

Volume 9, No. 2

Spring 2005

Jennifer Pens New Book !

Keep your eyes peeled for a new book coming in late May, written by our own Jennifer Bauer - Wildlife, Wildflowers, and Wild Activities: Exploring Southern Appalachia. Focusing on the biodiversity of The Southern Appalachian Mountains, Exploring Southern Appalachia takes the reader on excursions into nature study through the use of a wide variety of hands-on activities.

With so much life in this environment, every visit is guaranteed to provide a new adventure, making this book a great companion in the field. Full of fun activities, it is written for families, teachers, and individuals of all ages. You will learn information about plants, animals, microscopic life, wintertime in the mountains, life after dark, how to tune-in to the world around you, and so much more, often related through first hand experiences of the author. All of the activities stress the importance of a good conservation ethic, along with suggestions on how the reader can get involved in conservation within his or her own community.



Photo by Ken Murray

The book is illustrated by Janet Brown, a long time Friend of Roan Mountain. She has created exceptional drawings which enhance the descriptions of the activities, using her keen eye for detail and sensitive approach to life. Photographs have been contributed by two individuals familiar to us all, Jerry Nagel, Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences of ETSU and lifetime member of Friends of Roan Mountain as well as Ken Murray, author and photographer for the Kingsport Times News.

Exploring Southern Appalachia is an adventure in print that can accompany you on your excursions into the fields and forests. Its stories, games, crafts, investigations, and activities will delight you and make our earth an even more familiar place. And with the exceptional work of Janet, Jerry, and Ken, this book will be one you'll want to get your hands on!

Contact Overmountain Press, Johnson City, TN at 1-800-992-2691 for ordering information.

Gray Fossil Site

Larry Bristol, Paleontology Coordinator for the Gray Fossil Site, will be the featured speaker on Friday evening at the upcoming Spring Naturalists' Rally.

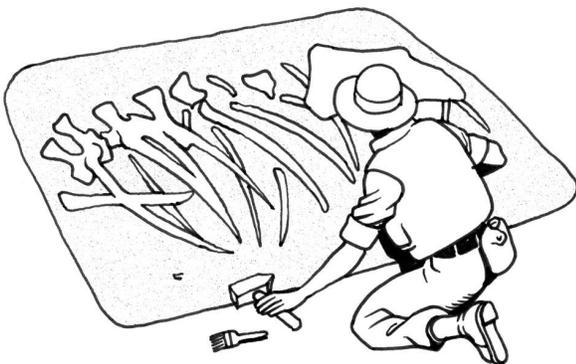
The Gray Fossil Site in Washington County, Tennessee represents a rare and unique terrestrial fossil assemblage. It is also, among other things, one of the largest single fossil localities in the world.

Discovered in May, 2000 by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) during construction along Highway 75, the ancient sinkhole is a treasure trove of ancient creatures. Dated to the Miocene Epoch, the site is known to be between 7 and 4.5 million years old. Animals recovered to date include fish, frogs, salamanders, turtles, alligators, snakes, birds, shrews, rodents, squirrels, rabbits, elephants, rhinoceroses, tapirs, peccaries, camels, saber-tooth cats, short-faced bears, weasels, and lesser pandas. In addition to these vertebrate organisms, the site also holds fossil invertebrates (clams, snails, ostracods), as well as plants, pollens, and spores.



Abundant fossils notwithstanding, the Gray Fossil Site is a unique scientific discovery for many different reasons.

- 1) It is one of the largest single fossil localities in the world. Covering nearly 5 acres, the fossil bearing sediments are upwards of 140 feet thick. Total volume of the deposit exceeds 50 million cubic feet. Active excavations will continue at this location for well over 100 years.
- 2) Geological deposits this "young" (geologically speaking, of course) are virtually unknown in eastern North America.
- 3) The site represents a rare terrestrial (land-based) ecosystem, 99% of the known fossil record being comprised of marine (ocean-dwelling) organisms.
- 4) It is known to have been a woodland or forested locality at the time of formation. All other known fossil deposits from this interval of time represent grassland or prairie type environments.
- 5) The site yields an uncharacteristically high percentage of articulated fossil specimens and unquestionably preserves the world's largest concentration of fossil tapirs.
- 6) The site is uniquely accessible. Whereas most fossil localities are literally in the "middle of nowhere", the Gray Fossil Site sits just two short miles off of a major Interstate (I-26).



