

Rolling in Deep Time: The Paleoart of U-HAUL®



Above: The very first dinosaur graphic, circa late 1980s.

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For some twenty million Americans, summer is a time for moving. A time to move forward with the past behind you. Or perhaps, ahead of you. If you have lived here for the last two decades, chances are that the past – namely dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals - have rolled right past you in traffic. Perhaps you have rode along with them.

Forty million people make residential moves every year in North America. A great majority rent trucks from the prime do-it-yourself mover U-Haul®, a Phoenix, Arizona-based company which was established in 1945 with only a few trailers but grew to a 42,600 vehicle fleet within its first 15 years. Today, at over 20,000 locations, nearly a quarter of a million trucks are available for rental, no longer simply sporting the familiar company logo but each adorned with eye-catching, colorful SuperGraphics™ representing American states and Canadian provinces. Eleven of the 75 Classic and 61 modern images that crisscross America every day of the year would be of “passing” interest to readers of *Prehistoric Times*.

You may remember one of the Classic SuperGraphics™ done for Utah but now retired along with others in the first campaign, America’s Moving Adventure™. It features a standing *Tyrannosaurus*, clearly based on Zdenek Burian’s 1970 painting of *Tarbosaurus* - albeit with a slightly crocodilian head. The six color graphic was created by freelance artists in the late 1980s, during which there was a limited research process. Had there been a formalized process at the time, that Cretaceous dinosaur may have been traded for a Jurassic dinosaur to more accurately represent the finds at Dinosaur National Monument.

Notably, famously dinosaur rich Western states Wyoming, Colorado and Montana do not have any trucks promoting their fossil quarries. Marketing account executive/Supergraphics™ project coordinator Shannon Myers explains that “U-Haul® didn’t specifically set out to single out states with dinosaurs. The focus was broadened to other unexplored concepts. We try to have a range that appeals to different age groups and interests. We cover a lot of science in our designs but occasionally mysterious places such as ‘Area 51’ for Nevada, or little known historical facts like the Underground Railroad that led to Ontario.”

In 1997, the Venture Across America and Canada™ campaigns began, an effort to arouse curiosity and intrigue by illustrating a concept that evokes a particular state’s national park or tourist attraction, although none of the locations sponsor or profit from the ubiquitous, free advertising.

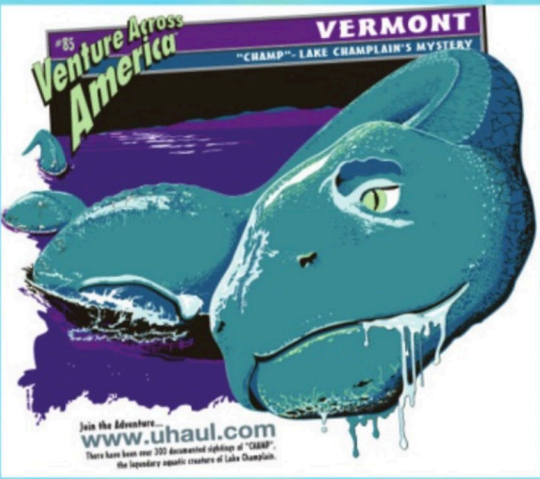
The artwork conceptualization process begins with a research team raiding media for ideas, compiling a list of regional phenomena in a given state, then vetting the ideas for maximum visual impact. Myers worked closely with senior illustrator Steve King on many of the SuperGraphics™ to ensure accuracy. Once the theme is decided, scientists may be consulted for more information, reference material or approval of the final render or description which accompanies each design, usually written at broad-reach-

ing high school level.

Legendary lake monster “Champ”, named after Vermont’s Lake Champlain, added cryptids to the moving menagerie only a year into the campaign. The description encourages the interested to learn about the real plesiosaurs upon which its image is based. Motorists may double-take at the ‘Tully monster’ from Mazon Creek in Illinois. Myers points out that this image was requested for use by a paleontologist in England, suggesting a fair bit of international intrigue in countries without a single U-Haul® vehicle. *Tullimonstrum*, thought to be a kind of segmented worm when designed in 2000, was recently identified as a lamprey. In the ever-changing world of paleontology, new research

begets new artistic depictions rendering older restorations obsolete. U-Haul® art should be valid for at least ten years (the life of most trucks), but don’t expect Hagerman horse to lose its stripes because scientists discover its fur was brown. Myers explains that “when new information is found we can always add in new text into the descriptions but artwork stays unchanged.”

