left lateral view	146
53. Caudal vertebrae in anterolateral view	147
54. Rib cage of MOR 794, in left lateral view.....	150
55. Hips of MOR 794 showing the ossified tendons; left lateral view	153
56. Left coracoid of MOR 794 in articulation with scapula and humerus	156
57. Right scapula MOR 1071-7-18-98-298 in lateral view	157
58. Left subadult scapula, MOR 1071-7-8-98-115	158
59. Left sternal MOR 1071-7-12-99-71, in anterolateroventral view	159
60. Right ilium of MOR 794 in lateral and medial views	162
61. Right pubis of MOR 794 in medial view and left ilium in lateral view	166
62. Right ischium, a portion of the distal shaft of the left ischium, medial view	169

63. Anterior blade and distal shafts of the ischia of MOR 794.....	171
64. Left humerus MOR 794 in lateral and medial views.....	173
65. Left radius and ulna of MOR 794 in lateral and medial views	177
66. Ulna and radius in proximal and distal views.	180
67. Right carpus of MOR 794 in laterodistal view	181
68. Left manus of MOR 794 in lateral and medial views.....	183
69. Right manus of MOR 794 in lateral and medial views	186
70. Proximal view of the metacarpals of the left manus of MOR 794.....	188
71. From left to right, manual ungual III and II in dorsal view	194
72. Right manual digit V, lateral view of the manus of MOR 794	199
73. Right femur of MOR 794 in medial view.....	202
74. Right femur of MOR 794 in proximal and distal views	203
75. MOR 794, left tibia in lateral view and right tibia in medial view	206
76. Proximal view of the right tibia and fibula of MOR 794.....	208
77. Right proximal tarsals of MOR 794 in anterior view.....	214
78. Distal view of the proximal tarsals of the right hindlimb of MOR 794	215
79. Left calcaneum of MOR 794 in lateral view.....	217
80. Distal view of the left pes of MOR 794.....	223
81. Subadult composite pes in dorsodistal view	224
82. Subadult composite pes in dorsal view.....	227
83. Left pes of MOR 794 in lateral view.....	230
84. Pedal unguals in dorsal view.....	237

85. Pedal ungual III showing a plantar keel (MOR 1071-7-31-99-273	239
86. Nasal crest in morph A	288
87. Right lateral view of the skull roof MOR 1071-7-7-98-86.....	289
88. Nasal crest in morph B.....	290
89. Cladogram showing the phylogenetic position of <i>Brachylophosaurus</i>	294

ABSTRACT

The recovery of an adult articulated, complete skeleton and more than 1,300 specimens from a bonebed of the hadrosaurid dinosaur *Brachylophosaurus canadensis* allowed a reexamination of the morphologic features of this taxon. The fossils were recovered from Upper Cretaceous (Campanian) Judith River of northeastern Montana. The bones were first described element by element in order to produce a complete redescription of the whole skeleton. Secondly, a systematic analysis of the morphological variation present in each element was conducted. Finally, a revision of the systematic position of this taxon was undertaken.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The dinosaurs of the family Hadrosauridae have been more intensely studied and we possess more fossil evidence about them than on any other dinosaur group. Yet, despite the current amount of data available, there are still gaps concerning the current knowledge of these creatures. For example, relatively little attention has been paid to their postcrania (Brett-Surman, 1976; Maryańska and Osmolska, 1983; Maryańska and Osmolska, 1984) in relation to the amount of work carried out on their cranial material. Thus, most diagnosis and studies have been focused on the skull (Ostrom, 1961; Heaton, 1972; Hopson, 1975; Maryańska and Osmolska, 1979; Weishampel, 1981b; Horner, 1992), plus some features of the appendicular skeleton (Chapman and Brett-Surman, 1990; Weishampel and Horner, 1990), probably because it is the most easily distinctive part of their anatomy. Likewise, a detailed morphological description of all the skeleton elements is not common in the literature, in spite of the vast quantity of specimens collected since the middle of the nineteenth-century (Lull and Wright, 1942; Colbert, 1984). Abundant hadrosaurid remains, including complete and partial skeletons, eggs, nests, babies and even integument (Horner, 1984) remains have been collected during the past hundred and fifty years in North and South America (Lull and Wright, 1942; Dodson, 1971; Horner, 1983; Bonaparte et al., 1984; Head, 1998), Europe (Weishampel et al., 1993; Laurent et al., 1997; Company et al., 1998; Casanovas et al., 1999) and Asia (Maryańska and Osmolska, 1982; Buffetaut and Tong-Buffetaut, 1993). Thus, we not

