Florida Fossil Horse Newsletter

Volume 10, Number 2, 2nd Half 2001

What's Inside?

Pony Express Thomas Farm 'Digger Extraordinaire 2001'

For the past ten years Thomas Farm has seen many eager fossil diggers from all over the United States. Some come for the thrill of discovery and contributing to the world of science. Some come to get away from it all, the camping experience, and for the gourmet meals. All of them hope that when it's over they have found something to write home about.

Sarah Killingsworth exposes fossils with paintbrush. Erika Simons photo

Sarah Killingsworth came all the way from California to spend some quality time with her father and to escape, if just for a weekend, the stressful life of being a family lawyer. 2001 was her second year back and she was looking forward to a fun relaxing weekend. By 8:00 AM Friday, while she was still savoring her breakfast, the other diggers had hurried down to the gridded fossil site to claim their favorite spots, eager to begin the day's work. When Sarah joined us I pointed out one of the few possible squares left in the boulder bar. As the name implies, the boulder bar is full of limestone chunks from the wall collapse of the ancient limestone cave. Fossils in this area are often very broken and difficult to extract. Sarah dutifully accepted the task of excavating her square. Bill Killingsworth, her loving father, offered to switch squares with her, but she wouldn't have it.

All morning Sarah uncovered bone after crushed bone. There was no shortage of fossils and each required a difficult decision about whether to keep it, or sacrifice it in favor of a more important fossil underneath. There were frequent calls for assistance and decisions to be made, but sometime after lunch those calls changed tone and got excited. Sarah had struck treasure! Now instead of a jumble of unrecognizable bones, Sarah had discovered teeth and those teeth went to jaws and skulls. As we recorded each new plaster jacket being made, we noted that several successive jackets were made by Sarah. Skulls and jaws were criss-crossed throughout the square and this drew a lot of attention from the other diggers. "Oh, I wish I had picked your square, I'm not finding much of anything", said one of them. Sarah could only chuckle and say, "remember I came down last. Any one of you could have had this square."

When the weekend was over, Sarah had collected at least 10 jaws and skulls, making her one of most productive diggers during the decade of *Pony Express* weekends at Thomas Farm. The *Archaeohippus* jaws will become part of Jay O'Sullivan's *Archaeohippus* population dynamics study.
Erika Simons

The Little Gem - An Untypical Morning in the Life of a Paleontology Collections Manager

It sat in its box, alone among the usual suspects from Thomas Farm, *Parahippus*, *Archaeohippus*, tortoise, camels, etc. A tentative label in pencil listed it simply as a "carnivore" and a "tooth". Less than half an inch long and a quarter of an inch wide, it is about the same size as a lower molar of

Archaeohippus. That would have been a reasonable field identification. The tooth in question was collected by Larry Ward during the first *Pony Express* spring session of 1999. On August 17, 2001, Erika Simons and volunteer Marcia Wright were getting ready to catalogue Larry's and his son Bryan's finds into the museum collection. As collections manager, I gave the specimens a perfunctory once-over, checking the identifications and deciding which of the fossils were too broken to catalogue.

Larry Ward carefully exposes fossils while his special tooth (inset) awaits discovery. Erika Simons photo

The "carnivore tooth" caught my eye. Surely we could identify it better than that. A quick glance under a low-power microscope quickly revealed that the tooth was both complete and essentially unworn, in perfect condition. The anatomy of the tooth was also revealing. The presence of numerous cusps and multiple roots indicated that it was a molar; having only two roots meant a lower molar. The front three cusps were arranged in a triangle (called by paleontologists the trigonid); the back half of the tooth was a saucer-like basin surrounded by a few high cusps (called the talonid). This general type of tooth (a three-cusped trigonid with a large talonid basin) is the primitive condition for modern mammals; opossum and shrews have this pattern. But the tooth was not completely primitive--the crests that formed the sides of the trigonid triangle had notches characteristic only of meat-eaters.

