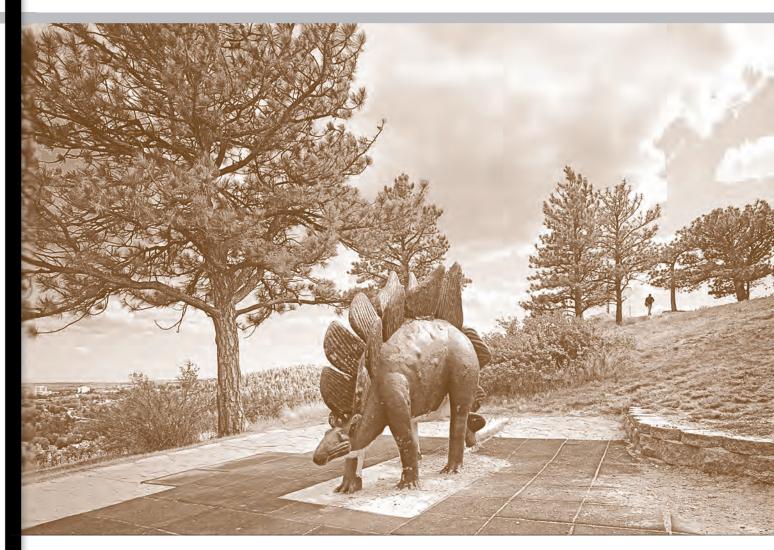# ARTIFACT

Dinosaur Park

DINOSAUR DIGGING IS A POPULAR TOURIST ACTIVITY in South Dakota, with its fossil-rich landscape. But one of the most loved attractions might be the above-ground dinosaurs. Perched atop a sandstone ridge overlooking Rapid City, not far from where the real thing roamed, stand five life-sized concrete and steel dinos. **LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**—and recently photographed by Renee Bieretz of the Historic American Buildings Survey—Dinosaur Park is home to a Triceratops, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Stegosaurus, Trachodon, and a 28-foot-tall Brontosaurus that is visible for miles. "It is one of the most elaborate examples of roadside tourist sculpture in the state," notes the National Register nomination. **A QUICK GOOGLE SEARCH REVEALS** dozens of dinosaur parks across the country, but in 1936, when this one was constructed, the concept was new, possibly inspired by the mechanically operated Brontosaurus at Chicago's 1933-34 Century of Progress International Exposition. "The creation of concrete dinosaurs hit three nerves in the American aesthetic," notes the nomination, "a sense of the history of the West, an enjoyment of things scaled larger than present-day life, and a sneaky enjoyment of being frightened." Built as a WPA project, to provide jobs and attract more tourists to the Black Hills (home of the new Mt. Rushmore), the dinos were designed by sculptor Emmet Sullivan, who was also key in creating the now defunct Dinosaur World in Beaver, Arkansas, once the world's largest dinosaur park. **THE GREEN-PAINTED STATUES HAVE SEEN BETTER DAYS**—a chunk of the Brontosaurus snout recently fell off. Maintaining the 20-acre city-owned site, which also features a gift shop, snack bar, and "100 Mile" views, has been difficult, but there are plans for a fundraising foundation. "Generation after generation have visited the park with children and grandchildren to have their pictures taken with them," says city parks manager Lon VanDeusen. "It seems that many have pictures of the family from earlier visits when they were kids."