only have information on hadrosaur anatomy and evolutionary history (Hopson, 1975; Weishampel, 1981b; Horner, 1990), but also on behavior and life strategies (Horner and Makela, 1979; Horner, 1982; Horner and Currie, 1994; Cooper and Horner, 1999), functional morphology (Galton, 1970; Weishampel, 1981a; Norman and Weishampel, 1985), paleoecology (Weishampel and Norman, 1989; Chin and Gill, 1996) and taphonomy and sedimentology of its fossil occurrences (Dodson, 1971).

Morphological differences in some areas of the hadrosaurid skeleton are so subtle that preservational effects can easily obliterate them. Hence it is usually difficult to use some skeletal elements (especially those that are evolutionary conservative) for diagnosis, variation and generally any study emphasizing fine morphological observation, in the hadrosaurid material available.

In 1996 a practically complete, fully articulated skeleton of an adult "duck-billed" dinosaur of the genus *Brachylophosaurus*, was excavated from Judith River Formation strata near Malta, northeastern Montana (Harmon, 1997; Horner and Dobb, 1997). Posteriorly, the articulated hindquarters of a subadult were uncovered, but never prepared. In the summers of 1998 and 1999, a paucispecific, multiindividual bone bed was excavated in the vicinity of the other two sites (LaRock, 2000). Detailed sedimentologic and taphonomic studies were conducted on the bonebed (LaRock, 2000).

The purpose of this study is first to redescribe *Brachylophosaurus* on the basis of the new material. Specific goals of this research include: (1) to provide a descriptive model of a hadrosaurid dinosaur, (2) determine the degree and type of morphologic variation existing among the available specimens, and (3) reassess the phylogenetic

position of this taxon, as well as the characters useful for hadrosaurid phylogenetic systematics. It is hoped that the osteology and variation presented in this thesis will contribute to the detailed understanding of hadrosaur anatomy, providing a complete description to be used in further anatomical studies on "duck-billed" dinosaurs.

General Geologic Context

The Judith River Formation forms a terrigenous wedge west of the front of the Rocky Mountains with its contemporaneous counterpart, the western Two Medicine Formation. The Two Medicine Formation - Judith River clastic wedge (fig. 1), located in the Western Interior of the United States and the southern Western Canada sedimentary basin, has been a major source of dinosaur and other Late Cretaceous fossil remains and information for the past century (Currie, 1987; Eberth, 1997). The sites to be studied in project belong to this clastic wedge.

These nonmarine sediments are interpreted as the remains of an extensive alluvial plain that stretched from the west rising front of the Cordilleran thrust belt to the western shoreline of the Western Interior Seaway. The lowest deposits may be Santonian in the westernmost outcrops and the youngest are early Maastrichtian (Rogers et al., 1993). The wedge formed as the result of the deposition of terrigenous material shed from the thrust belt front into its foreland basin, during a major regressive-transgressive cycle of the Western Interior Seaway (Kauffman and Caldwell, 1993). The wedge thins eastwards and interfingers up section with the transgressive, marine Bearpaw Formation, and down section with the marine, regressive Clagget Formation (Montana) and the Pakowki-Lea

Park Formation (southern Alberta). Below the lower nonmarine sandstones of the Eagle Formation in Montana and the Milk River Group in southern Alberta are present (Eberth, 1997). The middle portion of that broad alluvial plain is lost due to the erosion of strata from the Sweetgrass Arch. In fact, this post-Cretaceous erosional event isolated the Two Medicine Formation in western Montana from its correlative strata to the east, the marine Clagget Formation, nonmarine Judith River Formation and the marine Bearpaw Formation (Rogers, 1994). The Two Medicine-Judith River wedge and its interfingering marine correlatives are overlaid by the Maastrichtian Saint Mary River Formation in the west and the Hell Creek Formation in the east.

