

SCIENCE FIELD TRIPS — CREATION STYLE!

by Kathy Montaudo, Leesburg, Florida

“See the Thumbprint of the Creator” advertises the booklet of field experiences offered by Bill and Merilee Clifton. Bill Clifton is a science educator and creationist from the Orlando area. He teaches science classes to homeschool children in Lake, Orange, and Seminole counties, offers a 10-class study of marine science at Sea World and plans and hosts, together with his wife, 24 field trips based on creation science. Because my youngest daughter is studying Creation, the “Day of the Dinosaurs” trip was a perfect supplement to her reading. So off we went.

The Cliftons provided each person with a specially prepared card: Field Trip Bingo on one side with such items as “osprey nest on pole” and “cypress tree” and, on the other side, a multiple-choice questionnaire to be used at the first stop: Dinosaur World in Plant City. Upon arrival there, we gathered in a small arena for a brief orientation. Mr. Clifton gave a Scripture-based mini-lecture about dinosaurs and dragons. He used photographs, drawings and lots of hands-on items, such as a fossilized dinosaur tooth, an egg, and a coprolite (look that one up). He included easy-to-remember definitions, such as fossils are “bones to stones.” He encouraged everyone to answer the questions on the questionnaire and offered prizes for those who got the most correct. The group divided into families to tour the park at our own paces.

Dinosaur World was formerly Alligator World, an alligator farm and reptile-petting zoo. Some

years ago, it was purchased and renovated to showcase dinosaurs and their kin. The old Florida swamp and boardwalks remain, giving one a sense of being in a prehistoric, dinosaur-infested jungle. Throughout the park are models, some life-size, of dinosaurs and dinosaur-like creatures, as well as written descriptions of their sizes, locations and eating habits. It was from these descriptions that we were to get the answers to Mr. Clifton’s questions.

Everyone finished the walk in about an hour or so, and we enjoyed our brown-bag lunches in the park’s picnic area while Mr. Clifton quizzed us on the question sheet. Five or six children chose dinosaur-themed prizes for coming up with correct answers. We cleaned up, visited the gift shop, and headed for our next stop: Mulberry Phosphate Museum.

The museum is located in Mulberry, south of Lakeland, and is dedicated to enlightening folks about the phosphate industry in central Florida. The displays are housed in retired railroad cars, which adds to the fun. The car we focused on was filled with fossilized remains of various animals found in the matrix from phosphate mining. The fossils ranged from sharks’ teeth to an entire dugong skeleton, and were nothing short of amazing. All these creatures once lived within a 50-mile radius of Mulberry.

After inspecting the display, we headed out to the matrix pile to dig for our own fossils. Armed with trowels and spoons, colanders and holey breadbaskets, everyone from toddlers to moms and dads

started picking through the shells and rocks. Mr. Clifton again offered prizes for the largest shark’s tooth and the most unusual find. The tooth, found by a 7-year-old boy, was approximately two inches long. The children voted on what they thought was most unusual: the inside of a fossilized shell, found by a 7-year-old girl.

Dinosaur World is open year-round. By presenting your FPEA membership card you are entitled to an admission fee of \$6 per person (the regular rates are \$9.75/adult and \$7.75/child). Be sure to visit their website at www.dinoworld.net for educational activities and dinosaur jokes. For directions, call (813) 717-9865. Mulberry Phosphate Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday and asks for a donation.

While both locations are good and valuable on their own, the plus is having the Cliftons to tie them together with a biblical worldview.

For more information, contact the Cliftons at 407-331-3427 or sciencepartners@cfl.rr.com. Or, you may visit their web site at www.sciencepartners.net. They also offer creationist field trips to SeaWorld, Silver Springs, and other places to study Florida’s Water Systems and Central Florida Habitats.

Kathy Montaudo has been homeschooling her daughters - Sarah, Esther and Miriam - since 1989. She and her husband are home missionaries with Africa Inland Mission in Clermont.