My first idea was Leptarctus, a medium-sized member of the weasel and wolverine family. While not common, a modest number of jaws, teeth, and limb bones of *Leptarctus* have been found at Thomas Farm over the years. But they were not a match. The first lower molar of *Leptarctus* was longer and narrower, and the pattern of cusps was different.

OK, I thought, canids (the fox, wolf, and dog family) are the most common Thomas Farm carnivores, so could the tooth be from a canid? The three described canids from Thomas Farm are all about the same size, similar to a modern coyote. Their first lower molar is much larger than the mystery tooth (and very different in anatomy), and their tiny button-like third molars only have one root. But their double-rooted second lower molars are the same size as Larry's tooth. One by one I got out jaws with teeth of the three Thomas Farm canids and compared their second lower molar side-by-side with Larry's specimen. Definitely no matches--the cusp patterns were very different. So what was it?

In the same drawer as the jaws of the rare canid *Euoplocyon* was a box with four vials each with a single tooth. These were all upper teeth, labeled as belonging to *Phlaocyon* and that they were being studied by a former UF graduate student, Glynn Hayes. *Phlaocyon* is a member of an extinct tribe of omnivorous canids that lived in North America in the Oligocene and early Miocene. Glynn had already described a new species, *Phlaocyon taylori*, from an Oligocene site in Hernando County and mentioned the Thomas Farm specimens (Hayes, 2000). So, could Larry's fossil be the corresponding lower molar of the Thomas Farm *Phlaocyon*, the first ever found at the site? I scrambled to find references with good pictures of *Phlaocyon* lower teeth. Despite some tantalizing similarities, there were just enough differences in the relative sizes and positions of the cusps to answer no, it was not *Phlaocyon*.

At this point I had compared the tooth with all known Thomas Farm carnivores within the correct size range and eliminated them all. It was either time to give up or, as the saying goes, think outside the box. What other medium-sized carnivore was in North America in the early Miocene, the age of Thomas Farm? Perhaps making the comparisons with *Phlaocyon* gave me a subconscious clue. Because when the teeth of *Phlaocyon* were first found, they were classified as a member of the raccoon family, the procyonids. It was only after complete skulls were found did paleontologists realize that it was instead a member of the dog family. Could the tooth belong to a procyonid? I knew that the oldest published record of procyonids from Florida was late Miocene, almost 9 million years after Thomas Farm. But what was the oldest procyonid in North America? Back to consult the library. According to Baskin (1998), procyonids first dispersed from Eurasia into North America in the early Miocene, the exact age of Thomas Farm. So far, so good.

I went and found copies of Baskin's papers on fossil procyonids from North America and got a lower jaw of the ringtail cat, a small procyonid that today lives in the American Southwest and Mexico, from the museum's mammalogy collection. Comparison of Larry's fossil tooth with their first lower molars showed a much greater similarity than with anything else I had looked at all morning. The cusps were in similar places and had about the same relative heights. The size of the talonid relative to the trigonid was the same. Eureka, the first procyonid specimen ever collected from Thomas Farm, after 75 years of digging!

The story does not end there. I e-mailed former UF graduate student and fossil carnivore expert Jon Baskin a description of the tooth. An hour later he replied. Not only did it appear that the tooth was from a procyonid, but in fact two other early Miocene procyonid fossils were known from Florida. They were collected by Phyllis Miller in the Suwannee River and are stored at the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. A paper by Jon describing them as two new species will be published within a few months. Unfortunately, neither of them contains the first lower molar, so it will be difficult to make direct comparisons. Russ McCarty quickly made a mold of the specimen and a plastic cast of the tooth has been sent to Baskin for study.

