

Kirk Johnson Biography

Kirk Johnson is the incoming president and CEO of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. He is a scientist, explorer and author whose books, exhibitions and television documentaries have brought science to broad public audiences.

Since 2012, Johnson has served as Sant Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, one of the Smithsonian's most visited museums. He has overseen the world's largest natural history collection, nearly 149 million specimens and artifacts, and a museum that welcomes 4 million visitors annually. Under his leadership, the museum opened the \$110 million, 35,000-square-foot David H. Koch Hall of Fossils – Deep Time, a landmark exhibition that connects the history of life on Earth to the choices people make today.

His roots are in Denver. During his first tenure at the Museum, which spanned more than two decades, Johnson rose from curator of paleontology to chief curator and vice president of research and collections, leading fieldwork across the U.S. and abroad. In 2010 and 2011, he co-led the Snowmastodon Project near Snowmass Village, an Ice Age dig that captured national attention and recovered more than 5,400 bones of mammoths, mastodons and other ancient animals.

Johnson is as much a storyteller as a scientist. He has brought deep time to life for millions of viewers, presenting television documentaries, including the NOVA programs “Making North America,” “Polar Extremes” and “Ice Age Footprints” and the PBS program “The Great Yellowstone Thaw.” He has written 17 scientific and popular books and more than 100 research articles, and he works closely with artists to reconstruct ancient worlds, a pairing that goes back to his double major in geology and fine art at Amherst College.

Originally from Bellevue, Washington, Johnson earned his bachelor's degree magna cum laude from Amherst College, a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate in geology and paleobotany from Yale University. He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Paleontological Society, a Guggenheim Fellow and a two-time winner of the AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award.