



John Day Fossil Beds

The official newspaper of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument

Cant Ranch House Museum opens to the Public

John Day Fossil Beds National Monument has a history program? Readers may be surprised to learn that 200 acres of John Day Fossil Beds NM are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The James Cant Ranch National Historic District preserves the structures and cultural landscape representative of an early 20th-century sheep ranch.

In July 2004, after eight months of renovation work, the Cant Ranch Historical Museum opened to the public. Many visitors remember the Cant Ranch House's days as the monument's fossil museum. Now, the opening of the new Thomas Condon Paleontology Center has offered the opportunity for the house to be used to interpret the historic district and other related stories of this area's human history.

The Cant Ranch Historical Museum now hosts two rooms of exhibits designed by the National Park Service in collaboration with the High Desert Museum and fabricated by PPI; these exhibits address topics ranging from American Indian presence to the Canyon City gold rush to the arrival of immigrant sheep ranchers.



The front parlor still contains historic Cant family furniture and other artifacts, and the second floor of the house continues to house the park's headquarters offices, while the site historian's office is located in one of the first floor rooms.

So far, visitor response to the new focus at the museum has been very positive.

There have also been many enthusiastic comments about the future plans to develop the Cant Ranch grounds and other historic structures for interpretive enjoyment.

Anyone who is interested in being involved in greater depth with the Cant Ranch History Museum and would like to volunteer some time should contact Lia Vella, site historian.



New exhibits feature human history.



Museum/Paleo News

On the paleobotanical front, Regan Dunn spent 5 weeks in the field this past summer with Steve Manchester from the University of Florida and the OMSI Paleontology Research Team. They collected floras from ten sites from the Clarno Formation, including leaf impressions and petrified wood localities.

Elizabeth Wheeler, a paleoxylotomist (fossil wood specialist) from South Carolina also visited this summer for some collecting of spectacular Eocene woods from the Clarno Formation. We also collected beautiful paleobotanical specimens from a Mascall-aged (~16 Ma), diatomite locality near Austin Junction. Needless to say, the summer's collecting efforts have produced a backlog of hundreds of exhibit quality and scientifically significant paleobotanical specimens that are in need of preparation, cataloging and study, enough to keep the paleobotany division busy throughout the winter and then some.

Besides fieldwork, the entire paleontology staff has been consumed by tasks needed for the new museum gallery and lobby exhibits. We are hoping to have the first three lobby cases (fieldwork and collection, laboratory preparation, and collections storage) ready for display in the lobby by January.

Also, we are all busily working on completing the 6 other lobby cases which focus on taphonomy, paleosols, biostratigraphy, cooperative land management, radiometric dating, and fossilization. PPI has now installed the cabinets for all of the paleobiomes.

As most of you have probably noticed, work in the museum gallery is proceeding nicely. With the cabinets in place, we will be dragging specimens in

and out of collections in order to determine which will be used for exhibit, and where they will be displayed.

Exciting stuff!

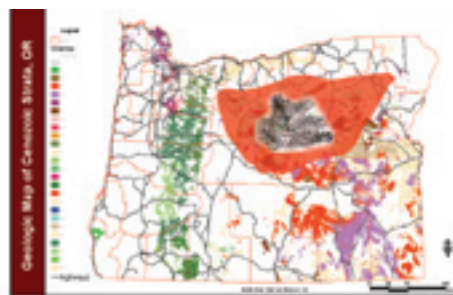


An NPS park ranger helps look for fossil leaves.

News from the Prep Lab

Other than the usual rush to get things done this year, one very different and exciting project stands out. Our wonderful laboratory assistant Cindy Kilpatrick has completed the fabrication of six sculptural pieces for the entrance of the Thomas Condon Paleo Center.

A lot of thought has gone into these rather unusual objets d'art. The central focus of each sculpture is an iconographic fossil specimen or specimens from each locality we plan to interpret in the upcoming gallery. For example, from the Bridge Creek Flora, *Metasequoia* was the fossil of choice.



Map showing distribution of Big Basin rocks.

Three parts of the *Metasequoia* were used in the sculpture. We selected sections of petrified *Metasequoia* wood, we used twigs and seed cones from living *Metasequoia* trees, and lastly we fabricated replicas of leaves.

We had to use replicas of the leaves because the fresh foliage wilted too quickly for Cindy to construct

the sculpture. These real fossils and modern equivalents were then embedded in a clay form which had a very unique shape.

The shape of the clay form represents the geographic distribution of the rock layers in which each locality is found. So, the Bridge Creek Flora shape represents the distribution across Oregon of all the rocks that make up the Big Basin Member which visitors to the park can see at the painted hills.