So, after 18 million years in the ground and two years waiting to be catalogued, Larry's fossil is ready to take its place as one the scientifically more important finds at Thomas Farm.
Richard Hulbert

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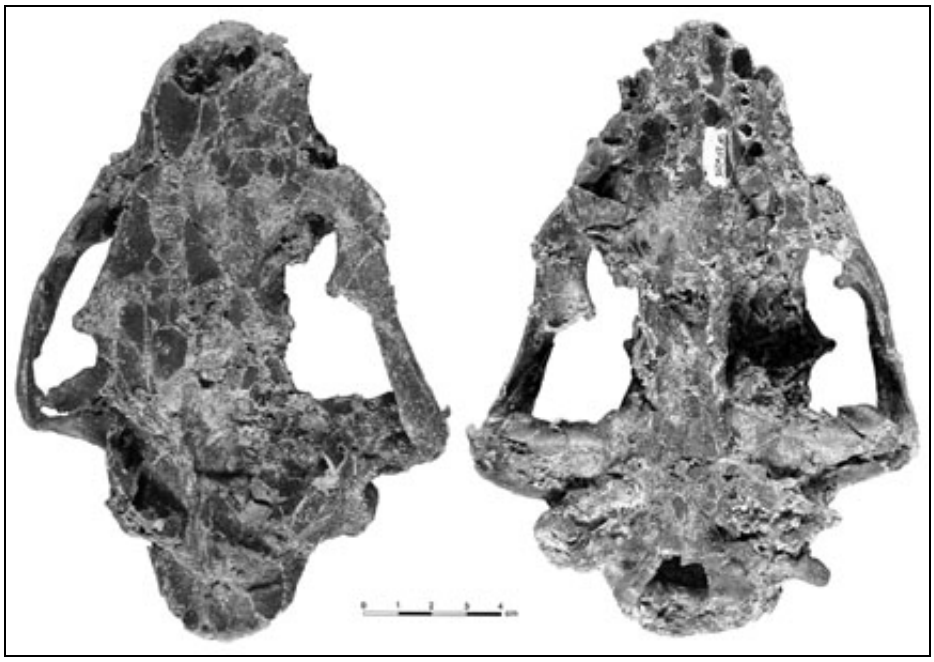
Oligobunis floridanus: A Mustelid Re-discovered

During the 1999 *Pony Express* spring field session, John Freund of Gainesville, Florida, discovered a skull of a medium to large-sized



Skull of Oligobunis Floridanus*(dorsal and occlusal views) from Thomas Farm. Erika Simons photo*

mustelid (the family that includes weasels, skunks, otters, and wolverines see page 4 of *Pony Express* Vol. 8, No. 2). This skull is the most complete and largest mustelid skull ever found at Thomas Farm. In 1947, Ted White of Harvard University described a new species of mustelid from Thomas Farm, *Oligobunis floridanus*. It was based on a partial lower jaw.

As we found in the previous article, carnivores are uncommon at Thomas Farm, and *Oligobunis floridanus* is no exception. Mustelids are typically among the rarest of fossil carnivores, due to low population densities and preference for forested habitats. Most of the other Thomas Farm carnivores are more common than *Oligobunis floridanus*. For example, numerous fossils have been found of the two dogs, *Metatomarctus* and *Osbornodon*, but *Oligobunis floridanus* is only known from the skull and partial lower jaw. Because of its similar body size and structure to the Thomas Farm dogs, it is difficult to distinguish the limb elements of *Oligobunis floridanus* and the two dogs. Therefore, *Oligobunis* may not be as rare as it seems to be at Thomas Farm.

Oligobunis floridanus is a fairly large mustelid for the early Miocene. Only one other mustelid genus was larger than *Oligobunis*, *Aelurocyon*. When *Oligobunis* lived there were no cats in North America. It was a badger-wolverine type animal that probably filled the niche of small cats and likely fed on the small mammals found at Thomas Farm.
Joann Labs, UF geology Ph. D. student

"Brontops Redux"

Who

Congratulations on a job well done to all the participants of the 2001 Nebraska Fossil Dig! Left to right (top)

Jim Toomey, Steve Hutchens, Bruce MacFadden, Reed Toomey, Sue Hutchens, Helen Cozzini, Phyllis Saarinen, (bottom) Pam Sufi, Judy Lundquist, Barbara Toomey, Marge Fantozzi. Marcia Wright photo

would've guessed? What began as an impulsive lark has become a fascination. Though hobbyist fossil collecting books have been gathering dust on my shelf for years, before joining Dr. MacFadden's group on *Pony Express* in Nebraska in June 2000, I had never actually looked for fossils, studied the animals that left them, or even tried to understand the earth's history in a deliberate effort. Now I make room in my library for the paleontology/geology texts that leap into my arms from the shelves of the bookstores.