Now a research facility of East Tennessee State University, the scientific importance of the Gray Fossil Site led to the awarding in 2002 by former Governor Don Sundquist of an 8 million dollar Federal grant for development and preservation of the site. Groundbreaking for a modern, 45,000 square foot Museum/Research Facility/Tourist Center took place on November 16, 2004, with a projected opening in early 2007.

For additional scientific information on the site contact Larry N. Bristol, East Tennessee State University, at bristol@etsu.edu. Persons interested in volunteering at the site should contact Mr. Jerry Jacene at jjacene@hotmail.com.

The Black-throated Blue Warbler

— Debby Neves

Not too far from the Miller Homestead, a Roan Mountain State Park cultural site, I have gotten to know the Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*). I call it the bonus warbler, two in one so to speak, for the female of this species is very different from the male. The male has a deep blue to blue-gray back with black face, throat and sides, and a white breast and belly. On its wing is an almost square patch of white, like a handkerchief tucked into a jacket pocket. The female has a drab light-olive back and face with a thin whitish line above its eye from bill to high cheek. Her throat, breast and belly are whitish. Sometimes there appear to be faint stripes of the same drab light-olive on her sides and lower breast and belly. Her one likeness to her mate is the square white patch on her wing. The bird guides that I have: a well-worn fourth printing of Peterson's *A Field Guide To The Birds* and brand-new revised edition of *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region*, both state that this patch is not always seen.



I have gone on the bird walks of the Spring and Fall Rallies off and on for years and have birded with other groups from time to time. I have learned to “pish” with the best of them. Along a familiar rhododendron-surrounded trail near a stream, one spring morning some years ago I “pished” up my first warbler, all on my own, and it was the handkerchief-carrying Black-throated Blue. A few minutes later I had another warbler. Not having my field guide in hand, I thought it was a female Northern Parula. The two warblers I had found seemed very friendly, flitting around together, in the moist spring woods and oddly they seemed to be answering each other’s call. Back in camp, field guide in hand, I discovered that I had the same warbler the black-throated blue, the male and female editions.

Now as I walk through these same woods, from early spring to fall, I hear their call. Peterson describes their voice as, “a husky, lazy zur, zur, zur, zreee or I am la-zy.” Whether in the crisp mornings of spring or fall, or even a humid July afternoon, I hear their lazy call and focus my binoculars toward the source. I play a betting game with myself, male or female, I ask. I am right at least fifty percent of the time. I have never failed to see the white wing patch either on the male or female. They have become my hiking companions and if I can’t find them, I can call them, and they will come.

To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter; to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest or a wildflower in spring - these are some of the rewards of the simple life. - John Burroughs (American naturalist and author)

<http://www.etsu.edu/biology/roan-mtn/>

Do you know that you can read our newsletters on the Friends of Roan Mountain website? From the home page, just click on the link for newsletters. If you would like to save paper and the cost of postage for the Friends, you can request that you be notified by email when a new edition is added to the web page. Just send your email address to barrigargn@earthlink.net with your request that our newsletter not be mailed to your home. If you prefer to receive a regular paper copy of the newsletter, you do not need to do take any action. We'll continue to send it by regular mail.



Don't forget to send in your reservation for the rally dinners, lunches and hikes. You can also find a reservation form at our website.



We're still looking for some extra volunteers for the Naturalists' Rallies. Would you be willing to assist with distributing lunches on Saturday at the rallies, or assisting our treasurer with registration at the convention center or in the field? Is there some other way you would like to contribute your time and talents? You can contact our rally directors, Jennifer Bauer 423 772-4772 or Gary Barrigar 423-543-7576.

Also, if you have photographs that can be scanned and placed on our web site or a favorite story about a hike, a slide show, a dinner, or a great discovery on the Roan, we invite you to share with your Friends! Please contact Nancy Barrigar, using the contact information listed below.



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