

# Florissant Fossil Beds

National Monument  
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## Paleontology Program



### Introduction

Scientific studies have been conducted at Florissant since the 1870s. Maintaining an active research program is an important part of the monument's mission. The paleontology program is overseen by the park paleontologist. The program conducts research, identifies and monitors fossil sites, publishes information, provides education to the public, helps research by other institutions, and collaborates with other paleontological studies both domestically and abroad.

### Research

Current and active research at the park includes studies in the following areas:

- Preservation of petrified stumps
- Fossil diatom studies
- Fossil mammals
- Volcanic ash studies
- Comparison of modern forests with the fossil flora at Florissant



Volcanic ash study Dr. VerStraeten (left), Dr. Meyer (right)

### Inventory and Monitoring (I & M)

How many fossil sites are there at Florissant? What condition are they in? Are fossils being stolen and sites damaged? These are the primary questions that drive the inventory and monitoring program at Florissant.

The I & M program utilizes technology such as GPS, digital photography, and complex databases to track the condition of fossil sites within the Monument.

Data collected during monitoring is entered into a database that contains the history of observations. Photographs and written information for each site are uploaded for future monitoring. Monitoring is conducted on a regular basis which helps to preserve and protect the fossil resources at the Monument.

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## Excavations

Many park visitors want to know if the park service is “still digging” for fossils. It is part of the park’s mission to conduct research- driven excavations as long as they are done in a scientific manner.

Excavations are either conducted by the park paleontologist and staff, or by academic institutions with an approved research permit.

Fossil excavations are slow and meticulous. An area is selected to be excavated. Often, a column is dug and measured. Notes are taken as the process continues. Rocks are collected and then brought back to the lab to be examined. Fossils are found by splitting open layers of rock, sifting material through screens, or exposing fossils still within rock or soil. Great care is taken to protect the fossils, and reduce the impacts of the excavations.

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## Collections

Fossils from excavations are assigned a number and become part of the park collection. This process is called accessioning. The fossils are then tracked through a computer database and are available for research by park staff or outside researchers. Some of the fossils become part of interpretive displays. The collections are managed so that they protect the fossils and provide for easy searching for specimens.



A paleontology intern monitors an interpretive excavation site where research takes place. This site is located on the one-mile, Petrified Forest Loop.