Stratal packages range from mudstones to litharenites and volcanic litharenites, and represent a wide array of paleoenvironments – beach and barrier island complexes, deltas, lakes, floodplains and fluvial channel systems (Eberth, 1997).

The strata of the Judith River Formation represent the more distal portion of the alluvial plain and thin eastwards towards the Cretaceous shoreline of the Western Interior Seaway. The deposits formed as the result of an eustatic fall of the sea level during Campanian time. The formation correlates in southern Alberta with the Belly River Group and the Judith River Group (Foremost, Oldman and Dinosaur Park Formations) (fig. 2) (Eberth, 1997). The outcrops of the Judith River Formation can be found in central Montana and south Alberta, and represent a coastal plain with fluvial, lacustrine and deltaic environments developed under a subtropical to temperate climate (Horner, 1989). The terrigenous material is chiefly composed of grayish to brownish siltstone and mudstones interbedded with medium-grained sandstone (Rogers, 1993).

Hadrosaur remains from the Judith River Formation are rather fragmentary in Montana, in contrast to the more complete and articulated specimens found in Alberta (Waldman, 1969; Horner, 1988; Currie, 1987; Weishampel, 1990). The material described here, recovered from Malta, may well be among the most complete and beautifully preserved hadrosaurid remains ever collected.

Location and taphonomy of the bone-bearing strata

The specimens herein studied were recovered from sites located in Phillips County, about 15 miles north of Malta, and 50 miles south of the Canadian border. The strata correspond to the lower portion of the Judith River Formation, in the Upper Cretaceous (Campanian). The Malta bonebed lies stratigraphically close to the underlying marine Clagget Shale, suggesting that these dinosaurs may have lived relatively near the shore of the Western Interior Seaway (LaRock, 2000).

In this area, the Judith River Formation outcrops are exposed in badlands located on the Bureau of Land Management lands. The tan-colored sandstones that entombed the Malta hadrosaurs are medium grained and well sorted. In the field area the Judith River Formation is composed by interbedded quartz rich, fine to medium grained sandstones and mudstones (LaRock, 2000). Fossil plant material is common and consists of isolated wood fragments, and interbedded plant material and sand layers (LaRock, 2000).

The taphonomy and sedimentology of the Malta bonebed, conducted by Jeff LaRock (2000), indicates that the deposit accumulated in a shallow sandy meandering channel under lower flow regime conditions. Likewise, the channel, which is of rather

small scale and nine meters from the underlying shoreface Parkman Sandstone, may have been a distributary one close to the paleoshoreline (LaRock, 2000). A tree trunk was found lying across the bonebed. The high degree of association coupled with the lack of hydraulic equivalence between the bones and the grain size of the sediment led LaRock to suggest that "the hadrosaurs arrived in the quarry as bloated carcasses and accumulated on the unstream portion of a fallen tree" (LaRock, 2000). This logjam was subsequently scavenged, disarticulated and slightly weathered. The accumulation of the hadrosaur remains probably represents a period not surpassing five years, based on the presence of bark on the tree (LaRock, 2000). The bonebed represents the remains of at least four subadults and two adult *Brachylophosaurus*. No evidence suggests herding behavior or that the animals were together at the moment of death.

Material and Methods

The complete list of the specimens studied can be found in Appendix A. In brief, the redescription, variation, and taxonomy of *Brachylophosaurus canadensis* is based on complete adult, articulated skeleton MOR 794, the more than 1,000 prepared specimens from the Malta bonebed (MOR 1071), a few cranial elements collected in the early twentieth century in Alberta, Canada (PB 862), and a fragmentary nasal UCB 130139.

The bone material of MOR 1071 and MOR 794 shows minimal weathering, none or very slight abrasion, some fractures, crushing, and a few tooth marks. MOR 794 is mediolaterally compressed due to lithostatic pressure probably, but otherwise is exquisitely preserved.

