

FLORISSANT FOSSIL BEDS

NATIONAL
MONUMENT

COLORADO

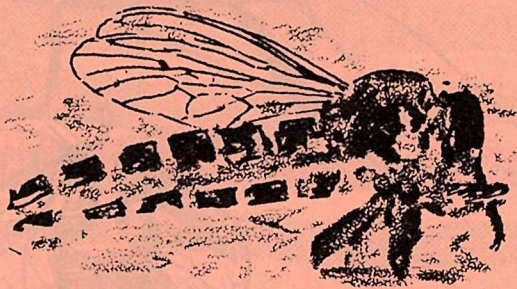


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Hidden several feet under the earth where you stand are the famous Florissant Fossil Beds, the world's most extensive deposit of delicate, fossilized insects and leaves.

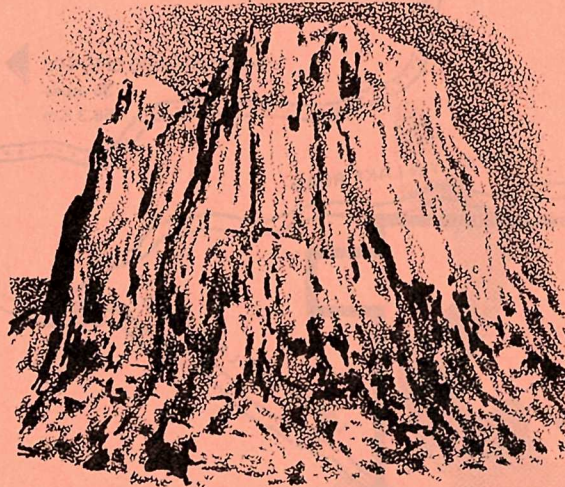
Impressions of dragon flies, beetles, ants, and butterflies and innumerable other creatures that lived here during the Oligocene Epoch, 34 to 35 million years ago, are almost perfectly preserved. Leaves from birches, willows, maples, beeches, and hickories, and needles from fir and giant sequoias are abundant. There are even palm leaves which prove that a warmer subtropical climate once prevailed here.

These fossils were created after millions of tons of ash, dust, and pumice were shot into the air during a series of volcanic eruptions over a period of ½ million years. This wind-carried material settled over ancient Lake Florissant, entrapping a vast variety of



plants and animals which fell upon the lake surface, then gently settled to the bottom. There they became fossilized, embedded in layers of ash which turned to shale, a type of rock. Like pages of a photographic album, these layers preserved an amazingly accurate record of the many plants and animals that once lived beside this ancient lake.

The fossils of the Florissant Lakebed were discovered by Dr. A. C. Peale of the U. S. Geological Survey in 1874. Since then, scientists from all over the world have dug into the shale and have removed 60 to 80,000 specimens, identifying over 1,100 species of insects, 114 plant species and several species of fish, birds and small mammals. In addition, several petrified tree stumps have since been excavated. One of the largest is a Sequoia stump 11 feet (3.4

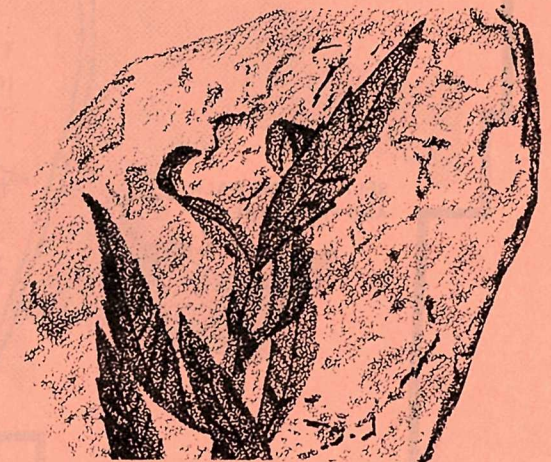


meters) high with a diameter of 10 feet (3 meters). At the time these were alive the area was about 3,000 feet (915 meters), but it is now 8,300 feet (2,532 meters) elevation. The ancient lake, which has since disappeared, was formed by a lava flow which dammed the stream, forming a sickle-shaped lake 12 miles (19 Km) long and up to 2 miles (3.2 Km) wide. Subsequent lava and mud flows from the ancient volcanoes covered many trees on the lakeshore, and covered the shale beds with a hard crust of rock which preserved the forming shales for millions of years.





