Book explores the deep history of shoes and showcases work of Brian Lanker

"10,000 Years of Shoes" blends both artistry and how shoes have impacted the human experience

EUGENE, Ore. – (Dec. 2, 2011) – The new book "10,000 Years of Shoes: The Photographs of Brian Lanker" -- produced by the Museum of Natural and Cultural History at the University of Oregon -- explores the form, function, history and diversity of shoes, with stunning photos by Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist Brian Lanker.

Edited by Jon Erlandson and Sarah McClure -- and including essays by Thomas Connolly, Erlandson, Petr Hlavacek and Kenny Moore -- the book connects two ends of a spectrum that have become hallmarks of the UO: the museum's famed collection of 10,000-year-old sagebrush bark sandals, the world's oldest known shoes, with the innovations in running shoes developed by Bill Bowerman, Phil Knight, and Nike from the 1960s on.

The story is beautifully woven together by the photographs of Brian Lanker, whose original idea for the book was inspired by visiting the museum's 2008 exhibit "Walk a Mile in These Shoes." Held during the U.S. Olympic Trials hosted at Hayward Field and the revival of Eugene's moniker as TrackTown USA, the museum's exhibit featured the ancient sandals collection and early Bowerman/Nike designs, as well as shoes from a diverse array of cultures and time periods. This diversity demonstrated that shoes not only protect the foot but also communicate information about individuals: from geographic area to physical stature, economic status and personal style.

When the exhibit came down, Lanker photographed dozens of the shoes before returning them to museum vaults or owners. The photographs captured shoes with styles ranging from purely functional to purely -- and outlandishly -- about style. Favorites from the exhibit, such as the platform-heeled silver boots worn by a member of the rock band KISS to runner Steve Prefontaine's big swoosh running shoes from 1971, showcase a wide range of footwear.

Lanker's personal passion in creating the book involved countless hours of volunteer time and a commitment to artistic excellence that long defined his work. Lanker was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer during the project and died in March 2011, as the book's design was nearing completion.

Essays in the book discuss the history of shoes from three different perspectives:

• Erlandson, museum director, and Hlavacek, professor of shoe technology at Tomas Bata University in the Czech Republic, present concise histories of footwear based on ancient archaeological findings to present-day shoe-consumption statistics.

• Connolly, director of archaeological research at the museum, writes on the original discovery of the sagebrush sandals in 1938 by the UO's Luther Cressman and what these ancient sandals reveal about the people who wore them.

• Moore, a two-time Olympics marathoner who ran for Bowerman and wrote the 2006 biography "Bowerman and the Men of Oregon," writes about the legendary track coach's infatuation with the ancient sandals and how they informed his innovations for UO's track team.

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The book is written for a general audience. The essayists were encouraged to write in a style that echoed Lanker's photographs.

"Brian's beautiful shoe-themed photography is marvelous for capturing personal histories and emotions," Connolly said. "In working on the essays that accompany the images, Brian encouraged us to present substantive information, but his persistent request -- and the mantra that compelled his own photography -- was to tell compelling stories about people. The final product is a book that is beautiful, but one that is also a powerful exploration of the complexity and history of the human experience."

Because of Lanker's untimely death, the book holds great significance to those who knew him personally. "This publication pays homage to a world-class artist, a profound thinker, a generous and caring soul, and a man with a contagious verve for life and a constant twinkle in his eye," Erlandson said.

The book can be purchased through the end of the year exclusively at Past and Presents, the museum's store, for $34.99. In January, the book will be made available for wider distribution.

About the Museum of Natural and Cultural History
The Museum of Natural and Cultural History, 1680 E. 15th Ave. in Eugene, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is $3 for adults, $2 for seniors and youths 17 and under, and $8 for families (two adults and up to four youths). Museum members are admitted free. Guided tours are offered each Friday at 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.

About the University of Oregon
The University of Oregon is a world-class teaching and research institution and Oregon's flagship public university. The UO is one of just two Pacific Northwest universities with membership in the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization made up of the 62 leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada.

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