A sea turtle representing landlocked South Dakota? Read the small print: A-ha! Giant *Archelon* once roamed the Western Interior Seaway. In 2000, this second true prehistoric vertebrate was an alternative to another dinosaur – the second of which was unveiled five years later. Connecticut’s lush green *Eubrontes*, an ichnotaxon inspired by the still quite accurately created *Dilophosaurus* statue at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill, remains one of the most popular designs.

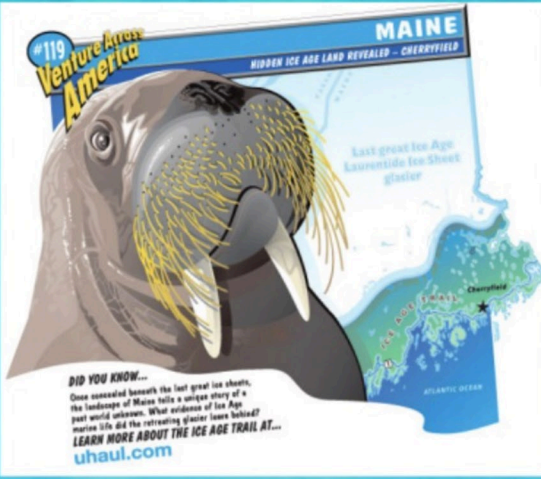


King originally envisioned a Jurassic Park-style movie monster breaking out of the side of the truck but was disappointed with the final “textbook style” selection, which was not only scientifically better but also tasteful and less frightening. To this point, Myers attests that “scientists, researchers



and historians have been impressed by the lengths our team goes to ensure we are accurate in such depictions.”

U-Haul®’s other “paleotrucks” may not be recognizable to those unfamiliar with megafauna. Presented in 2005, that New York “elephant” is actually the Hyde Park Mastodon. Introduced in 2006, a walrus represents Maine’s little-known Ice Age heritage. Idaho’s “Zebra” from 2007, is actually the ancestral Hagerman Horse. Ashfall Fossil Beds’ *Teleoceras* (first seen in 2008) may seem to be just an ordinary “Rhino” on Nebraska.



In 2010, Tennessee’s Miocene Red Panda *Pristinailurus* and dwarf tapir, can easily be mistaken for extant species. Unveiled 2013, Yukon features Canada’s only U-Haul® prehistoric as of yet, *Camelops*, which again, could be mistaken for a modern day camel.

“Actually you are looking at a modern day camel”, Myers admits. “For the Yukon project, we picked the prehistoric camel because normally one would not think a desert animal like a camel had any connection to a land of snow and ice.” King had proposed a number of layouts for Myers and the



research team to vet. “He proposed a single camel, a herd, and a skeleton. The Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre had little in the way of reference material except skeletons so Steve went to the Phoenix Zoo to photograph camels. Out of dozens of shots, some with full bodies, he thought that particular head shot was the best angle to use.”

Indeed, for most of the megafauna, only giant heads are visible as opposed to the entire bodies. As Myers explains, “we found that the most successful graphics tend to have heads or faces popping out of the graphic - you can recognize them from a great distance down the road.” The color schemes tend to feature shades of cool, icy gray, blue, teal, and indigo for good reason. “You don’t see a lot of red on our images because Steve found blues and purples better contrast the orange, black and white colors of the trucks.” Due to its complicated artistry, Nebraska’s *Teleoceras* ended up being King’s favorite out of any he ever designed.

