"PLEASE DO TOUCH": THE ESTUARIUM TOUCH TANK

Of the three major themes of the museum - paleontology, maritime history, and estuarine biology - perhaps the most "active" is estuarine biology. While there are fossil specimens to examine at the beginning of the paleontology exhibit and sharks teeth to find in the Discovery Room sandbox, as well as lighthouses, actual vessels, and boat races in maritime history, only estuarine biology has live specimens to view and live animals to touch. These live specimens have been the topic of articles in issues of the Bugeye Times in recent years, notably the otters, the special sturgeon exhibit in 1999, and seahorses in 2002. The most interactive exhibit - the touch tank in the Estuarium - has not received much attention.

Visitors to the museum's exhibits are certainly aware of the touch tank, located at the end of the various tanks of the Estuarium and just before leaving the building to watch the playful otters in their habitat. The touch tank operates most days, with a member of a dedicated group of museum volunteers in attendance. Many animals in the Chesapeake Bay and the Patuxent River are known to us, but they usually are not obliging to human contact. We have at some time handled fish that have been caught, we are familiar with oysters or blue crabs, and certainly have had contact with jellyfish, but we may never have had close contact with horseshoe crabs or terrapins. It is obvious, of course, that only certain animals are appropriate to a touch tank - animals that are amenable to handling. Fish, of course, do not normally meet these requirements (except for a short period after they are caught!), nor do seahorses or otters. Within strict guidelines, however, the museum has made it possible to observe several marine animals up close and to touch them. These opportunities exist at the touch tank.

Ken Kaumeyer, curator of estuarine biology, and his staff have created, maintain, and oversee the museum's touch tank. Ken admits, however, that the workload of the estuarine biology staff does not allow much opportunity for hands-on types of programs with the public. "The volunteers are able to fill this void to answer questions and make the visitors' experiences much more enjoyable and informative." The staff does provide to the touch tank volunteers various specimens of horseshoe crabs, fiddler crabs, and terrapins, all obtained locally. When not in the touch tank, these animals are kept in special tanks in the behind-the-scenes areas of the Estuarium where they are fed and watched for any evidence of trauma from their "public appearances." While each animal may have a pet name, no one specimen is used repeatedly, the usual period of public appearance being several hours at most. Although the volunteers who meet the public may know which animals are available for the touch tank, it is the estuarine biology staff members who are ultimately responsible for their careful use.

One of the chief responsibilities of each volunteer interpreter is to encourage the visitors to enjoy the experience of close interaction with the animals, but these volunteers are also expected to be knowledgeable about the animals' natural histories, the environment in which they exist in the wild in our area, and their relationships to other animals. To help the volunteers obtain this knowledge, the estuarine biology department provides many training opportunities, including written material that they can study at their leisure. This written material - a "touch tank manual" - is not limited to just the animals in the touch tank, but extends to all the exhibits in the Estuarium - an important feature, since the touch tank volunteers frequently receive questions about the other estuarine exhibits.

At least ten volunteers are currently active at the touch tank. Margaret Stamper, who is the liaison between the estuarine biology department and the volunteer council, has commented on working with visitors both at the touch tank.

Continued on page 6
MUSEUM RECEIVES SEVERAL GRANTS

The museum will be a recipient of one of the recently announced grants from the National Park Service for the fifth year of the “Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Program.” A new exhibit on skates and rays (see announcement in another part of this issue) will be the beneficiary of a grant of $42,688 to assist in creating interactive panel displays, audio/visual presentations, and custom artwork used to depict the many kinds of skates and rays that inhabit our local waters. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Program provides grants to non-profit organizations and state and local governments to enhance those places that participate in the Gateways Network, to which CMM was named in April 2001.