My goal has become to experience the pleasure of learning in detail the history of this biosphere Earth, or Gaia. Stephen Jay Gould believes that the odds are near nil of a sentient, self-aware life developing from primitive preCambrian/early Cambrian forms; if we re-ran the tape of Earth's history, intelligent life would be most unlikely to emerge a second time. But here we are, we humans, for better or worse. What could be more compelling and, indeed, incumbent than to understand and appreciate our biosphere, very, very likely unique in all of space and time, as humans knowingly (and somehow helplessly) contribute to another of Earth's many extinctions?

Thirty-five million years ago on the marshy flood plain of what is now semi-arid western Nebraska, a member of the herd died. Scavengers stripped the flesh of her large, thick-skinned body and her bones were scattered and tumbled by muddy floods. Over the years her remains were covered by sediments, then blowing dust and sand of desert climates and meters of ash from volcanoes to the west. The climate shifted again and now her bones shine in the sunlight.

What's that? Aha! A large rounded bone protruding from the dry popcorn rubble of a low Chadronian hillside. It's smooth and lighter than the glaring clay, radiating the sun's intense heat. I can see there are other bones underneath, but my screwdriver is inadequate to the task. "Hello! Yoohoo, over here! I've found something big! Do you have a pick?"

Pony Express participants labor at the Brontops *excavation during the 2001 Nebraska Fossil Hunt. Phyllis Saarinen photo*

The two plaster jackets of titanothere (*Brontops robustus*) vertebrae, ribs and leg bones that we were able to excavate on the last half-day of our 2000 Nebraska expedition whetted our appetites for this year's adventure. Dr. MacFadden, Steve and Sue Hutchens and six volunteers returned to Phyllis's Quarry June 18, 2001, this time fortified with small generator driven jackhammers to clear the meters-thick overburden from the 10 X 4 meter site. Within minutes ten humans were tenderly picking and brushing to clear two 25 to 35 cm mandibles with canine teeth as well as two vertebrae and ribs. After four days of grunting, smashing hard work and bruised knuckles, we cleared several leg, ankle and toe bones, vertebrae, ribs, and two dark shiny molars; even one base of a *Brontops* horn. The only non-

Brontops bones found at the location were one rhino mandible and a Mesohippus jaw fragment. Though we were not lucky enough to find a skull or pelvis, we left for home satisfied that we had thoroughly worked the location. We might even have enough bone to create a *Brontops* display in the Florida Museum.

Barbara, Reed and Jim Toomey supported our expedition with enthusiasm and humor, good suggestions, and great food. They even conjured up delicious impromptu dinners for 13 people in spite of a malfunctioning refrigerator (so we could work longer hours at the quarry). Happily, for most of the week the weather was 5 to 10 degrees cooler than last year.

It's a special privilege to be the first to see the shape of another life out of sight for 40 million years. I have a new feeling of being connected, of being part of something much greater and more enduring than humankind.
Phyllis Park Saarinen, Gainesville, FL

Sloth-In-The-Wall - Painful Discovery & Reconstruction"

Before digging at Haile 7C, my last experience had been on an elementary school field trip to the local limestone quarry in Central Pennsylvania. And as kids we'd played in the cornfields, finding pieces of pottery scattered everywhere. We were sure we had discovered an ancient civilization!

Casey Austin sits perched on a ledge at the Quarry where the sloth was discovered. Most of the exposed bones were covered with plastic bags to shield them from drying out. The femur is bleow her encased in a plaster jacket. Richard Hulbert photo

Now that I am older and wiser, I was excited to experience a "real" dig. Then, the first day provided the makings of a great made-for-tv movie so here goes... Riding on the van to the site, the girl next to me revealed that this was also her first dig. When we arrived, we were given the Cliffnote version of digging, and set at a jumble of bones at the South Sloth hole where we couldn't do much harm.