The present day National Monument is an area of rolling hills and ridges covered with ponderosa pine,

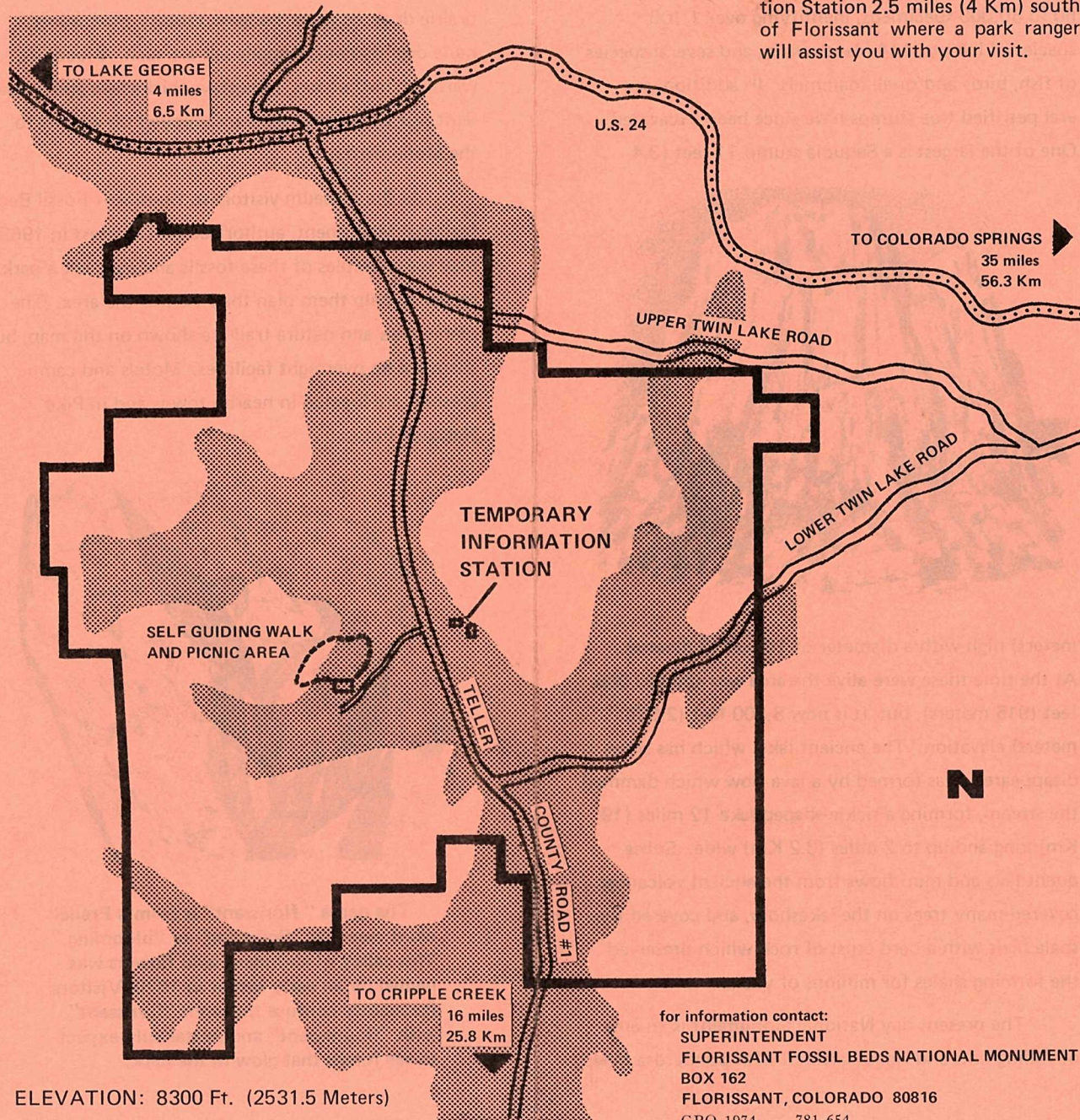
Douglas fir, Colorado blue spruce and aspen. Surrounding grassland meadows have abundant wildflowers including Indian paintbrush, loco, senecio, blue flax, wild iris, shooting stars and columbines. Squirrels, prairie dogs, coyotes, badgers, rabbits, porcupines, mule deer and occasionally elk are seen. Bluebirds, warblers, nuthatches, mountain chickadees and a resident pair of golden eagles are enjoyed by visitors to the Monument.

At the museum visitors to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, authorized by Congress in 1969, may see examples of these fossils and may ask a park ranger to help them plan their visit to the area. The picnic area and nature trail are shown on the map, but there are no overnight facilities. Motels and campgrounds are located in nearby towns and in Pike National Forest.



The name "florissant" is from a French word meaning "flowering" or "blooming." This valley of abundant wild flowers was named by an early settler in 1870. Visitors frequently confuse the word "florissant" with "fluorescent" and mistakenly expect to see fossils that glow in the dark.

-  MONUMENT BOUNDARY
-  SHORELINE OF ANCIENT LAKE
-  PAVED ROAD
-  UNPAVED ROAD



ELEVATION: 8300 Ft. (2531.5 Meters)

The Monument, located south of the village of Florissant which is 35 miles (56 kilometers) west of Colorado Springs on Rt. 24 is not yet fully developed. We suggest you stop at the Museum and Information Station 2.5 miles (4 Km) south of Florissant where a park ranger will assist you with your visit.

for information contact:
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