National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natural Resource Program Center
Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Florissant Fossil Beds

A ***Views of the National Parks*** virtual experience

On a pine-covered hill in the southern Colorado Rocky Mountains, in the shadow of Pikes Peak, stands a massive petrified redwood stump. This giant fossil is not alone. Many other fossils, including additional redwood stumps and delicate paper shale fossils, are found at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. They have inspired paleontologists to investigate an ancient ecosystem that once existed at this place and the events that led to their preservation.

During the late Eocene Epoch, a warm-temperate, broad-leafed forest existed in the Florissant valley. Towering redwood trees grew beside ferns and palm trees. Myriad numbers of buzzing insects, birds, fish, and now-extinct mammals such as the brontothere (rhinoceros-like mammal) and the mesohippus (miniature horse) also lived in the Florissant valley.

Today, if you visit the Florissant valley, you will find rolling hills of pine, fir, and spruce. Elk, deer, bear, and ground squirrels inhabit the montane ecosystem found at Florissant. The valley is dominated by grassy meadows.

What happened to the ancient ecosystem? How did almost 1,700 different species of plants and animals become preserved in the rocks of the Florissant valley? What makes Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument special to scientists, citizens, and you?

The answers to these questions, and many more, can be found by taking a virtual tour of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The Natural Resource Program Center of the National Park Service and the staff of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument welcome you to this virtual experience of Florissant Fossil Beds.

Features

The Florissant virtual experience provides many stories for you to explore. Whether you want to learn about the fossils of Florissant, the present-day flora and fauna, or the cultural history is up to you.

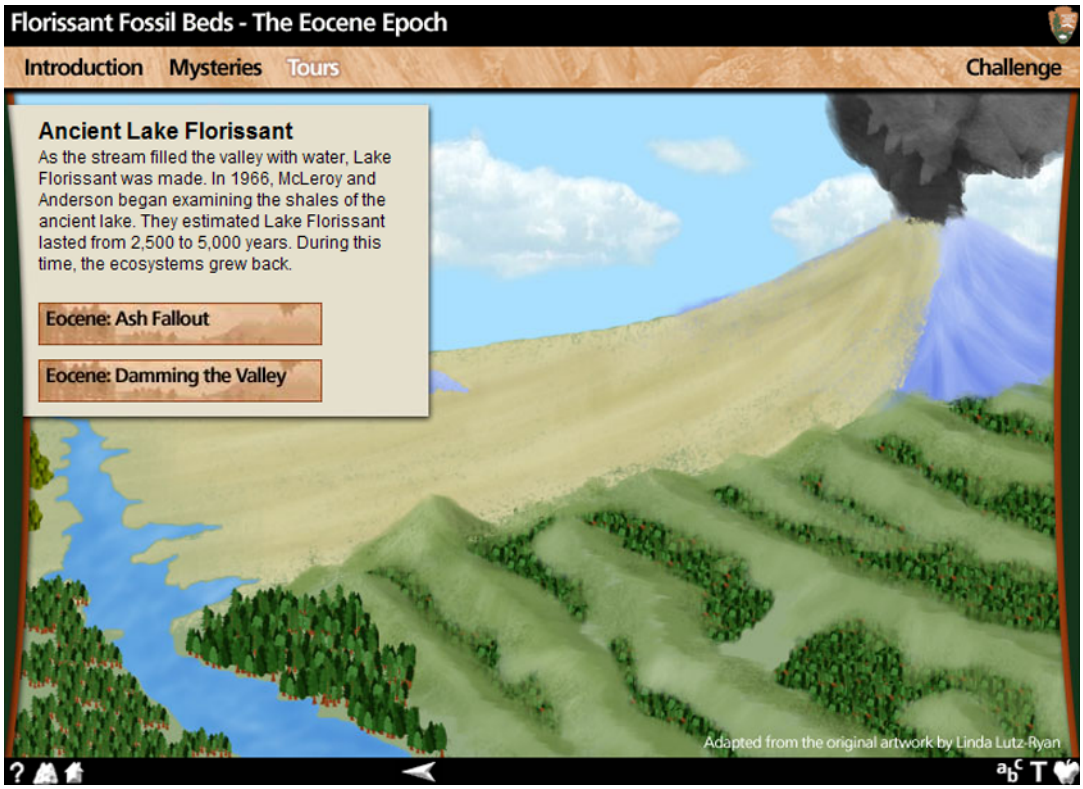
The "Big Stump," a petrified Redwood tree, can be seen from one of the many hiking trails at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. (NPS Photo)

Florissant stands as a top contender among the world's fossil sites in claims for 'the most,' 'the biggest,' and 'the only.' Species diversity alone attests to Florissant's significance.

— Herbert W. Meyer, Paleontologist
Florissant Fossil Beds
National Monument

Visit *Views of the National Parks* online:
www2.nature.nps.gov/Views

Take a trip back in time to the Eocene Epoch to learn about the geologic events that formed the fossil treasures we see today in the Florissant Valley.



When the mountains are overthrown and the seas uplifted, the universe at Florissant flings itself against a gnat and preserves it.

— Dr. Arthur C. Peal, 1873
Hayden Expedition Geologist

- **Introduction**
  Watch a short, animated video that introduces the important features of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.
- **Mysteries**
  Become a detective from the Phacil Thyme Detective Agency. Use your knowledge and your electronic detective tools to solve mysteries fromFlorissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Investigate different aspects of wildlife, scientists, research projects, climate change, fossils, and fossil preservation. Your special I.D.E.A. pad (Investigator's Detective Electronic Assistant) will guide you through the process.
- **Tours**
  Be your own guide. You can travel into the ancient past and learn about the ancient ecosystem of the late Eocene. Witness volcanic eruptions and geologic processes that led to the preservation of the world-famous fossils. Visit the recent past and the present. Learn about the Ute people, the pioneers, and the early scientists that were drawn to the Florissant valley. You can also "visit" the park and explore the trails, the present day ecosystem, and the fossils that have been found there.
- **Challenge your understanding**
  Become a paleontologist and participate in a virtual fossil excavation. Go through the process of finding and extracting a fossil, then take it to a virtual laboratory to identify it. Who knows what you will discover?

Teacher Resources

The Teacher Guide provides teachers (both local and distant) with curriculum-based activities and lesson plans that can be used in the classroom and in the field. These teaching tools include both history and science-based lessons. Information is provided so teachers can relate this virtual experience to national teaching standards.

Partners

The Natural Resource Program Center teamed up with interpretive rangers at Florissant Fossils Beds National Monu - ment, the NPS Intermountain Region, and Maria Lauer (educator) to create this virtual experience.

Contact us

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument
Jeff Wolin - Park Ranger
(Education/Interpretation)
jeff_wolin@nps.gov
(719) 748 -3253

Views Project
Bruce Nash - Project Manager
bruce_nash@nps.gov
(303) 987 - 6697

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