



'Accidental Mummies' from mining town of Guanajuato, Mexico make US debut in Detroit

The Associated Press

Thursday, October 8th 2009, 7:39 PM

Through a replica of cemetery gates, a new exhibition offers a glimpse into the lives of people whose bodies were accidentally mummified in the mining town of [Guanajuato, Mexico](#), more than a century ago.

Thirty-six mummies on loan from Guanajuato's Museo de las Momias ([Museum of the Mummies](#)) go on public display Saturday at the [Detroit Science Center](#) as part of the "Accidental Mummies of Guanajuato" traveling exhibit.

The roughly \$2 million project marks the first time the mummies have been shown in the U.S. Using scientific, historical and cultural research, the exhibit explores the lives of miners, soldiers, farmers and children whose bodies were mummified and stored in aboveground crypts.

"This is listening to these mummified remains tell their story," said [Ronald Beckett](#), a professor emeritus at [Quinnipiac University in Connecticut](#) who studies the Guanajuato mummies and helped research the exhibit.

"Accidental Mummies" is designed to tell the story of Guanajuato, its culture and its people.

Past the exhibit gates — replicating the portal at the cemetery where the first Guanajuato mummy was discovered in 1865 — visitors walk through a room bordered with crypts, where they learn about Mexican traditions surrounding death. At one end, five mummies are displayed behind glass as they might have looked in their crypts.

Visitors then enter the main exhibition space, where 21 mummies — some positioned as if standing upright — are shown. Each mummy is accompanied by text in English and Spanish that gives his or her name, an estimate of the age at which the person died, and details about his or her life.

"Whether you worked in a mine or you were a soldier ... you had a significant place in making Guanajuato what it was at that period," said [Martina Guzman](#), the exhibit's content developer. "All of these people were that."

According to local legend, the bodies were preserved because the city's water is rich with minerals and sulfur. But Beckett, former co-host of "The Mummy Road Show" on the [National Geographic Channel](#), said researchers believe hot weather warmed the crypts, drying out the bodies.

Beckett and Quinnipiac colleague [Jerry Conlogue](#) have studied two-thirds of the roughly 110 mummies in the Guanajuato museum's collection. But preparations for the [Detroit](#) exhibit offered a closer look, including CT scans of seven mummies performed at a [Dearborn](#) imaging center.

With the scans, Beckett said researchers were able to learn more about medical problems of those whose bodies were mummified. Those findings were incorporated into the displays, and the scientific techniques used — from DNA testing to forensic facial reconstruction — are highlighted in the exhibit.