

Gray Fossil Site Museum & Visitor's Center

Gray TN

In 2001, while carving a path through the East Tennessee Mountains for a new highway, the Tennessee Department of Transportation noticed a large number of bones turning up in the excavated soil. Astounded paleontologists convinced the DOT to reroute the highway, and preserve the area for an exhibit and ongoing research. The Natural History Museum and Gray Fossil Site now houses a 6,000 sq ft exhibit on the Miocene fossils discovered on the site, as well as 2,500 sq ft of temporary exhibit space, and an ongoing archeological dig site staffed by University students and volunteers – now North America's largest known fossil site.

The lighting for the interpretive exhibits is lush and colorful, an approach meant to break visitor's predisposition to think about dinosaurs and fossils as part of a "black and white" or sepia-tinted past. The area was once lush and brimming with life. The vibrant textured lighting creates an atmosphere that brings a dynamic quality to the posed skeletons and detailed murals.



Using theatrical techniques and architectural controls, the lighting is easy to maintain, runs automatically based on the museum schedule, and requires a minimum of different lamp types, leaving the staff more time to excavate saber tooth tiger teeth out of the 7 million year old pit waiting outside.



Exhibit Design:
Photo:
Completed:

Gallagher & Associates
Tim Becker
2009