MOR 1071 includes complete and partial cranial elements such as premaxilla, nasal, prefrontal, frontal, lacrimal, postorbital, jugal, maxilla, pterygoid, ectopterygoid, palatine, prementary, dentary, quadratojugal surangular, splenial, squamosal, including two articulated braincases in partial skulls (nearly complete roof skulls); and either complete or partial postcranial elements including cervical, dorsal, sacral and caudal vertebrae, sternals, scapula, coracoid, humerus, ulna, radius, pubis, ilium, ischium, femur, tibia, fibula, carpals, tarsals, metacarpals, metatarsals, manual and pedal phalanges, including unguals.

The MOR 794 and 1071 specimens were hardened with vinac and were prepared during the last five years. In fact, as this manuscript is written, more jackets are still being opened providing more elements from the Malta bonebed that will not be included here due to the limitations of time.

The bones are characteristically tan-colored and show minimal permineralization or infilling. The immense majority of specimens fall in the 0 and 1 weathering stages of Behrensmeyer (1978). The stage 1 of weathering is seen in the form of mosaic-cracking patterns on the articular surface of mostly vertebrae (especially caudals) and distal limb elements such as phalanges and unguals (LaRock, 2000, fig. 10A). Spiral fractures are also present in some specimens and are interpreted by LaRock (2000) as prefossilization breakage. A few specimens, dentary (MOR 1071-8-15-98-574), a partial nasal (MOR 1071-7-12-99-76), and two vertebrae, show deep grooves possibly indicative of tooth marks. The case of the dentary is very compelling, as it includes two deep and sharp grooves plus a puncture mark in its vicinity. Eight bones from the bonebed show

pathologies (Hanna et al., 1999). Perhaps the most remarkable is a subadult metacarpal II with a bone overgrown.

This work was accomplished by first describing the skeleton of *Brachylophosaurus* in a rather systematic way, starting for the postcrania and ending up in the braincase. For organization purposes, the description is arranged in cranial and postcranial (appendicular and axial) osteology. Within the cranial description, the skull is organized in facial, palatal, mandibular and neurocranial segments or regions. The facial elements are those exposed externally and around the maxilla, a major bone in the skull. The neurocranial complex includes the braincase and the frontal and parietal, which are intimately related to the former.

Once the dinosaur was fully described, attention was paid to the analysis of the variation present among the fossil material. The two age classes found in the bonebed represent ontogenetic variation. Individual and, possibly dimorphic, variations were also studied and described.

Finally, a new diagnosis of the taxon was established, along with a revision of the systematic position of *Brachylophosaurus*. It should be emphasized that the phylogeny here presented is rather limited by the time and taxonomic sample size available to me, and is intended only as a way to provide a phylogenetic context to *Brachylophosaurus*. Most of the characters employed were taken from a recent list by Horner, Weishampel and Forster (personal communication). Some characters were modified, several others deleted, and a few ones added to the list used here. The resulting matrix was input into MacClade 3.0 and PAUP, to obtain the tree herein presented.

The hadrosaur fossil material is here assigned to the species *Brachylophosaurus canadensis*. All the hadrosaur non-diagnostic elements from the Malta sites are also placed in this taxon, assuming that they follow the diagnosis suggested by the other elements. This is considered here the most parsimonious and probable hypothesis on the taxonomic precedence of these remains.

Numerous measurements were taken of several dimensions and features of the osteologic elements, whenever the landmark was complete enough. Linear measurements were taken with a caliper, while a few angular measures were taken with a conventional protractor. The measurements are intended to provide an idea of the dimensions of the different features of the skeletal elements. Although very precise figures are given, they should not be taken as the actual measures of the features, since breakage, abrasion, crushing, concealing by articulation and other preservational artifacts commonly affect the remains.

