



Tracking Dinosaurs in Virginia and Arizona--USGS Scientist Ron Litwin (left) discusses casts of dinosaur tracks with Dallas Peck, Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, and Eugene Hester, Assoc. Dir. for Natural Resources of the NPS (right). The dinosaur footprints, found during a 1991 civil engineering project in Manassas, VA, are typical of those found recently throughout the Culpeper Basin. The basin that lies between Frederick MD and Culpeper, VA is the same geologic age as Petrified Forest NP in Arizona. Cooperative research by USGS and NPS scientists on both sites is not only improving the understanding of dinosaur behavior, but also providing a clearer picture of weather and habitat conditions between 225 and 150 million years ago.

Hester and Peck unveiled the dinosaur tracks as part of a new display at the USGS National Center, Reston, VA. More than 10,000 people have viewed the tracks since the display opened in spring 1992.

USGS geologists found fossil pollen and spores from evergreen trees, mosses, ferns, horsetail rushes and other plant life in rock layers above and below the track site. These microscopic fossils are from the Early Norian part of the Triassic Period, approximately 215 million years ago. The group of pollen and spore fossils is nearly identical to those studied in rocks exposed in the Petrified Forest NP.

USGS and NPS scientists have collaborated on many geologic problems, whether the geologic history of Crater Lake, thermal changes of geysers at Yellowstone volcanic field, or the age of artifacts found in glacial deposits in Alaska. Members of both bureaus have much to learn from one another about the natural setting of our national parks, which comprise nearly a quarter of all land in the western United States.