We sat with out backs against a high, vine covered dirt cliff that continued to rain debris on us throughout the day. We were happily digging up pieces and parts (of what, we didn't know) when a large rock rolled down the hill, hitting my friend in the back. When we turned to see what it was, it was a sloth vertebra!

Now comes the good part. Our excitement drew a crowd and when a handful of the vines was pulled back like a curtain, the cliff wall was full of sloth bones sticking out all over! Hence, the discovery of the South Sloth-in-the-Wall. You can see from the one picture that we moved A LOT of dirt to get it out!

After the dig I begged and pleaded the museum staff to let me help in the lab. I had to know what happened to, what I had come to call, "my sloth." So for two months I washed and boxed the bones we had collected. Finally I was deemed worthy to

Under the direction of experienced staff Casey spent many hours at the museum painstakingly re-assembling the shattered sloth femur using Elmers glue and epoxy resins. Erika Simons photo

begin putting things together. I started with a turtle, moved quickly to parts of a camel, and then graduated to paper maiche and magic sculpt on a mammoth femur. And now, I have drawn the awe and amazement of many, including Dr. Webb, for putting together four trays of pieces and parts to make up this sloth humerus from the Sloth-in-the-Wall.

Yes, I am very proud! So now that I've proven I can run with the Big Dogs, I'll look forward to seeing you at the Newberry rhino site this fall!
Casey Austin

If you would like to volunteer in the vertebrate paleontology range at the Florida Museum of Natural History please contact Collection manager, Richard Hulbert or Senior Preparator, Russell McCarty for further information:

Richard Hulbert (Vertebrate Paleontology Collection Manager) at (352) 392-0736 or e-mail: rhulbert@flmnh.ufl.edu

Russell McCarty (Vertebrate Paleontology Senior Preparator) at (352) 392-6767 or e-mail: cormac@flmnh.ufl.edu

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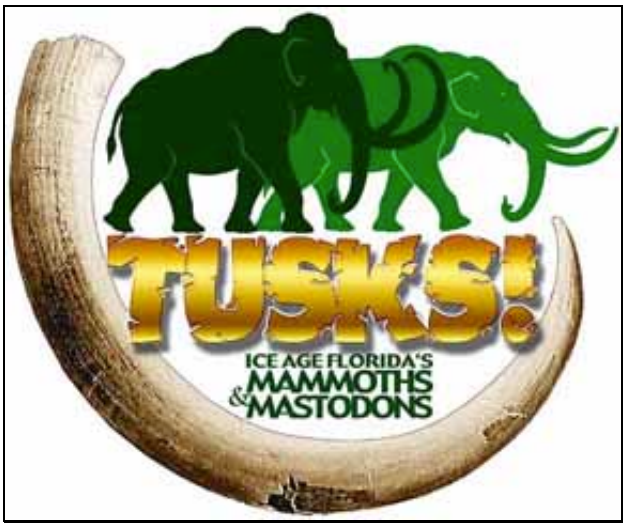
New Exhibits Coming to the Florida Museum of Natural History

The Florida Museum of Natural History and Gainesville Chamber Orchestra are pleased to announce a joint project centered on the "A T. rex Named Sue" traveling exhibit and its accompanying "Tyrannosaurus Sue, A Cretaceous Concerto" music. The project is scheduled to begin Friday, Jan. 25, 2002, with Gainesville Chamber Orchestra performances at the Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. "Sue" will open to the public at Powell Hall, FLMNH, on Saturday, 26 January, 2002 and run through 19 May 2002. Admission to "Sue" is $4.00 for adults and $2.00 for children (under 12 and all registered school groups). This exhibit was created by the Field Museum, Chicago, and made possible through the generosity of McDonalds Corporation.



