Pollak displays archeological specimens

BY ALEXANDER DOMINGUEZ – POSTED ON NOVEMBER 19, 2014

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The Cooper Center’s exhibit “Titans! Student Research in Archeology and Paleontology at The Cooper Center” is currently on display at the Pollak Library.

The exhibit is housed in the Atrium Gallery and features research done by students in the paleontological and archeological fields.

“We wanted to accomplish two things in this exhibit,” said Meredith Rivin, the associate curator for paleontology at The Cooper Center. “We wanted to, first of all, just share the wealth of material we have at The Cooper Center. Then also emphasize the amount of research that’s being done here by students. It’s primarily through research by Cal State Fullerton students, so that’s what we focused on, although we have students from other universities working here as well.”

For the past 80 years, The Cooper Center has collected specimens that students have studied by independent collectors in the county, to pieces retrieved from construction sites due to environmental mitigation laws. County laws require that a construction site be searched for scientific or cultural material before they break ground.

“I like to consider that [Orange County] is just one big archeological sight. Pretty much every time they go in to do any kind of construction or build a freeway or a shopping mall, they find material,” said Jeannine Pederson, the associate curator for archeology at The Cooper Center. “Native Americans have been living here in the county for at least 10,000 years up to the present. We find a variety of different kinds of artifacts.”

The center is a non-profit research establishment that was started in 2009 as a partnership between Cal State Fullerton and Orange County through OC Parks.

Students working at the Cooper Center have involved themselves in a wide variety of studies, ranging from mapping archeological sites in the county to describing different species in the collection. One of these such specimens is a brand new species of walrus affectionately nicknamed “Waldo.”

“[Waldo] is described by an undergraduate student in the geology department. He’s actually going to give it a new species name,” Rivin said.

The exhibit only shows a small portion of the samples and studies at The Cooper Center. The exhibit features roughly 50 specimens, but The Cooper Center has collected about 4-5 million specimens in total. Much of the exhibit’s content was decided on what was available and would not hinder further student research.

Overall, it took around six months to plan and put together, Rivin said.

“We looked for student projects that were interesting and had completed to a point where we had something to say about them, and where we weren’t taking specimens away from students who were actually actively studying them and putting them on exhibit for several months,” she said.

Due to space constraints, only around half of current student projects were put into the exhibit.

“I think there are 10 or 12 that are highlighted in the exhibit, but we probably have about double that going on,” Pederson said.

The display includes different archeological artifacts, as well as specimens such as ammonite, oysters and 90 million-year-old dinosaurs, which Rivin said is some of Orange County’s only dinosaurs. A computer model of Waldo is also on display.
The Cooper Center hopes the exhibit will help open up the door for more students to come use the center’s collection for research.

“Now that The Cooper Center is here, the collection is open and available for research,” Pederson said. “There’s endless opportunities for students from Cal State Fullerton and other schools to come in and use the collection for projects, research papers or thesis.”

The exhibit opened Oct. 6 and will remain in the library until Dec. 31. For more information, visit jcoopercenter.org/exhibits.

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About Alexander Dominguez
Alexander Dominguez writes for the Daily Titan and is enrolled in the COMM 471 class for Fall 2014.