



Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds eNewsletter

Every Fossil Needs a Friend

#45—July 2020

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Monument Update

Greetings to all,

Under difficult circumstances, the Monument continues to function with significant modifications for the safety and wellness of employees, volunteers & visitors. Some of our programs have been cancelled completely (like the yoga walks) while others have become virtual.

The visitor services operation continues, although modified. People are enjoying coming to the park and still seeing stumps and hiking on the self-guided trails (about 100 per day). Scores of kids have gotten their Junior Ranger Badges. All the staff, who have been spending a lot of time outdoors under tents and in the stump shelter, are helping visitors the best they can.

There is the possibility of volunteer patrollers and trail crew coming on in this month. In addition, our new Latino Heritage Intern will be arriving in just a few weeks to help do outreach to Latino communities in the region.

Summer camps continue to be virtual and some new interns are busy getting rid of non-native plants.

The new film is posted on the front page of the Monument's website (link below). All are encouraged to visit. The new film has higher production values and provides greater insights in how our area was and then came to be. It is informative and entertaining.

Updates to activities are occurring weekly, so be sure to check the Monument's website. In the meantime, stay safe & stay healthy.

Gary Censoplano
Vice President
Friends of the Florissant
Fossil Beds



View the new film by clicking [here](#)

Great Backyard Bird Count of 2020

Once again, the third weekend in February brought the Great Backyard Bird Count to the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument on Saturday, February 15, 2020. This was year number seven for this Citizen Science event to be held at the Fossil Beds. (In 2019, it was held at the Aspen Valley Ranch as all National Park Service areas had been closed). This event is sponsored by the Friends of the Fossil Beds each year.

Although the attendance was low in number, a “good time” was had by all including visitors, Park Service employees and Friends’ volunteers. Superintendent Therese Johnson and her husband Mike joined everyone on one of the hikes. What a treat for everyone as they are both very informed naturalists and added much more to the hike than just counting birds.

During the three bird hikes, 13 species of birds were identified and counted. The favorite sighting of the day was an eagle. It was a first time visit for several of the visitors and they were very complimentary of all that they saw and experienced.

The statistics for the entire count which lasts for four days around the world are as follows:

- Checklists were received from 110 countries.
- 7040 species of birds were counted
- 252,246 checklists were received
- There were 268,674 participants
- 42,367,172 individual birds were counted (largest number ever counted in the 22 years of the event)

The Friends look forward to again hosting the Great Backyard Bird Count in 2021. We will have a large group of 4th and 5th grade students from the Pikes Peak region joining us on Saturday, February 13th. We hope you will consider joining us for the fun and helping with this very important worldwide bird count.

2020 Summer Seminars

Over the last 26 years, the Friends of the Fossil Beds have offered seminars for the general public with a special emphasis on topics of interest to educators. Our first seminar was held in 1994 during the 25th Anniversary celebration for the establishment of the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Since then over 100 different seminars covering such topics as paleontology, geology, biology, ecology, natural history, history, botany, different ecosystems and climate issues have been held. Graduate credit for teachers through Adams State University and CE credits for teachers through Pikes Peak BOCES were offered every year. Well over 1000 people have participated in these seminars over the years.

The Friends of the Fossil Beds have felt that in offering these seminars for the Monument we are assisting in fulfilling its mission statement: “we are dedicated to assisting the National Park Service (NPS) to preserve and protect our national treasures, secure resources to help preserve the fossils, promote programs and activities that enhance the Monument’s educational, research and scientific objectives.” Part of our role in this mission has been to offer these seminars which help to educate the public about the NPS and the Florissant Fossil Beds.

Unfortunately, this year, we will be unable to offer “in-person” seminars because of COVID 19. NPS areas

have had to cancel programming of all kinds. Most visitor centers are not opened yet. In talking with Jeff Wolin (Lead Interpreter at the Fossil Beds) in late May, he suggested that we might want to try some virtual programming.

After that conversation, the Seminar Committee began pursuing the idea. Several seminars would have worked well for a virtual seminar but we decided to do just one seminar to begin with to see how the process works and if we wish to do more in the future. The first virtual seminar offered by the Friends will be for members only. Please know that we will make this first virtual seminar as user-friendly as possible. The first virtual seminar will be done by John Stansfield on August 8th at 10 AM. Below, please find John's bio and a description of his program entitled "Long's Expedition in the Front Range."