Mammoths and Mastodons, ancient relatives of modern elephants, roamed much of North America until the end of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago. Tusks! Ice Age Florida's Mammoths & Mastodons, a new exhibit by the Florida Museum of Natural History, will explore the story of these animals in river bottoms, sinkholes, caves and phosphate mines. The exhibit will be at the Florida Museum of Natural History from June 15, 2002 through late spring, 2003.

5th Annual Badlands Fossil Hunt to Start in Denver With Tour of Denver Museum of Nature and Science

Over the past four years we have started and ended our trip to the Nebraska Badlands from Rapid City, SD. For this upcoming year, we have decided to change the point of origin/departure from Rapid City, ND to Denver, CO in order to: (1) benefit from more direct (and less expensive) roundtrip air flights to/from DIA (Denver International Airport), and (2) to have the opportunity to visit the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, one of the premier natural history museums in the US.

Several years ago the DMNS opened a world-class exhibit on fossils and paleontology "Prehistoric Journey." This exhibit tells the story of the evolution of the Earth and its inhabitants throughout four-and-a-half billion years, including the dinosaurs, and of relevance to the badlands trip, Cenozoic mammals. The award-winning Prehistoric Journey includes outstanding interpretive dioramas and graphic panels, hands-on interactives for kids of all ages, many mounted skeletons, lots of interesting fossils in cases, and is a must-see destination for fossil enthusiasts.

The 5th Annual Badlands Fossil Hunt will therefore originate on Saturday afternoon, 16 June in Denver. We will visit the DMNS on this weekend (either Saturday afternoon, or Sunday morning, to be determined). On Sunday we will then travel to Nebraska (about a 5-6 hour drive), where we will stay at Fort Robinson as in the past trips. From Monday through Friday we will continue as before, digging in the Nebraska badlands, and conclude the trip on Saturday afternoon 23 June upon arrival back in Denver. We are changing this schedule as described here on a trial basis, with future years' point of origin/departure for the Badlands trip to be determined from participants' feedback.

Interpretive panel & mounted skeletons of Cenozoic mammals, including those found in western Nebraska. Bruce MacFadden

We hope that this new and exciting opportunity will encourage you to sign up for this popular trip. For more information about the 5th Annual Badlands Fossil Hunt, consult the enclosed brochure, or contact Erika Simons:

photo

Erika Simons (*Pony Express* Program Coordinator) at (352) 846-2000 ext. 255 or e-mail: esimons@flmnh.ufl.edu

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Eadward M. Brown: 1923 - 2001

It is with great sadness that I report the passing away of Ed Brown, a friend of some 25 years. For many years Ed was actively involved in volunteering at the FLMNH and participating in paleontological outreach activities, until his declining health prevented him from doing so. Ed, and his wife, Anita, of Lake City, got their introduction to fossil digging in the late 1970's as Earth Watch volunteers at the Hot Springs Mammoth site in South Dakota under the direction of Larry Agenbroad. Ed and Anita were instrumental in assisting with the development of the early FPS-sponsored week-long digs at Thomas Farm in the early 1980's. Ed volunteered for many years in the VP prep lab, working with Russ McCarty, and then helping with the George Gaylord Simpson Library at the FLMNH. Although a charter member of the Florida Paleontological Society, Ed did not have a love for organizations, so his participation in the FPS was somewhat limited.

Ed was born and raised in Gainesville and educated at the University of Florida. While serving in the U. S. Army during WW II, Ed contracted polio, an affliction that was to affect him greatly as the years passed. Ed was an accountant by profession and rancher in S. Florida (Ft. Myers area) until things got too crowded down there. In the 1970's he moved his family to Live Oak, and then to Lake City, where they lived in a beautiful restored 1920's house in the historical district.

I first met Ed in 1977 when I went to Live Oak to give some public lectures. It was lots of fun, and there were some great parties. At the time I still had much of my Yankee upbringing in me, and Ed, never one to hold back his thoughts, let me know so. Thereafter we developed a wonderful friendship. I enjoyed his frankness, practicality, and sense of humor. Some of my fondest memories of Ed were when he would call me on the spur of the moment to go to lunch while he as down in Gainesville. I always did what I could to go. We were in many ways different, but there was a strong bond of friendship that I will miss.

