

## Mae Jemison U.S. Science Reading Room Celebrates Its First Year



Two students study the skull cast created before their eyes

of the Witwatersrand and the Ifa Lethu Foundation. The two expert fossil casters, Boy and Bongani, captivated the attention of about 60 students as they created a skull cast which was later donated to the Reading Room.

Prof. Berger presented an engaging lecture to an audience of 150 students, teachers, and science education partners on human evolution, which placed Africa at the center of a long evolutionary continuum. He inspired students by explaining that Africa is at the forefront of new technical developments and discoveries relating to ancient humans and paleontology. Berger is an American scientist who came to South Africa for research and has now lived in Johannesburg for 20 years.

On January 27, 2010, over 150 students and teachers, science education partners, University of Pretoria (UP) faculty, and Reading Room volunteers gathered to celebrate a successful first year of inspiring science education at the Mae Jemison U.S. Science Reading Room. Special guests were Ambassador Donald Gips and Mrs. Gips, and UP Vice-Chancellor Cheryl de la Rey.

The afternoon's events included a fossil casting demonstration using a new technique created by students studying under renowned paleoanthropologist Professor Lee Berger of the University



Amb. Gips and Rector De la Rey admire the skull cast

of the Witwatersrand and the Ifa Lethu Foundation. The two expert fossil casters, Boy and Bongani, captivated the attention of about 60 students as they created a skull cast which was later donated to the Reading Room.

The afternoon closed with a production of "Darwin and Wallace," an educational theater presentation by three performers from the Paleontological Scientific Trust (PAST). The minimalist production is designed to travel to schools throughout Africa in 2010 to teach students and teachers the story of the "tree of evolution" and human development through time.



"Darwin and Wallace"





## Field Trip to Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre

On Feb. 3, 2010, 30 students from secondary schools in Mamelodi East gathered at the Mae Jemison U.S. Science Reading Room to board a bus to the Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre (WSEC).

In conjunction with World Wetlands Day (*see story, below*), the students visited WSEC to see a real wetland and to learn more about preservation of natural wetlands in South Africa. Student Lisa Skhosana commented on the trip, saying, "We are studying wetlands in our school, but I'd never actually seen one!"



WSEC Facilitator Solomon demonstrates how wetlands store and trap water

## February Events

(All programs start at 3 p.m. unless otherwise indicated)

### February 3

- 2.30 p.m.: Field trip to Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre (*see story, right*)
- Web Chat on climate change

### February 10

- Photography workshop, Week 1  
Start of a three-week course on Photographing Your Environment. Students must commit to attending all three sessions.
- Film: *The Ascent of Man*

### February 17

- Photography workshop, Week 2  
Field trip to Pretoria Arts Museum  
Photography Display  
Only for students signed up for the Photographing Your Environment course.
- Film: *Planet Earth (Pt. I)*

### February 24

- Sci-enza presents ... "Science In A Bottle"

## January Statistics

- 63 books checked out
- 375 visitors

## February 2 is World Wetlands Day

On February 2, 1971, countries around the world came together and signed the Convention on Wetlands (an Inter-governmental Treaty) - the first ecologically focused convention - in Ramsar, Iran (see <http://www.ramsar.org>). Since then, 158 countries have signed the Treaty, including the U.S., and 169 million hectares of wetlands (1828 sites) have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance.

In the developing world, 1 in 5 people do not have access to clean drinking water. Poor management strategies that support the health of wetland eco-systems can affect the health of humans, with wetland-related diseases claiming the lives of 3 million people each year and bring suffering to many more. It is estimated that 1.4 billion people live in water basins where water uses exceed sustainable levels.

We can all make a difference by making the connection - because wetlands work for us, we need to work for wetlands!

Read more: [http://www.wetland.org/education\\_wetlandsday.htm](http://www.wetland.org/education_wetlandsday.htm) and <http://www.ramsar.org>.