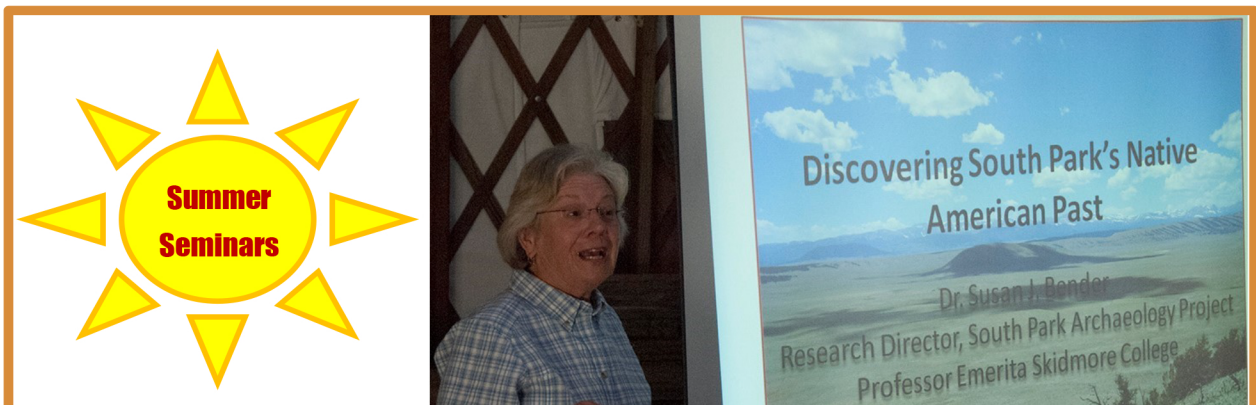
Title: Celebrating the Bicentennial of the Long Expedition Exploring the Front Range, 1820

Description: From Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains and back. Major Stephen Long's U.S. Government expedition traveled by boat, horseback, and foot in 1819 and 1820. Along their way, the explorers met hardship and success in addressing numerous tasks assigned to them.

This one-hour program celebrates the expedition's bicentennial, while focusing on their adventures in the South Platte and Arkansas River valleys during the summer of 1820. Words from the journals of explorers and artwork from the exploration's illustrators enrich this presentation by storyteller John Stansfield.

Presenter's Bio: For forty years, storyteller and author John Stansfield has recounted stories from the American West and the world. He reenacts the lives of national park pioneers Enos Mills and John Otto, as well as Charles Fox Gardiner, frontier physician. He authored biographies, *Enos Mills: Rocky Mountain Naturalist* and *John Denver: Man for the World* (Filter Press 2005, 2008, respectively). His book *Writers of the American West: Multicultural Learning Encounters* (Teacher Ideas Press, 2002) earned a Colorado Authors' League Award and was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. John's latest book, a folkloric short story collection titled *Rocky Mountain Stories To Read Aloud or Alone*, is pending publication.

If you are interested in "attending" this virtual offering, please watch for an email that will come to you with instructions for how to join this virtual seminar. We are very excited about being able to try this way of reaching out to our members. Should you have any questions at this time, please don't hesitate to email Sally McCracken @ sammckind@aol.com or Wendie Warner @ wendielwarner@gmail.com.