In the end, complications from the polio got the best of him. Ed is survived by his wife of 50 years, Anita Whitmore Brown, two children, Thomas and Catherine Boyett, and four grandchildren. At the time of Ed's death Anita requested that contributions in his memory be given to the VP Endowment Fund.

(Bruce J. MacFadden)

Florida Museum of Natural History presents: Newberry Rhino Dig - Fall 2001 -

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

From October 15 through December 16, 2001 the Division of Vertebrate Paleontology of the Florida Museum of Natural History will conduct a major fossil excavation near Newberry, Florida. We seek interested individuals who would like to volunteer to assist and work side-by-side with museum staff and students excavating 9-million-year old fossils of rhinoceroses, elephants, horses, camels, and many other extinct animals. No experience necessary--just a willingness to work hard. REQUIRMENTS

Minimum age for regular volunteers is 15 (younger children can participate on family days). Volunteers need to be of at least moderate physical fitness and be able to work outdoors for extended periods. For insurance purposes, volunteers must sign a liability waiver. All fossil specimens collected during the excavations become the property of the Florida Museum of Natural History. HOW TO APPLY

Fill out an application form and mail it to Richard Hulbert at Dickinson Hall P.O. BOX 117800 Gainesville, FL 32611-7800 . If you are on the UF campus, you can pick up and deliver application forms at Dickinson Hall at the corner of Museum Road and Newell Drive. Application forms are also available on the internet at: /vertpaleo/2001_dig.htm or contact Richard Hulbert at:

Richard Hulbert (Vertebrate Paleontology Collection Manager) at (352) 392-0736 or e-mail: rhulbert@flmnh.ufl.edu

FAMILY DAYS

We have scheduled three half days when children between 7 and 14 years old can participate at the fossil site: Saturday, October 27 from 9AM to 4:30PM, Mon, November 12 from 1:30PM to 4:30PM,Sat December 8 from 1PM to 4PM

Two New Florida Museum of Natural History Bulletins

Two new FLMNH Bulletins published on vertebrate fossils: Hayes, F. G. 2000. The Brooksville 2 Local Fauna (Arikareean, latest Oligocene): Hernando County, Florida. Florida Museum of Natural History Bulletin, volume 43, number 1, pages 1-47. ($6.50)

MacFadden, B. J. 2001. Three-toed browing horse *Anchitherium clarencei* from the early Miocene (Hemingfordian) Thomas Farm, Florida. Florida Museum of Natural History Bulletin, volume 43, number 3, pages 79-109. ($5.50) Copies are available for purchase by contacting Managing Editor of the FLMNH Bulletin at:

mjoyner@flmnh.ufl.edu

Pony Express

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Pony Express--Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this newsletter is to communicate news and information and disseminate knowledge about fossil horses, particularly in Florida, and to develop a state-wide constituency that will support and enhance the research, exhibition, and educational programs offered at the FLMNH that pertain to fossil horses. Contributions to the Fossil Horse Fund are deposited into an account at the University of Florida Foundation, Inc., a tax-exempt entity, and will be used for the purposes stated here.

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Printed back issues of this newsletter are available at a cost of $8.00 per volume, or $3.00 per issue. Issues 1 and 2 of Vol. 1 are only available as photocopies. Other issues, which are available in their original printing, are: Vol. 1, # 3, 4; Vol. 2, # 1-4; Vol. 3, #1-3/4; Vol. 4, # 1 and 2; Vol. 5, # 1 and 2; Vol. 6, #1 and 2; Vol. 7, #1 and 2; Vol. 8 # 1and 2; Vol. 9 #1; Vol.9#2; Vol. 10 #1 Please make checks out to **UF Foundation** and send your request to Erika H. Simons, editor and *Pony Express* Program Coordinator at the above address.

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