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Collecting Titanosaurid Sauropods in Mongolia

The Polish-Mongolian Palaeontological Expeditions recovered two sauropods in 1965 from the Nemegt Formation of Mongolia. The nicely preserved, complete skull became the holotype of *Nemegtosaurus mongoliensis*. The second specimen was found 50km away in the same formation and consisted of most of the skeleton except for the skull and neck; it became the holotype of *Opisthocoelicaudia skarzynskii*. The two sauropods were assigned to different sauropod families that had previously been found in North America and Africa, although by the end of the twentieth century both of the Mongolian genera had been recognized as titanosaurid sauropods. If that had been recognized initially, then they might have been classified as the same species. However, because the holotypes of *Nemegtosaurus* and *Opisthocoelicaudia* do not include any overlapping skeletal parts, then it is difficult to reverse the process and prove that they are the same. In 2007 and 2016, we succeeded in finding the quarries where the specimens had been collected from, and it was obvious that all of the *Nemegtosaurus* had not been collected. Unfortunately, the postcranial bones of this animal were buried under more than 5m of siltstone and sandstone. This was almost certainly why more of the specimen had not been collected in 1965. We set out to find money, manpower and time to overcome this problem, and everything came together in September, 2023. With a crew of more than 20 Mongolians and a dream team consisting mostly of my former students, we succeeded in removing more than 200 metric tonnes of rock from above the *Nemegtosaurus* skeleton. We now have more than twenty overlapping bones of *Nemegtosaurus* and *Opisthocoelicaudia*, and are confident that once they are cleaned up and studied, we will be able to convince everyone that they are the same species. This certainly makes more sense in that the environment in that region was highly stressed, and is not the kind of place where you would expect to find such a diversity of such large dinosaur species.