SMITHSONIAN TO OPEN “EL NINO” EXHIBITION
Interactive Display Explores the Interrelation of Earth’s Components

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History will open “El Niño’s Powerful Reach,” an exciting new exhibition that focuses on the El Niño weather phenomenon, on July 19th. The exhibition uses the example of El Niño to demonstrate the dynamic interrelations among the Earth’s four components – the geosphere (land), the atmosphere (air), the hydrosphere (water and ice), and the biosphere (life) – and the effects of these components felt around the world. “El Niño’s Powerful Reach” will be on view through June 2003.

“El Niño, the periodic warming of eastern Pacific Ocean waters, is a striking example of a physical phenomenon that has global biological and cultural ramifications,” said William Melson, senior scientist in the Department of Mineral Sciences at the Smithsonian’s Natural History Museum. “Flooding in California, drought in Africa, and fewer hurricanes in the Caribbean once seemed to be unconnected events, however, they have all been linked, either directly or indirectly, to El Niño. This dramatic and innovative exhibition will enable visitors to examine the consequences of El Niño and the complex interactions that produce it.”

“El Niño’s Powerful Reach” will advance public understanding of how the Earth’s components work as a system by utilizing space-based observations from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and combining them with the Museum’s renowned research and collections. A wide array of scientific disciplines will be represented including anthropology, archaeology, botany, entomology, geology, invertebrate zoology, marine biology, oceanography, paleobiology and vertebrate zoology.
Exhibition highlights:

- Weekly updates of an El Niño “watch”
- Ancient Peruvian artifacts that demonstrate the far-reaching cultural effects of El Niño
- Interactive displays where visitors can explore the work of Smithsonian scientists

The focal point of “El Niño’s Powerful Reach” is a multi-screen presentation of ground-based and satellite images. Many of these images provide recent views of Earth taken from space. Others show the interplay of the Earth’s elements at a microscopic level. The exhibition also features interpretive touch-screen computer stations that combine text, graphics, video, visualizations, and objects from the Museum’s collections that aid in telling the story of El Niño. At these interpretive stations, visitors will meet the Smithsonian scientists studying these Earth systems and learn more about current scientific explorations.

The exhibition was made possible through the support of NASA’s Earth Science Enterprise, which also assisted in the development and content of “El Niño’s Powerful Reach.” Additional funding was provided by NOAA and the Environmental Protection Agency.

“El Niño’s Powerful Reach” is the first element of the Natural History Museum’s “Global Links,” a changing exhibition about Earth system science. The “Global Links” exhibition hall will support a series of stories about Earth phenomena and is the core of the Museum’s “Forces of Change” program. This program examines the geological, environmental, and cultural processes that have shaped and continue to change our world. Aside from the “Global Links” exhibition hall, the program includes traveling exhibitions, publications, interactive computer products, and public programs.

The National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W., welcomed more than 8.4 million people during the year 2001, making it the most visited natural history museum in the world. Opened in 1910, the Museum is dedicated to maintaining and preserving the world's most extensive collection of natural history specimens and human artifacts. It also fosters critical scientific research as well as educational programs and exhibitions that present the work of its scientists and curators to the public. The Museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum and research complex. The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History is open for special summer hours from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day through Sept. 2. Admission is free.

###

NOTE TO EDITORS: Images are available upon request.
SI-333-2002