

ANCIENT FOSSILS REVEALED

By Dená McClurkin, Public Affairs

More than 250 people got a glimpse into Iowa's geologic past at the Devonian Fossil Gorge during the site's official dedication ceremony on June 23. The old and the young came out to watch the District become official caretakers of the gorge's new \$500,000 visitor and learning facility.

"This project is building on the unique aspects of Iowa and will bring more people to this great state," said Nicole Warren from the Iowa Department of Economic Development.

Eight years ago, the Flood of 1993 was busy moving thousands of tons of earth and stone to reveal a quarter-mile stretch of Devonian-age bedrock that is now called the Devonian Fossil Gorge. The floor of the gorge is a tiny segment of a bed of coral-rich limestone that extends 100 miles from Waterloo, Iowa, to Davenport, Iowa.

Today, the gorge has been transformed into a major point of interest with an elaborate entry plaza lined with limestone monoliths, which are 6-feet wide, one-and-a-half feet thick, and up to 11-feet tall. There is also a walkway lined by a succession of 14 large Cedar Valley limestone boulders leading down to the biostrome and gorge floor.

As the project landscape architect, Kevin Holden, Engineering Division, assisted the site's creators, Devonian Fossil Gorge, Inc., a non-profit organization, in developing their vision for the facility design.

"I thought it was important that the form of the facility, and the materials used, be a

response to the nature of the gorge and its Devonian-age features," said Holden. "The colored concrete relates well to the natural stone of the gorge; massive limestone monoliths were used to create an outdoor space that might be suggestive of more ancient times; the octagonal motif comes from the six-sided form of one of the site's most prominent fossils -- a coral known as the Hexagonaria."

This facility, which also features a limestone fountain and informational graphics, will provide the public with a chance to view the fossils for free. After years of hard work and collaboration with the District to develop the site, DFG Inc. was able to raise half-a-million dollars to pay for the total costs of the center. Donations came from several state and local government agencies and many private individuals.


"I commend them for their excellent efforts," said Lt.Col. Torkild Brunso, deputy district engineer. "Many people have worked very hard to make this dream a reality. They should be proud, as the Corps will be proud, of the important interpretive services they are providing the millions of citizens who will visit this gorge over the years."

Organizers hope the center will capture a sense of discovery as visitors explore and learn about the geological and historic features of the site.

"What we are trying to do is present the information about the gorge in a way that is easy to understand," said Tom Woodruff, president, DFG Inc.

Some educators are excited about the new center and plan to incorporate it into their teaching curriculum.

"This new site will allow us to show our students all the things they have read in books," said Linda Maxson, dean of the college of liberal arts and sciences at the University of Iowa. "Touching these fossils will make the experience real for our students and teach them in ways a computer or book can't."

The gorge, which is located just south of the Coralville Dam's emergency spillway, contains rock with 365-million-year-old fossils that are embedded into the exposed surface. Some of the most typical types of fossils found at the gorge are corals, crinoids and brachiopods. 

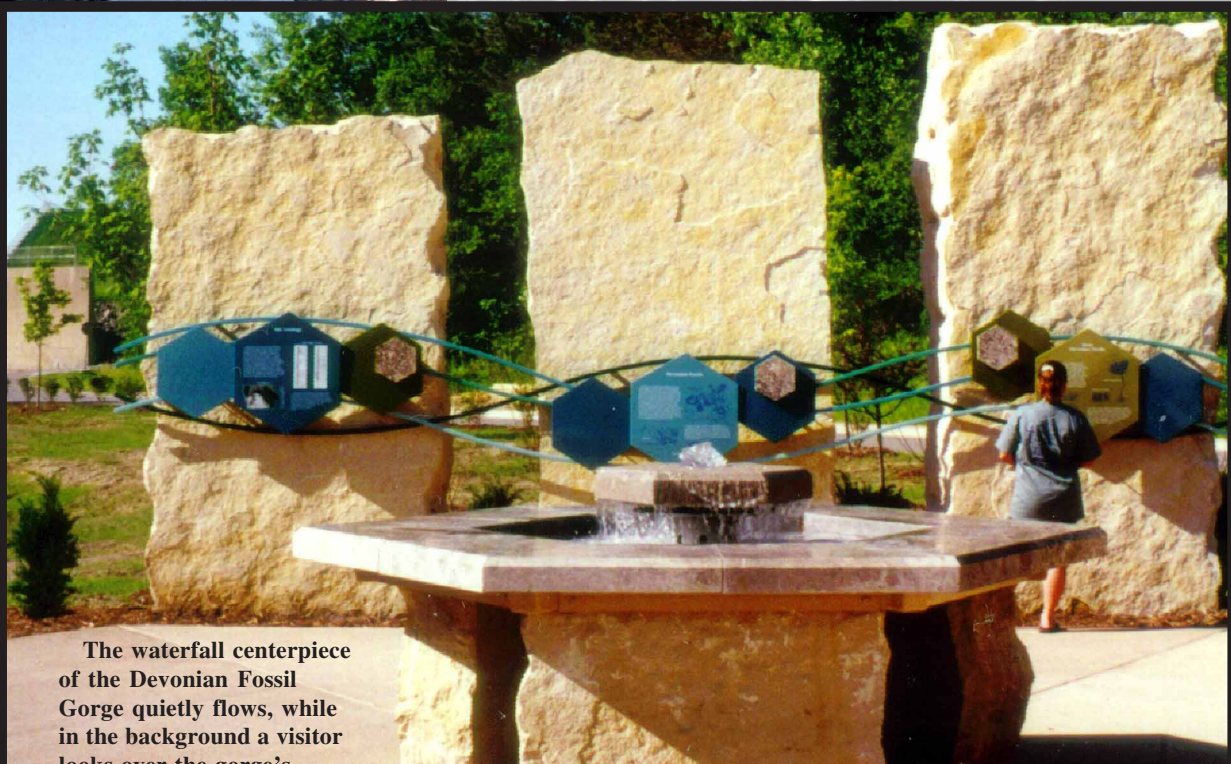
On the 'Net

www.mvr.usace.army.mil/ncrodc/coralville.htm





Visitors at the Devonian Fossil Gorge get a close-up look at ancient fossils unearthed for public viewing at the site. Photo by Dená McClurkin, Public Affairs.



The waterfall centerpiece of the Devonian Fossil Gorge quietly flows, while in the background a visitor looks over the gorge's historical information. Photo by Kevin Holden, Engineering Division.

Tom Woodruff, president, DFC Inc., John Castle, manager, Coralville Lake, and Lt. Col. Torkild Brunso, deputy district engineer, place a hexagonal metal plate in the concrete of the fossil site's plaza overlooking the gorge. The metal plate marked the site's "discovery point number one." Photo by Kevin Holden, Engineering Division.