An approved digital illustration usually takes one month from concept to completion. Each is blown up to accommodate machine cut decals that fit 10 foot, 14 foot and 17 foot trucks, the largest of which is 11 feet wide x 8 feet tall for 26 foot long trucks. There’s literally an inside joke in every Supergraphic™, too as King concealed into the details an image of the company’s older mascot, “Sammy U”, a little man carrying a giant letter “U”. Named after founder L.S. “Sam” Shoen, its random placement was often selected by King’s young daughter, many in background maps that accompany some of the recent designs, a concept encouraged by CEO E.J. “Joe” Shoen. “The geographical awareness is

very important to him – that enough info is there for a parent to talk to a child about what they are seeing”, says Myers.

In fact, E.J. “Joe” Shoen, one of founder “Sam” Shoen’s sons, personally approves every SuperGraphic™ before it goes out, stating “the space each graphic occupies on our

trucks is priceless. It’s not for sale. We could sell this space to corporate America, but U-Haul® believes we must give something back to the communities we serve.” Myers agrees with Shoen’s principles, adding “the potential to make millions off of what essentially could be moving billboards is there but we choose to promote educational messages instead.” A web URL on each truck encourages readers to learn more about these animals and their ancient environments via the company web site, which offers a “Thank you” to North America, “for the mysteries you have revealed to us.” America should also thank U-Haul® for their commitment in taking

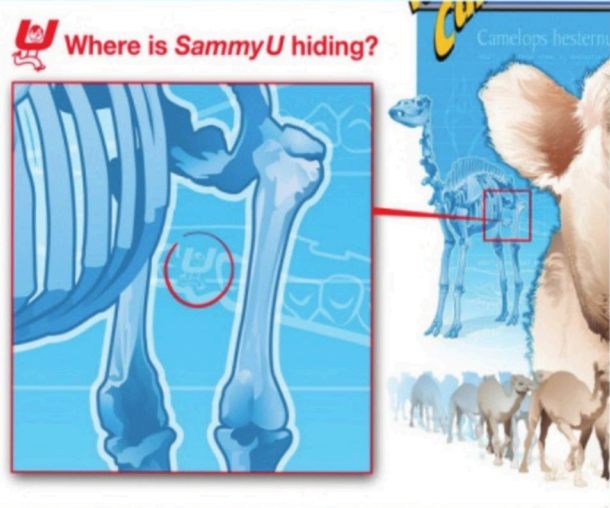
the longer, high road to stimulating intellect rather than the faster, low route to selling out.

Thousands of letters and e-mails have been received from people who want to learn more about the art program. Many inquire about ordering SuperGraphics™ shirts that were produced for official unveilings, or merchandise such as coloring books, pages from which can be downloaded and printed off the web site.

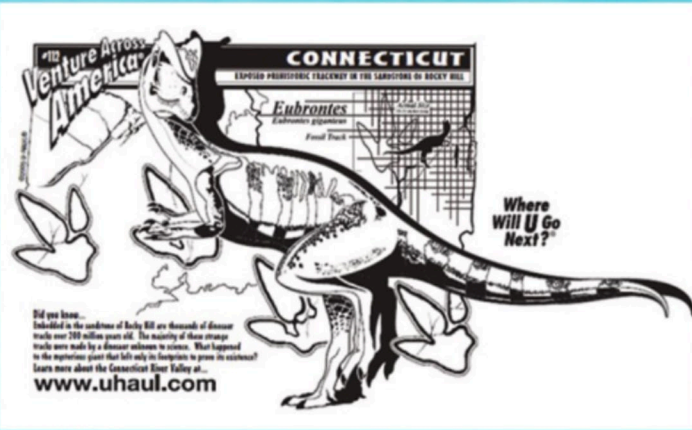
A few states remain without new Supergraphics™. Arizona - Petrified Forest? Kansas – *Tylosaurus* breaching to attack *Pteranodon* over the Niobrara Sea? Washington D.C. - *Capitalsaurus*? All possibilities. When new SuperGraphics™ are added, perhaps our future highway adventures will be alongside trilobites, eurypterids, placoderms, pelycosaur, pterosaurs, mosasaurs, saber teeth, and terror birds. Suggestions are welcome to publicrelations@uhaul.com.

U-Haul® just may pull some of your suggestions off - without a hitch.

Trademarks Sammy U™, America’s Moving



Above: Sammy U’s location in the Yukon art.



Above: Sample coloring book page.

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