The recently acquired Miocene baleen whale skull, described in the Bugeye Times in the issue for winter 2003/2004, is of such significance that the decision has been made to accord it a special exhibit. To help develop this exhibit, planned to open in mid-2005, a donation of $12,500 was received from Bowhead Support Services, a navy contractor with offices in Lexington Park. The firm, whose shareholders are native Alaskans, is named for the bowhead, a modern-day whale indigenous to Arctic waters. Leaders in the corporate structure headquartered in Barrow, Alaska, felt that a partnership with CMM would be most appropriate. Museum director Doug Alves commented, “It is exciting to not only have a partner in our efforts to preserve, interpret, and exhibit this rare find, but to learn about the Inupiat culture and share in their respect for the environment.” Museum staff and volunteers, now working to remove hardened sediments entombing portions for the fossil, may be watched as they work at the beginning of the paleontology exhibit area.

Dominion Cove Point LNG recently donated $12,000 to CMM to cover the remaining cost of renovating Cove Point Lighthouse’s fog bell signal building into a mini-theatre, to be used for viewing the museum’s upcoming documentary, The Keepers’ Children. This film, being produced by River Bend Research, will take viewers into the lives of people who once lived at the Cove Point Lighthouse as children of lighthouse keepers. “The support of Dominion is very timely in that our documentary is in the final stages of production,” commented Vanessa Gill, CMM’s director of development. “Having the funding to complete our mini-theatre on the grounds of the lighthouse is very exciting, and we are proud to have Dominion as a partner in this project.” This project also is expected to be completed by mid-2005.

WATERSIDE MUSIC SERIES

Waterside Music Series presented Merle Haggard live in concert to a sold-out crowd on July 18. On September 19, The Beach Boys performed all their classic hits on CMM’s Washington Gas Pavilion stage. Fall and winter concerts are planned, so please check the museum’s website for updates.

Miocene whale skull as presently exhibited. The new grant will enable staff to finish preparation and create a new exhibit. CMM photo by Stephen Godfrey
MIOCENE ELEPHANTS FROM CALVERT CLIFFS

By Stephen J. Godfrey, Curator of Paleontology

[Editor's note: This article appeared in the August 2004 issue of The Anchor, the museum's newsletter for volunteers, but it seemed of general interest to museum members.]

During the Miocene epoch (23.8 to 5.3 million years ago), there were many terrestrial mammals living in Maryland that are now extinct. Among these were the prehistoric rhinos, tapirs, peccaries, camels, smaller horses, and elephants - to mention a few. As one would expect, because the sediments that now make up Calvert Cliffs were laid down on the bottom of a deeper prehistoric Atlantic Ocean that covered southern Maryland, the vast majority of the fossils here are of marine organisms. From time to time, however, the fossilized remains of large terrestrial animals erode from the cliffs, and those of prehistoric elephants are among the most exciting because of their large size.

Gomphotheres are one of the entirely extinct groups of prehistoric elephants. They first show up in the North American fossil record about seventeen million years ago, a rough estimate of when they first migrated from Asia. By about thirteen million years ago, they had spread across North America to inhabit the forests of Maryland.

Perhaps the most conspicuous way in which gomphotheres differ from living elephants is that they retain tusks in their lower jaws. In addition to which, the upper tusks retain a strip of enamel that runs lengthwise along the outside surface of the ivory tusk. Until very recently, although gomphothere molars were known from the Calvert Cliffs, no gomphothere tusks, or parts thereof, had ever been found. Through the efforts of long-time fossil collector William (Doughie) Douglass, we now preserve in CMM's collections several handsome sections of a gomphothere tusk. More recently, Sandy Roberts, a long-time volunteer, donated the second known gomphothere partial tusk to the museum. This tusk is split lengthwise, revealing its internal structure.

Although exceedingly rare, the large and robust molars of these elephants are more commonly found than are their tusks. We can now claim to have in our collection the largest and most complete gomphothere molar known from Calvert Cliffs, thanks to the collecting efforts of David Rhea. After 150 years of collecting along Calvert Cliffs, only these two partial tusks and a dozen or so gomphothere teeth are known from this area.

MUSEUM APPEARS AT FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

Interested visitors watch CMM’s exhibits curator, Jim Langley, at work carving.

CMM photo by Rachel Reese

CMM was invited to appear in this year’s Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the Mall in Washington during the two weeks June 23 through July 4. The theme of “Mid-Atlantic Maritime Culture: Coastal Community Connections” provided an opportunity for communities to exchange information and grow regional networks while engaging the public in demonstrations of nautical skills. Staff members spent their time talking with the many visitors to the festival, as well as actually working on appropriate projects.

