DINING WITH DINOSAURS

Smithsonian’s Fossil Café Opens at the National Museum of Natural History

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History offers a unique blend of dining and education with the opening of its new Fossil Café. Located on the first floor at the rear of the Dinosaur Hall, Fossil Café combines delicious cuisine with exciting learning opportunities that extend the traditional experience of a visit to the world’s most visited natural history museum.

In a cooperative effort between Museum curators, Smithsonian Business Ventures and Restaurant Associates, the innovative café was designed to educate visitors in an entertaining atmosphere. Undertaken by members of the Department of Paleobiology and Office of Exhibits, Fossil Café incorporates real fossils accompanied by descriptive text and illustrations on display within the café’s tabletops.

The tabletops were designed for multi-purpose use - as specimen cases and as dining tables - so that patrons may enjoy their meals while learning about the evolution of flowering plants. Shadow box-style tabletops contain real fossils and other specimens, along with photos, drawings and descriptions. Table themes include “Early Flowering Plants,” “Fossil Flowers – A Rare Treat,” and “Who, Besides Us, Eats Plants?”

“Fossil Café broadens the conventional boundaries of the Museum’s exhibitions by enabling visitors to examine real fossils in an unusual setting – within the tables of a restaurant,” said Scott Wing, curator in the Department of Paleobiology and member of the team that developed the café. “When visitors stop at the café they don’t have to choose between exhibitions and food, because they can continue to learn even while they eat and drink. I don’t know of any place like this in the world.”

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Decorated in warm wood and stone finishes with a 30-foot mural depicting scenes of life from the Cretaceous through the Pleistocene epochs, Fossil Café is an ideal place for visitors to satisfy their appetite and whet their curiosity for more exploration into natural history. The menu offers an array of sandwiches, salads, desserts, beverages and a coffee bar. The light-filled café features a large window with a view of the Mall and the carousel. Fossil Café is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and is operated by Restaurant Associates for Smithsonian Business Ventures.

Linda Deck, of the Office of Exhibits at the Natural History Museum, served as exhibit developer. The café was designed by Daroff Design, Inc. of Philadelphia.


The National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W., welcomed more than 8.4 million people during 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 from May 24 through Sept. 2. Regular hours are 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free.

Smithsonian Business Ventures manages all revenue-generating businesses of the Smithsonian Institution, including Smithsonian and Air and Space magazines, restaurants, museum stores, concessions, gift Catalogue, IMAX theaters, consumer products licensing, e-commerce and marketing activities, and commercial media properties.

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**NOTE TO EDITORS:** Images are available upon request.

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