

Guidelines for Visiting Researchers to the USNM Paleobiology Collection

These guidelines are in place to protect the collections and the individuals working with them, and to ensure the security of the department. All visitors are expected to be familiar with these policies and we reserve the right to revoke visitor privileges at our discretion.

Hours and Access

All visitors are required by the Smithsonian to be issued visitor passes; unannounced visits can be difficult to accommodate due to the security process. Please visit our [Visitor Information webpage](#) and complete the [Visitor Registration Form](#) at least two weeks in advance of your anticipated arrival to make arrangements. The Department of Paleobiology is open to visitors Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. except on Federal Holidays.

Assistants

Anyone working in the collection is required to be issued a visitors badge. Information about assistants must be entered on the Visitor Registration Form when submitting a request to visit the collection. If you need to add an assistant after placing a request, submit a Visitor Registration Form for them individually two weeks prior to your visit.

Security Clearance Requirements

After an accrual of 30 days within a 365 day period visiting any Smithsonian Institution museum, a background check is required. If you know you will be visiting for more than 30 days within 365 days, please notify us as soon as possible so we can begin this process. In our experience, this can take several weeks.

Equipment

We have a limited number of dissecting microscopes and copy stands available for visitor use. Please make sure to note on your Visitor Registration Form if you will need access to this equipment. Visitors must bring any other necessary equipment and accessories with them. If you are bringing in comparative material that could be easily confused with our specimens, make sure this is noted on the Visitor Registration Form. If you have any questions regarding equipment and availability, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Photography

If you wish to photograph or image specimens, we ask that you complete a Department of Paleobiology [Photography License Agreement](#).

Collection Organization

In our collection, specimens are organized in one of three ways (1) by type/published specimens, (2) systematically, and (3) stratigraphically. It is extremely important to put specimens back in the correct location.

Handling Specimens

To maintain the condition of all our specimens, all specimens must be treated with extreme care and respect. Before and after handling specimens, please wash your hands. Use trays and carts to transport specimens, never place a specimen on the floor. Only remove specimens from the cabinets that you can work with in a single work session. Put all specimens away at the end of the work day and when taking a lunch break. All cabinets need to be kept closed and locked when not actually removing or returning specimens. Cases are to be closed while studying removed specimens. Labels and numbers are not to be removed from specimens without consulting a Collection Manager. When removing specimens from the collection, a loan slip must be completed and left in the collection to flag the specimens location.

Some collections such as the Burgess Shale require special visitor oversight from a departmental staff member.

All specimens brought to the museum (e.g. for comparison) must be logged in to the department at the time of your arrival and checked at your departure.

If you have any problems or concerns when handling specimens, please do not hesitate to contact a staff member for assistance.

Destructive Analysis

Any destructive analysis of a specimen requires an approved proposal to be submitted to the collections manager. Your proposal must include what your study is, what exactly will be sampled, the sampling methods and amount of sample required, justification for why this sampling is needed, explanation of why there are no alternatives to sampling, how the data might be relevant in the future, and an agreement to provide a copy of the data to the NMNH for our records. The proposal should be signed by yourself and, if you are a student, also approved signed by your advisor.

Reporting

We ask visitors to please notify a staff member of any signs of a live pest infestation, misplaced specimens, or suspected incorrect data such as specimen misidentification (please do not make any corrections).

Food and Drink

Visitors may have a re-sealable water bottle with them while working in the collection but no other food or drink is allowed.

Both the NMNH and MSC have a cafeteria. There is a microwave and refrigerator available for visitor use at NMNH.

Safety and Evacuation Procedure

Many specimen cases within the Department of Paleobiology contain trace amounts of lead and arsenic. The department maintains a supply of gloves for use by researchers upon request. Make sure to wash your hands before and after handling specimens and opening and closing cases. There is also to be no eating, drinking, or storing food in collection ranges or around specimens. For additional information contact one of the collection managers.

In the event of a museum emergency, listen for and follow the instructions broadcast over the security loudspeakers. If you are asked to evacuate, please do not worry about specimens or equipment, and leave the building immediately.

If you experience an emergency, call NMNH security at x33066 or MSC security (main entrance) at x81156 from any of the museum phones. If you can also call 911, which routes to NMNH and SI security.

Questions

If you have any questions about these guidelines or about visiting the collections please contact Kathy Hollis at 202-633-1357 or hollisk@si.edu.