Also there is a textural pattern on the surface of the form. This texture is a geological symbol that represents the kind of rock that the Big Basin Member is comprised of. In this case the rock is mostly tuffaceous claystone. Once the clay form has been sculpted, and the fossils embedded, a rubber mold of the whole shebang was made into which a cement like casting material could be poured. When the cement casts harden they will be fitted for hanging outside the paleo center.

The shapes of the icon fossils will be repeated throughout the new museum and should help to orient new visitors as to what time period a fossil is from, and roughly from where in the state it came from. It's almost the same idea seen in local grocery stores, images of eggs and cheese over the dairy section, or bread over the bakery.

New Life for Old Structures

In an effort to protect and restore the cultural landscape and historic buildings associated with the James Cant Ranch National Historic District, the monument completed a number of cultural resource projects in 2004, with many more planned in coming years.

Years of weathering and exposure had compromised the structural components of two large feed racks near the barn and the haystacker, which is on display along the River Trail near the Cant House.

Using a local supplier who cut all of the timbers to the original specifications, these three structures have been rebuilt completely.

During construction of the haystacker, several “older” visitors to the monument told stories to the work crew of when they used this or similar types of haystackers as young men on ranches in the region. Other repairs were made to the wagons and rake that are on display along the trail.

Monument crews hand worked and crafted several of the hardwood components that had simply weathered away. All of the wood and metal will be treated over the winter with preservatives that should give all of these attractions another 100 years of viewing life.

In addition to all of this work, crews at the monument also installed a new electric pump

and irrigation system across the river in the large agricultural field. This replacement allowed for the removal of a large diesel pump that had created noise along the River Trail for years and required constant refueling.

All of the fields within the historic district are irrigated to

maintain the cultural landscape of the early 1900’s Cant family sheep operation. Today these fields have become important feeding areas for elk herds, deer, coyotes, upland birds, and other wildlife which are often seen by visitors as they walk the River Trail or drive along Highway 19.



Reconstruction of the haystacker.

Meet Greg Lloyd, our new law enforcement ranger!

After nearly a three-year hiatus without a law enforcement ranger, the monument has established a unique new position in collaboration with the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and hired Greg Lloyd for that position.

Greg comes to us from Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado and has a lot of law enforcement, search and rescue, and emergency medical Experience.

His energy and outgoing personality should provide a perfect fit with our staff.

Greg will be living in the Foree house, just north of the Foree trailhead access road, and will spend 50 percent of his time on Park Service land and 50 percent on BLM land in the upper John Day.

New Museums, New Hours

In 2004, with the new opening of both the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center and the James Cant Ranch Museum, park staff have been busy keeping two facilities open as much as possible for visitors.

The Thomas Condon Paleontology Center will be open daily throughout the year and closed only on the federal holidays from Thanksgiving Day through President's Day. The open hours during the year will be from 8:30 am to 4:30 PM. This is the first time the monument will be keeping the primary visitor center facility open on weekends during winter months.

*leave them unimpaired for
the enjoyment of future
generations*

A portion of the act creating the National Park Service



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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The National Park Service cares for the Special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

During June, July, and August, the center will stay open until 5:00 PM.

The James Cant Ranch House is also home to the monument headquarters. The open hours for the headquarters and museum will be Monday through Friday throughout the year from 8:30 am to 4:30 PM, and closed on Federal holidays from Thanksgiving Day through President's Day.

On weekends during the summer months the house will be open the same hours. On weekends from October through May the house will be open as staffing permits or by appointment. For information on current hours please call 541-987-2333.

JODA'S New GMP

Starting next month, the monument will begin the process of redoing its general management plan (GMP). A GMP establishes the overall direction for the future management of a national park or monument. These plans take a long-range view, answering the question "what kind of place do we want this to be in the future?" There will be several opportunities for the public to help us in this endeavor. The first opportunity is coming up very quickly – on December 6 in the Malheur National Forest Office in John Day, from 6:30 – 8:30 PM, we will conduct an open house to gather public issues and concerns. On December 7 we will conduct a similar open house in Fossil in the conference room over the town's fossil museum.

All persons interested in the monument are welcome and should attend.

Fossils and the Night Sky

Beginning in September, 2004, a new evening program was offered by the monument. Ranger John Fiedor developed a night sky program that ties the prehistory of the fossil beds to the prehistoric light emanating from the night sky. The program will be presented once during each of the four seasons to take advantage of the changing star patterns visible during the early evening. Participants are asked to bring binoculars and a red

light for moving about in the dark, and to dress warmly for the weather. Star clusters, nebulae, galaxies, satellites, and the occasional falling star are readily visible in the wonderful John Day skies. "It has got to make you think when you hold a fifteen million year old fossil in your hands and look up and see a galaxy as it was fifteen million years ago." says John. The next program will be offered in early 2005, looking up at the winter night sky.