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National Park Service celebrates first National Fossil Day

WASHINGTON: National parks are home to some pretty intimidating species. There's the saber-tooth cat, for example. The flesh-eating Allosaurus, with 5½-inch claws. And the hulking entelo-dont, a seven-foot-tall, boar-like scavenger and predator with a nasty nature and powerful jaws.

If it sounds like bears (which, yes, can also be found in national parks) will be the least of a visitor's worries, let it be known that the creatures named above exist only within the national parks' wealth of fossils. At least 230 parks preserve fossils from throughout geologic time; billion-year-old stromatolites, 200 million-year-old dinosaurs, and ice age mammals from thousands of years ago all appear in national park fossils. To promote awareness and stewardship of fossils—the record of evolving life on a dynamic planet—and foster greater appreciation of their value to scientists and educators, the National Park Service and the American Geological Institute will hold the first National Fossil Day on October 13, 2010, during Earth Science Week.

"Fossils deserve Americans' attention and appreciation," said National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis, "and I am proud that the National Park Service has been one of the driving forces behind the establishment of National Fossil Day. Fossils provide clues to how living things respond to change and hold important lessons for us, here on our warming Earth. Fossils excite children and adults and draw them into the world of science. Everyone should come out and learn more about America's paleontological heritage on October 13."

Throughout the country, children and adults can participate in National Fossil Day events. These include the National Fossil Day Celebration on the National Mall in Washington, DC, at which participants can excavate fossils from chunks of sediment at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, watch lab workers clean fossils, and identify fossils with the help of paleontologists.

In Arizona, National Fossil Day coincides with the opening of the Trail of Time at Grand Canyon National Park. As visitors walk the trail, they can read about the geology and human history of the Grand Canyon and about recent climate change. All the while, they stride through eons and gain a better sense of geologic time, for each meter on the 4.56-km trail represents a million years.

To plan for October 13, please visit the National Fossil Day website at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/geology/nationalfossilday/>. The site lists National Fossil Day events by state; provides guidelines for the National Fossil Day 2010 Art Contest; and serves as a one-stop shop for teachers, students, and paleontology-lovers seeking

activities and resources to help them pursue their interest further.

The website also lists the many partners helping the National Park Service to organize National Fossil Day. These federal and state agencies, avocational groups, professional organizations, fossil sites, and museums include the National Science Foundation, the American Geological Institute, the Association for Women Geoscientists, and the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

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