Staff at the festival: (left to right) Tim Scheiner, Rachel Reese, Skip Edwards, and Richard Dodds.

CMM photo by Ken Wease

Holiday Shopping at the Museum Store

As you begin your holiday shopping in the next months, remember that there are always wonderful gifts to be found in the museum store. Museum members receive a 10 percent discount at all times, but this is increased to 20 percent during the Solomons Christmas Walk on Friday, December 10, through Sunday, December 12, including the Members’ Yule Party on December 12. The store will also provide help with wrapping presents on the Friday evening and Saturday of the Christmas Walk weekend.

YOU’LL BENEFIT FROM FINDING APPROPRIATE GIFTS AND CMM WILL BENEFIT FROM YOUR SUPPORT
CRADLE OF INVASION 2004

This annual event continues to attract many attendees to the museum for a weekend of reminiscences of the U. S. Naval Amphibious Training Base here at Solomons during World War II, as well as the civilian life of the 1940s. Ideal summer weather drew a larger crowd than the previous two years, including many veterans who each year have been encouraged to record their memories of that important period of the nation's history. There were two new features this year: an attractive and informative program guide, prepared by the education department, and a new group of military enactors - the men of a re-created 29th Infantry Division who represented the thousands of men who trained at Solomons. Features repeated from previous COI weekends included the 1944 Living History Camp across from the museum on all three days; several cruises on the Wm. B. Tennison; a "1940s Nite Club & Fashion Show" on Friday, August 6; an opening ceremony on Saturday, August 7; entertainment during the afternoon in the museum auditorium; a reenactment of an amphibious landing at the Naval Recreation Center; a dinner-dance at the amphibious training base on Saturday evening; and more entertainment on Sunday, August 8, ending with the navy's Sea Chanters in the late afternoon under the Drum Point Lighthouse.

Capt. Zachary A. Henry, commanding officer of the U. S. Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, presided at the opening ceremony on August 7. Immediately to his right is David Hale, president of the Calvert County Board of Commissioners. During the ceremony a letter was read from President George W. Bush expressing his best wishes for a successful celebration honoring a significant event in the nation's history.

Some of the veterans attending the weekend. CMM photo by Bob Hall

Participants in the 1944 Living History Military Camp were visited by "Abbot & Costello" (Joe Zeigler and Bill Riley). CMM photo by Bob Hall

The Navy Sea Chanters under the Drum Point Lighthouse were the closing event of the COI 2004 weekend on August 8. CMM photo by Bob Hall

The amphibious landing exercises at the Navy Recreation Center were viewed from land and from the nearby Wm. B. Tennison on August 7. CMM photo by Bob Hall
“PLEASE DO TOUCH”: THE ESTUARIUM TOUCH TANK

[Continued from page 1]

and in visits to schools. In showing the horseshoe crabs, for example, she has found that adults are interested in the practical medical uses of these animals, but the children like to touch something that can trace its lineage back to prehistoric times. While the children are fascinated, the adults sometimes have to be prodded and cajoled by their offspring into actually touching “that thing.” Terrapins, on the other hand, are liked by everyone – they are docile and put up with no end of petting. At one school visit, a group of four- and five-year-olds produced a list of things people have that terrapins don’t: hair, teeth, ears, eyebrows, and belly buttons.

During 2001, nearly seven hundred hours were logged by the touch tank volunteers, who included Linn Abbott, Deb Carlson, Harry Childers, Linda Densmore, Mary Hellebower, Sue Hu, Dawn Jones, Dana Shepherd, Margaret Stamper, and Don Sweeten.

What’s to Come?

On October 23 a new exhibit will open in the changing exhibit area, just inside the entrance to the museum’s exhibition building. This exhibit, with the title “Secrets of the Mermaid’s Purse: Skates & Rays of the Mid-Atlantic,” will feature these marine creatures that are distant relatives of the shark. They are found throughout the oceans of the world, and several species can be found in the Chesapeake Bay and the lower reaches of several of its major tributaries. Crowned rays, for example, can be found regularly in the Patuxent River. Clearnose skates are also occasionally captured as far upstream as Benedict, but they are not often observed, as unlike the rays, they spend most of their time on the bottom.