CHAPTER 2

SYSTEMATIC PALEONTOLOGY

Ornithopoda Marsh, 1871

Iguanodontia Dollo, 1888

Hadrosauridae Cope, 1869

Brachylophosaurus Sternberg, 1953

Brachylophosaurus canadensis (Sternberg, 1953)

(= *B. goodwini* Horner, 1988)

Revised Diagnosis

Hadrosaurid possessing a subrectangular skull, with a relatively deep snout; nasals greatly developed into a paddle-like solid crest that extends caudodorsally overhanging the dorsal region of the skull; nasals possessing an anteroposteriorly-oriented groove terminating in an elongated foramen, located medial to the prefrontal; prefrontal projected posteriorly, resting dorsomedially over the anterior process of postorbital and, more posteriorly, extending ventromedially underlying the nasal; jugal with a ventrally projected semicircular flange, in overall a deeper element than in *Maiasaura*, but more lightly built than in gryposaurs, saurolophs and edmontosaurs; extremely elongated, rod-like anterodorsal process of the maxilla

projecting medial to the narial cavity along most of the anteroposterior length of the external naris; depressed dorsal surface of the frontal between the nasal joint and the postorbital suture; anteroposteriorly short exoccipital-supraoccipital roof posterior and dorsal to the foramen magnum; sternals with a compressed, oval "paddle"; and very elongated, slender forearm due to elongation of radii and ulnae.

Referred Specimens

MOR 794, a complete adult articulated skeleton lacking only the distal part of the tail; MOR 1071, more than 800 subadult and adult specimens from a paucispecific bonebed, including disarticulated or partially articulated and/or associated coracoids, scapulae, sternals, ilia, pubes, ischia, cervical, dorsal, sacral and caudal vertebrae, ribs, humeri, radii, ulnae, carpals, metacarpals, phalanges, femora, tibiae, fibulae, tarsals, metatarsals, pedal phalanges, premaxillae, maxillae, a partial nasal, prefrontals, postorbitals, jugals, quadratojugals, quadrates, dentaries, a prementary, splenials, surangular, angulars, articulars, pterygoids, ectopterygoids, palatines, frontals, and two articulated skull roofs with preserved braincases, plus an articulated partial subadult skull. PR 862 is a partial skull roof with associated jugals, dentaries, pterygoid, nasals, right surangular, angulars, and left quadrate. UCB 130139, a partial nasal from the holotype of *B. goodwini* (Horner, 1988).

Locality

The adult quarry of MOR 794 (MOR locality JR-168) and the bonebed of MOR 1071 (MOR locality JR-224) correspond to two sites located in Phillips County, about 17 miles north of Malta, northeastern Montana, 54 miles from the Canadian Border (LaRock, 2000). PR 862 was found in 1922 by the Elmer S. Riggs expedition, in the Red Deer River area, north of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. The nasal UCB 130139 is part of the material found by Mark Goodwin in 1981 in the Judith River Formation, UCMF locality no. V83125, Canadian Creek, Hill County, Montana.

Horizon

MOR 794 and MOR 1071 correspond to the Judith River Formation. PR 862 was unearthed from strata pertaining to the Two Medicine Formation. Both formations are Campanian in age.

Discussion

Sternberg (1953) originally named and described briefly *Brachylophosaurus canadensis* on the basis of a complete skull, cervical and anterior dorsal vertebrae, ribs, scapulae, coracoids, humeri, left ulna, and radius. These specimens came from the Oldman (Judith River) Formation of southern Alberta. In 1988 Horner emended Sternberg's diagnosis, characterizing *Brachylophosaurus* by the possession of a solid and low, sheet-like, nasal crest caudally directed, a nasal depression that do not extends to the crest, lightly constructed jugal with a ventrally projecting boss and an craniocaudally

short supraoccipital-exoccipital roof caudal to the foramen magnum (Horner 1988, emended diagnosis). This diagnosis is here enhanced to accommodate a few more characters.

In the same 1988 paper, Horner described and named a new species of *Brachylophosaurus*, *B. goodwini*, from fragmentary cranial elements from the Judith River Fm. of Montana. This taxon is here considered invalid and a junior synonym of *B. canadensis*. Horner diagnosed *B. goodwini* on the basis of a deep and rounded dorsal depression or pit at or near the junction of the frontal and postorbital, dorsally concave upper process of the nasal, posterolateral surface of nasal reaching orbital rim, and quadratojugal process of the jugal parallel with postorbital process (Horner, 1988).