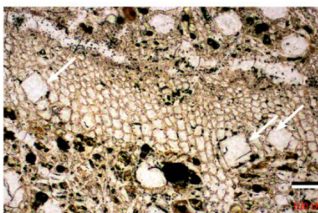


New Artwork Reconstructs the Eocene Forest of Sexi, Peru

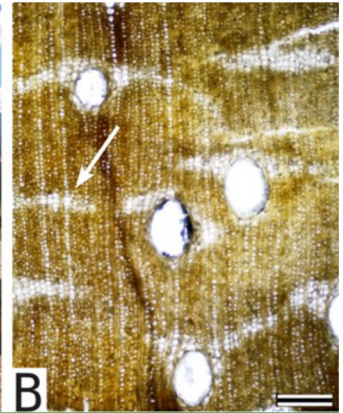
Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument with support from the Friends has been helping with conservation and research of the Eocene fossil forest Piedra Chamana near the village of Sexi, Peru for nearly 20 years. Dr. Deborah Woodcock of Clark University and the monument's paleontologist Dr. Herb Meyer, along with the monument's former postdoctoral paleontologist Dr. Sarah Allen and others, have been studying more than 50 species of fossil woods and leaves. Besides the scientific investigation, our recent work at Sexi in 2018 showed that human impacts and erosion are having big effects on the fossil trees. Woodcock and Meyer have just completed a scientific article to be published in Peru (in Spanish) summarizing our findings (previously published in English journals) and stressing the need for the people of Peru to provide better preservation of the site, perhaps by pursuing a UNESCO designation such as World Heritage Site.

With the artistic talents of the monument's paleontology guest scientist Mariah Slovacsek, we are beginning to create the first reconstruction of what this dry tropical forest looked like in Peru 39 million years ago. Take a look at this fossil trunk and microscopic thin section of the wood of *Cynometra*, a genus that still lives today. Then, look at the artist's drawing as she recreates this tree. Why only a single branch of flowers and dead leaves? To see if the scientists want them in the final image or not! This is a work in progress.

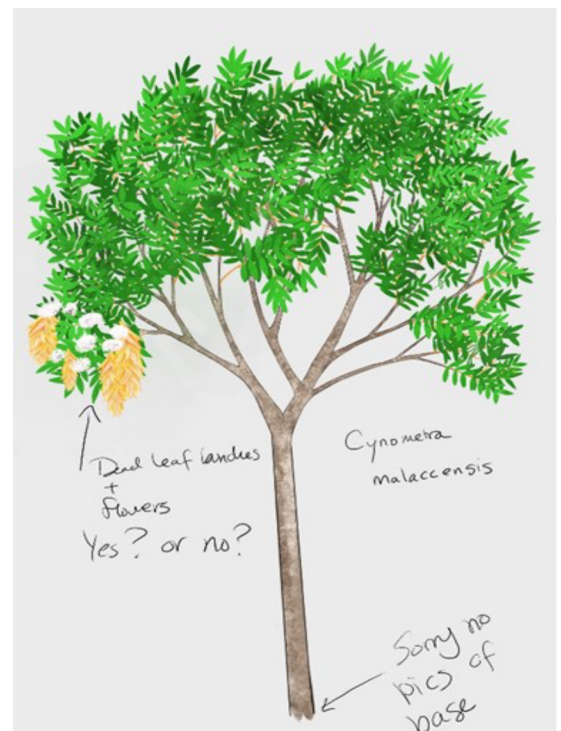
Another fossil plant from the site is the mangrove *Avicennia*. Mangroves grow in and near salty waters at sea level, but these fossils are found high in the Andes Mountains! Just as Darwin once wondered about marine fossils in these mountains, the scientists studying the fossils of Piedra Chamana are intrigued by the story the fossil woods and leaves from Peru tell about the uplift of the Andes. Take a look at the microscopic thin section of this fossil wood and the fossil leaf. The cubic crystals are probably pseudomorphs of halite (salt!) in the wood. Then, look at the reconstructions our artist is drawing.



Fossil wood and leaf of the mangrove *Avicennia*. Arrows show pseudomorphs of halite (salt).



Fossil trunk and wood of the legume *Cynometra* from Sexi, Peru



Artistic draft reconstruction of *Cynometra*

Though it was nearly 40 million years ago, these plants from the Eocene might have looked pretty familiar as they had leaves and other features similar to their modern relatives. This is useful for an artist as it means those same modern relatives might give a very good clue as to what their fossil ancestors looked like. Once the drawings of the individual trees are complete, they will be assembled to form an image of the whole Eocene forest in Peru. Artistic reconstructions of the past are necessarily based on a little bit of conjecture from the fossils themselves, yet they are often one of the best ways to convey scientific information that helps the public to visualize the past. We hope the result of this work will be enticing for people everywhere, but especially for the people of Peru.

Avicennia alba*Avicennia*Artistic reconstructions of the mangrove *Avicennia*

Contributed by Mariah Slovacek, Herb Meyer, and Deborah Woodcock

A Monumental View



A mother & fawn pronghorn taken inside the monument boundaries.
courtesy of the NPS