This exhibit is part of CMMs ongoing feature exhibit program, and will feature encounters of the batoid kind - the exhibit will make clear what batoids are! A series of descriptive panels will be used to familiarize visitors with the long history of these fish, their present locales throughout the world, where they go in cold weather, and their interaction with other species. New to the museum will be a forty-inch touch screen providing information. A commemorative coin will be given to the first hundred visitors to the exhibit.

But the most interesting feature of the exhibit will be a large tank that contains live skates and rays, to be seen up close. Visitors will be encouraged to actually touch these fish that are harmless (their barbs have been removed), so this tank will provide another opportunity for volunteers to help visitors enjoy live specimens. If space permits, it is planned to have the touch tank operations moved to an area near the tank holding the skates and rays, providing our visitors with an even broader experience of “please do touch.” More information on the opening of the new exhibit will be carried in local papers during the next few weeks.

Sources: Some of this information appeared in an article by Margaret Stamper in the Bugeye Times (Spring 1999) and an article by Shirley Mihursky in The Anchor (August 2004)
Holiday Basket Bingo Extravaganza

Benefit: The Calvert Marine Museum Society

Sunday, November 14, 2004

Calvert County Fairgrounds
Route 231, Barstow, MD

Doors open at 11:00am; early birds begin at 1:00; regular games begin at 1:30pm
410-326-2042, ext.17

Over $8,000 worth of baskets to be won!
Featuring products from the new Fall/Winter “Wish List” and the 2004 Holiday Campaign!
King Tutt for baskets will be played!

SPECIAL DRAWINGS
Special basket drawings for CMMS members
and all pre-paid ticket holders;
order your tickets today!
LIMITED SEATING!

ADMISSION PRICES
Regular Book of 25 games: $20
Extra books: $5 each (no limit)
Special book of 5 games: $5 each
Early bird book of 4 games: $2 each

Advanced Ticket Order Form

A limited number of tickets will be pre-sold.

Sorry, but we are unable to accept reservations without a pre-paid ticket;
a limited number of tickets WILL be available at the door on the day of the event.

YES! I would like to have a chance at over $8,000 worth of baskets. Please reserve my ticket for the
Holiday Basket Bingo Extravaganza for the Calvert Marine Museum Society on November 14!

NAME: ________________________________  # of tickets @ $20 each: ________________________________

ADDRESS: ________________________________  Make checks payable to CMMS ________________________________

PHONE: ________________________________

_____ No, I cannot attend, but please include me as a CMMS sponsor of the event. My donation is enclosed.

Mail order form and payment to:
CMMS
PO Box 97
Solomons, MD 20688

CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM
New Boat Owners at Calvert Marine Museum

Left to right: Scott Fringer, Robin Baker, Jack Fringer, Jason Baker, Ben Weinstein, Gabe Weinstein, Clinton Bordand, Jerry Weinstein, Jim Johnson, Mike Schwartz, Joshua Bordand, Alan Schwartz, Stuart Thompson.

CMM photo by George Surgent

BUILD A CANOE IN A WEEKEND

Sign up now for another program to build a 15.5-foot wooden canoe at the museum’s Patuxent Small Craft Center, on Saturday, November 13, and Sunday, November 14. Working singly or with a friend or family member (kids aged 10 and up are welcome in the company of an adult), your canoe and paddle will be ready to take home and paint at the end of the course. Simple hand tools will be used under the guidance of expert instructors – no previous boating experience is necessary. The fee of $475 for museum members and $525 for non-members includes everything necessary to build a complete canoe and double paddle, except for paint. Further information may be obtained from George Surgent at 410-586-2700. To register, call Melissa McCormick at 410-326-2042, extension 41.

Volunteer Council Annual Meeting – since the meeting was held too late for this issue of the Bugeye Times, the names of the new officers will appear in the December issue.