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John Day Fossil Beds National Monument Newsletter

National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

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Primate Fossil Found ...

A tiny tooth recently found on an isolated peak in central Oregon represents the youngest known fossil primate in North America. The 4mm (0.15 inch) specimen was found within John Day Fossil Beds National Monument during routine prospecting under the direction of the park's paleontologist Ted Fremd. It was discovered by John Zancanella of the Bureau of Land Management who was working in the park on an interagency team.

During cataloguing this fall, when several other new kinds of animal fossils also were identified, this tooth "jumped out as something we've been looking for with very little hope, for many years," Fremd said. "After 130 years of collecting in the John Day Basin, this is the only one of its kind. This is about as rare as fossils get."

The isolated lower molar is unique because it is the only North American primate fossil of the late Oligocene Epoch (23 to 24 million years ago) to be found in proximity to volcanic ash layers. Using new, high precision argon isotopes, scientists are able to date these ash "tuffs."

Previously described evidence of this animal in the Pacific Northwest was limited to three molars in an upper jaw fragment with minimal stratigraphic data. "We try to continuously examine fossil-bearing rocks to collect scientifically significant fossils on federal lands. Otherwise, weathering and other factors and destroy them," said Fremd.

Maintenance Decks House ...

During April and May the Maintenance Division has been replacing about 900 sq.ft. of porch decking on the back porch of the James Cant Ranch Visitor Center. It is being replaced in kind with the original type of flooring installed when the house was built 1917-18. This screened in porch once served as a sleeping porch for the

Cant Family during hot summer nights. Also, the roof will be re-shingled this summer with cedar shingles. The house was last shingled about 20 years ago.

Other projects this summer include a fence removal project funded by the Public Land Corp. This project will be conducted by a crew of about 15 workers, all local hires. They will be working mostly on the eastern side of the John Day River at the Sheep Rock Unit. The monument will also have a new fence project going at Foree area, installed by park staff.

Out of Africa ...

Jim Hammett, monument superintendent, recently returned from a trip to Uganda, Africa where he led a management and operational review of Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. This park is just south of the equator, right under a 14,000-foot volcano and located on the Rwanda and Congo borders. Though extremely happy to be back, it was a very rewarding and difficult assignment.

Jim completed a review of a sister park, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, also in Uganda back in July. His involvement is an example of the many partnerships that the U.S. National Park Service is now engaged in. All his travel expenses were funded by CARE International and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The U.S. National Park Service graciously provided Jim the time away from the monument for this project.

The two parks that Jim helped support the only remaining populations of mountain gorillas left on earth. This is the species of gorilla made famous by Dian Fossey and the book and movie Gorillas in the Mist. Human population pressures in that part of East Africa are extreme. The population densities around both parks exceed 1,000 people per square mile! The challenges faced by the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which manages these parks, are difficult to comprehend.

Teacher Workshops Begin ...

John Day Fossil Beds will be conducting teacher workshops throughout 1998 for middle school and high school science teachers. The workshops are designed to familiarize teachers with "The Horse Fossil Study Kit", a hands-on study of ancient horses which is available through the educational loan program at the fossil beds.

The kit allows students an opportunity to observe, measure and analyze replicas of fossil horse skulls. The workshops allow teachers to participate in the study activities, as their students would, and to consider the larger scientific framework these activities suggest.

The workshops include presentations on evolutionary concepts in biology and the fossil record by Ted Fremd, the monument's paleontologist. The workshops also demonstrate the diversity of ancient plants and animals that are studied at the fossil beds. Horses are one of over 30 animal families represented, and interactions among different kinds of animals present some of the most challenging scientific questions.

The February teacher workshop was held at OMSI (the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry) in Portland. Workshops are also planned for July at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, and this fall at the visitor center in the Sheep Rock Unit near Dayville. Beginning in July, the workshops will be offered for academic credit through EOU. Please contact Jennifer Chapman if you would like more information about these workshops, at (541)987-2333.

NEW EMPLOYEE SECTION

Moss's Team Up At the Monument ...

Greg and Pattie Moss joined us here June 23, 1997 - Greg as our Chief Ranger and Pattie as our Administrative Officer. Greg grew up in Kewaunee, Illinois and joined the Park Service in 1978. His first job was in Interpretation at Glen Canyon. He has also worked at Glacier, Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Everglades and 8 of the 13 parks in Alaska. Pattie grew up in Pigeon, Michigan, and also joined the Park Service in 1978. Her first job was in the mail room at Grand Canyon where she met Greg. They later joined forces at Lake Clark, in Alaska, where they were married by their park superintendent.

Pattie wonders how many other NPS couples out there were married by their superintendents. After Lake Clark, Greg and Pattie moved on to Death Valley, the Virgin Islands, Guadalupe, North Cascades and finally the John Day Fossil Beds. Along the way, Greg changed his focus from interpretation to visitor and resource protection. Pattie also changed her focus to administration, but along the way she worked in every division except Natural Resources. (At Death Valley, she worked in maintenance.) They brought their "kids" with them, Cuda and Maho,

two Dobermans. Greg likes the feeling of being a part of the local community and not just being part of the "park". Pattie enjoyed our mild almost snow-less winter. Their last winter at North Cascades included 7 feet of snow.

A Return to Dayville ...

Nona Quilling Gibson was born and raised in Spring Valley, Wisconsin. In 1968 Nona moved to Oregon where she graduated from Dayville High School which is 9 miles from the park. After high school, Nona went to vocational school in South Dakota where she learned bookkeeping and secretarial skills. After vocational school she moved back to Wisconsin where she worked in the private sector in various clerical and administrative positions. She waited until age 35 to marry and now has 2 wonderful little boys, Cody, age 6 ½ and Dusty, age 4 ½. In 1996 Nona came with her boys to visit her uncle who lives in Dayville and decided to stay and raise her children in this friendly community.

In March of 1997, Nona was hired into her first National Park Service position by the monument as an Administrative Technician. Nona feels that the National Park Service will satisfy the "gypsy" in her, as she likes to travel and see different parts of the country.

Rushmore's Loss = Our Gain ...

After the retirement of Hank Tanski, in May of 1997, the monument had some vital interpretive shoes to fill. That same May, Jennifer Chapman transferred from Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, in South Dakota, to the fossil beds as the new interpretive park ranger and education program coordinator.

Born in Chicago (of The Lincoln State), Jennifer got her B.A. in Visual Arts at Brown University, and M.F.A. at the University of California - Berkeley. She is currently completing work on her B.S. in Natural Sciences, through the University of Alaska. She has worked with the National Park Service since 1992. In addition to Mt. Rushmore she has worked at Kenai Fjords National Park in Alaska. She is now residing in Dayville. About her new assignment, Jennifer says, "The fossil beds represent a really interesting time when mammals were diversifying and becoming the animals we're familiar with today. This place is so full of both knowledge and mystery."

Jennifer's has been very enthusiastic about her role with the monument's education programs and has made many contacts with teachers regionwide promoting the program. Her other duties include fossil bed interpretation to the general public, book store manager, library coordinator, and our new "webmaster" developing the monument's homepage on e-mail. Rushmore's loss is our gain!

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