The depression on the dorsal surface of the frontal near the postorbital joint has been also found in the Malta specimens. The subadults MOR 1071-7-13-99-87-I and MOR 1071-6-30-98-4 show depressed areas near the postorbital suture. These depressions are elongated, but individual and/or ontogenetic variation might account for that discrepancy with Horner's observation.

The nasal characters are probably resulting from the wrong reconstruction of the fragmentary remains of this element studied by Horner. Horner interpreted the nasal UCB 130139 as having a concave relief, in contrast to the arched relief of the holotype and the other specimens of *Brachylophosaurus canadensis*. However, a closer comparison with the MOR 794 and MOR 1071 specimens shows that the UCB nasal was oriented in the opposite direction. When correctly oriented, the UCB nasal fragment corresponds probably to the supra to preorbital region of the skull and follows the outline of the

typical *Brachylophosaurus* skull. The only difference is the large size of the UCB specimen. The parallel quadratojugal and postorbital process of the jugal is a case of individual variation. MOR 794 shows jugals with postorbital processes only slightly divergent. Among the bonebed specimens of available there is a degree of variation in the divergence between the postorbital and quadratojugal processes, coupled with a remarkable variation in the size and shape of the quadratojugal process (but see variation).

CHAPTER 3

OSTEOLOGIC DESCRIPTION

This chapter, the major section of this project, is intended as a redescription, as detailed as possible, of *Brachylophosaurus canadensis*. It revises and enhances the account given by Sternberg in his original paper in 1953, in the light of the new, more diverse and complete specimens. The text is organized in cranial and postcranial osteologies. The postcrania is split into appendicular and axial skeletons. The appendicular skeleton includes all the elements excluding the vertebral column and the ribs, being more or less related to the limbs. The cranial section is mainly divided into mandibular, facial, palatal, and neurocranial complexes, in a similar, but not exact, way of Ostrom (1961). Facial complex is preferred here instead of maxillary complex (Ostrom, 1961; Horner, 1992), since, although the maxilla is the major element in that segment of the skull, not all the elements included in that area contact the maxilla. Facial complex elements here are those exposed externally on the skull, exception made of the ones associated with the braincase and the mandibular segment. The other cranial complexes considered here follow the organization of Ostrom (1961).

General Description of the Skull

The skull of *Brachylophosaurus canadensis*, as exemplified by MOR 794 (Fig. 1) and the MOR 1071 specimens, is about two and half times longer than deep. The skull is relatively broad mediolaterally, especially across the postorbital width and the paroccipital processes, where the skull is one third as wide as it is long. In lateral view,

the dorsal border of the skull is anteriorly arched and sloping along the anterior third, close and from the nasal-premaxilla joint. Along the posterior two thirds of the dorsal border the skull is rather straight, only rising posterodorsally very gently due to the projection of the nasal crest. The ventral border of the skull is also rather straight and mainly formed by the ventral edge of the dentary, the anteroventral deflection of which is slight in MOR 794, but much more remarkable in PR 862.

Brachylophosaurus shows a ellipsoidal, anteroposteriorly elongated and large external naris. The premaxilla forms the anterior edge of the narial cavity, while the nasal forms a lunate posterior border. The ventral border of the external naris is formed by the dorsal edge of the posteroventral process of the premaxilla. The dorsal border of the narial cavity is mostly formed by a laterally convex anterodorsal process of the nasal. The anterodorsal process of the maxilla can be seen crossing almost all the narial cavity anteroventrally as a narrow and long rod-like projection. A relatively large maxillary foramen opens anterolaterally, its anterior edge bounded by the lateral border of the posteroventral process of the premaxilla. The orbit is oval, relatively more elongated dorsoventrally. The longest axis of the orbital cavity extends in a dorsoposterior to anteroventral direction, about 20-25 degrees from a vertical line. The orbit is relatively very large and its anterodorsal edge is sharp and rugose, formed by a prefrontal that overlaps the dorsal face of the anterior process of the postorbital to underlie the nasal. Likewise, the posterodorsal and posterior edges of the orbit, formed by the postorbital, are still more rugose, notched and mediolaterally expanded at the dorsal area of the jugal

