

A Day to Discover and Dream about Mars

BY ALICE RHEIN
CORRESPONDENT

The Atkins and Zone diets may be chic among celebrities, but did you know that on Mars, a 150 pound person would only weigh 57 pounds? See, it's gravity that weighs you down, it couldn't possibly be all those pascals you ate earlier this month.

And you know how you're always wishing there were more hours in a day? A Mars day is 24.6 hours - more than half an hour extra to get things done.

Lots of facts about Mars will be revealed Sunday, March 22 when the Exhibit Museum of Natural History on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor hosts "Journey to Mars Discovery Day."

The all ages event features talks by former astronaut Tor. England and NASA educator Jim Fitzgerald. A quarter-scale model of a Mars Habitation module will be parked outside the museum, and a live feed from the Michigan Mars Rover Team test site in Utah will be viewable in the museum's rotunda.

Students from the U of M College of Engineering will have hands-on activities, and there is also a planetarium show narrated by Star Trek's Patrick Stewart that is recommended for children in grades four and up. Families also have the opportunity to enter a contest to win a trip with the Michigan Mars Rover Team.

"Kids are always interested in

the unique aspects of weightlessness," says Fitzgerald, an aerospace education specialist who provides NASA workshops and presentations in Michigan and Ohio. "They are fascinated by the details of daily life such as eating, sleeping and, of course, going to the bathroom in space. Students always ask about going to the bathroom and get a big laugh out of the description of the astronauts' waste management activities."

Well, kid or not, what's not wondered about that?

The Discovery Day is one of several events and lectures centered around the red planet (which is actually by interstellar in color, the red comes from the rust in Martian rocks and dust).

Through April, the Museum has a

photography exhibit in the rotunda featuring many photos taken using Viking Orbiter data and facts about Mars and its moons, Phobos (meaning "fear" in Greek) and Deimos (meaning "panic").

The "discovery day" has become a popular annual event at the museum and drew more than 1,200 visitors last year. Washtenaw County libraries also have activities to coincide with the "Journey to Mars" theme.

Though the tragedy of the Space Shuttle Columbia is still fresh with NASA, and all Americans, the space program is also known for moving forward.

"Inspire the next generation of explorers, as only NASA can," is one of its stated missions.

For NASA's mission to Mars, the next launch is expected by

this summer, and will land in January 2004, if all goes as scheduled. "NASA is in the business of developing technologies and doing research that will enable humans to expand their presence away from the Earth," says Fitzgerald.

And that often begins with a child's fascination with space. So what advice does Fitzgerald give for children who dream of traveling in space?

"Keep dreaming. This is where motivation, aspiration and determination begin," he says. "We have built our dreams of spaceflight on the shoulders of the dreams of others in the past and our own. Exploration and innovation are both seated in the realm of the possibilities that we consider in our dreams."

DISCOVERY
What: Journey to Mars
Discovery Day
Where: The Exhibit Museum of Natural History, University of Michigan, 1109 Geddes, Ann Arbor
When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday, March 22
Information: Call (734) 764-0478 or on the Internet visit www.journeytomars.org
Admission:
No charge, planetarium shows are \$3 per person

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CRANBROOK

FROM PAGE B1

exhibit of usually hidden objects. For the first time in decades, visitors can see *Treasures of the Institute Collection*, which spotlights the rare and mysterious wonders of 12 areas of scientific study from anthropology to geology, ornithology, entomology, mammalogy, and paleontology.

The exhibit continues to Sunday, May 4. On Saturday, March 29, Stafford will give an in depth tour of the collection as part of Archaeology Day.

"It's our first major exhibit in three decades, the first time in 72 years we've focused on the collection," said Stafford. "We have 5,000 square feet here and generally rotate traveling exhibitions. *Treasures* show-

cases our primary interest and makes a statement about the breadth and depth of our collection.

The founders of Cranbrook, George and Ellen Booth were dedicated students of Egyptology. They were in Egypt in 1922 when King Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered. That's a photo of them on camel back. George tried to buy King Tut's throne from the British government and when they turned him down he had the replica at the front of the exhibit done."

A timeline shows the history of the institution and the Booth's 1926 trip to purchase 277 minerals in Denver.

Minerals were one of the founding collections of the Institute, said Stafford.

"George Booth collected them world-wide."

Hundreds of objects tell the history of cultures and nature through artifacts and specimens. A birch bark canoe hung from the ceiling demonstrates the skill of the craftsman who created it from a single piece of bark. There's a 1890 bear totem from Vancouver, British Columbia, an Arapaho Bison headdress from the late 1800s, gold jewelry from 1000 A.D., Roman glass, a tusk from the toothed whale known as the Narwhal, an African sword, and Japanese Samurai Armor.

Visitors to learn more about the botany of Michigan? In addition to looking at dried plants in the exhibit, visitors are welcome to use the resources of the museum for research.

The exhibit only takes a portion of the story. Stafford is quick to point out highlights - an extinct passenger pigeon from 1900s, and large elephant bird egg from Madagascar that belonged to an emu-like species hunted to extinction at beginning of the 1900s.

"The ornithology collection tells the story of how the natural world is disappearing from certain areas," said Stafford.

"The Carolina parakeet was the only parrot native to the U.S. and is now extinct. We can only show 1 percent of the collec-

tion. The idea is to get people interested in natural history, draw them in with objects and specimens. They're blown away by the size of the elephant bird egg and it makes them want to learn.

"Many objects are too fragile or too valuable to bring out. That's why we're having Archaeology Day. We'll bring out Inca gold, 17th and 18th century trade silver, spears, swords, feathered dresses from Paraguay. It will be an up close and personal experience. Visitors can learn about archaeology. We'll demonstrate how stone tools are made and they'll have a chance to get their hands dirty in a simulated archaeological dig."

The ability to see nature and the rocks Mandy Maitland is learning about at Southfield Christian School is the reason her mother Holly agreed to chaperone the field trip to the museum.

"They're enjoying it," said Maitland of Bloomfield Hills. "They're curious, asking a lot of questions. It's fun seeing things through kids' eyes, to see their excitement about a basket."

Stafford points to baby turtles in a glass case and explains the jagged edges on their backs warn passersby of snapping tentacles. It's apparent this father of six loves spending time with the children.

"I feel a degree of frustration as head of science," said Stafford who was appointed director in November after seven years as a curator. "I knew what was here. I saw kids of this age, their excitement, taking them into the collections and decided to do the exhibit. The Institute is headed in an exciting new direction. We want to appeal to kids tuned out to the natural world. We're in the science and learning business. As a father I see the impact of the museum on my own children. We're a learner's museum. We're all life-long learners. We have stuff if you're 6 foot 2 inches or 3 foot 2 inches."

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