

## Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

by Dave Cooper



*Checking out one of the petrified Redwoods along the Petrified Forest Loop trail-small.jpg*

Many visitors come to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument to see the huge, fossilized redwood trees. Equally fascinating, though, are the fossilized remains of insect and plant life that have been unearthed at this site.

Although many specimens have been removed from the site, either by scientists or by visitors prior to the protection afforded by National Monument status in 1969, remains of some of the giant redwood stumps have been preserved and can be seen along one of the hiking trails. The visitor center also has intriguing displays of fossil remains.

The redwood tree stumps were preserved when a volcanic mudflow blanketed the area around 35 million years ago, while volcanic ash settled to the bed of prehistoric Lake Florissant to create the shale layers that trapped and preserved insect and plant remains. According to park literature, these fossil beds added thousands of previously unknown species to the scientific database since the site was first discovered in the late 1800's, and are internationally renowned.

Plan to spend a day here, viewing the fossil displays and enjoying almost 15 miles of hiking trails. After viewing the informational video and examining the trays of fossils on display in the visitor center, grab a trail guide and head out to wander some of the many trails that allow you to explore the monument. After a stop to look at the covered display of giant redwoods, the 1.2 mile Petrified Forest Loop is a good place to start. A self-guided tour takes you by several examples of petrified redwood stumps on this easy walk around the meadow. One of the original excavation sites, the Scudder pit, is located partway around this loop.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** Drive on Highway 24 to the town of Florissant, approximately 15 miles west of Woodland Park. Turn south on County Road 1 and drive 2.3 miles to the entrance to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Turn right and drive 0.3 miles to the Visitor Center.

**Details:** The monument offers almost 15 miles of easy hiking trails, including a wheelchair accessible loop. For more information go to <http://www.nps.gov/flfo/index.htm>.

A \$3 entrance fee, good for one week, is charged for admission to the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

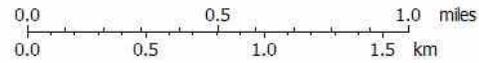
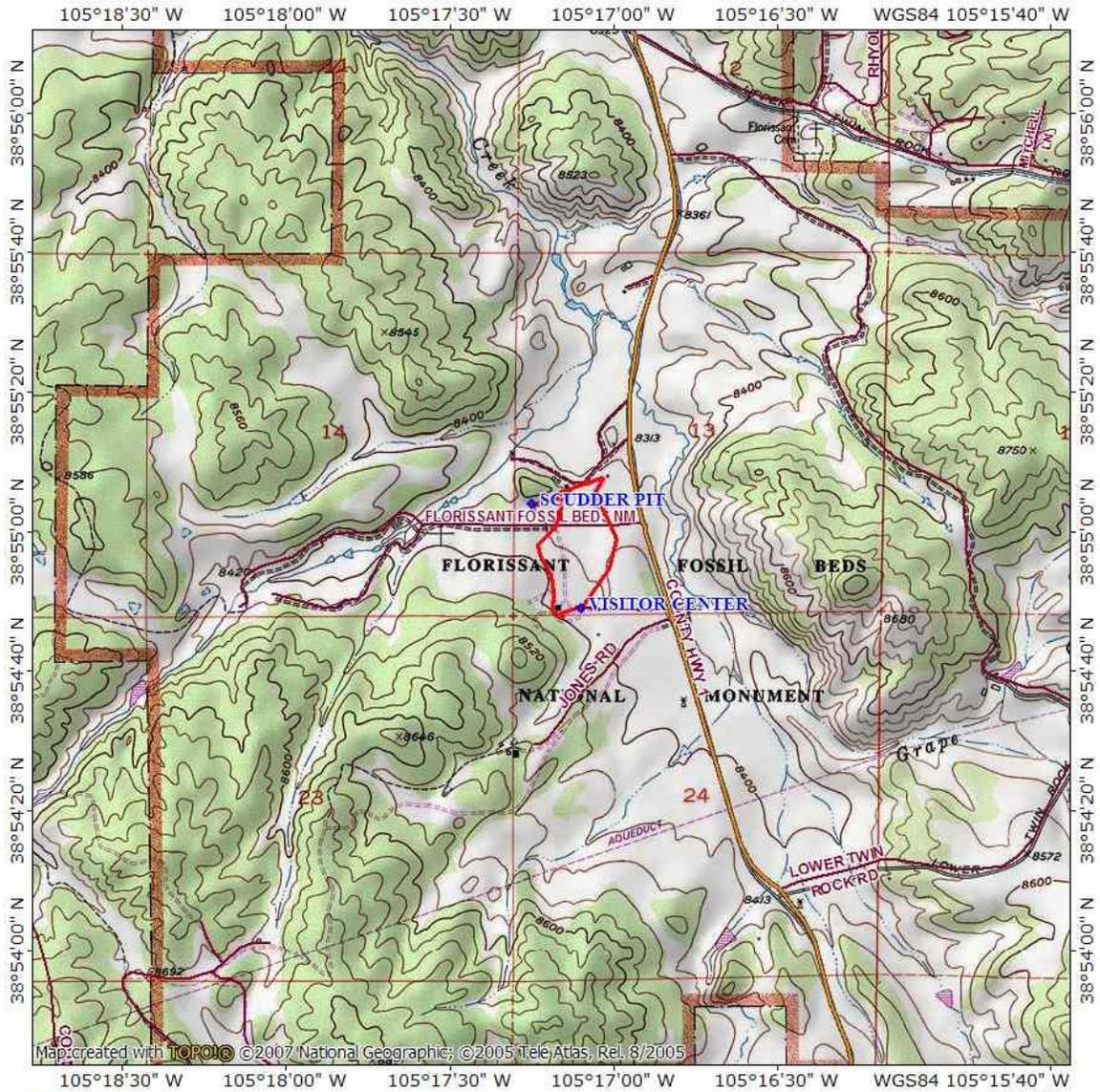
*One of the carefully-preserved redwood fossils-small.jpg*

After completing this loop, choose from one of the others; perhaps a walk through the ponderosa forest or, for a longer outing, take the four mile long Hornbek Wildlife Loop and visit the historic Hornbek Homestead, an 1878 settler's ranch.



*The Hornbek Homestead-small.jpg*

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