

James and Rosemary Nix Nature Center
Fossil Discovery Station
Laguna Beach, CA

Interpretive Planning & Exhibit Design: Jennifer Rigby,
The Acorn Group

Creative Direction & Exhibit Design: Laura Stahlberg,
SoLa Creative

Fabrication: Gene Smith, Exhibitree, Inc.

The James and Rosemary Nix Nature Center is located in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, 6,600 acres of coastal sage scrub adjoining an additional 10,000 protected acres in the heart of coastal Orange County. Its mission is to instill an appreciation among visitors for this rare vestige of coastal wilderness and to enlighten them about its history and culture.

Working with the Laguna Canyon Foundation and Laguna College of Art and Design, The Acorn Group and SoLa Creative set out to design an exhibit program that represented a different approach to interpretation. Sounds, stories, tactile experiences, and rich imagery combined to fulfill the learning behaviors and interests of adults and children alike.

The floor-to-ceiling windows at the award-winning Nix Nature Center frame four dramatic views, or portals: *The Peaks of Saddleback*, *Little Sycamores*, *Of Bunchgrass and Buckwheat*, and *Stories in Stone*. These portals form the cornerstones of interpretation as seen through the lens of scientists, historians, Acjachemen elders, park advocates, and artists. Their stories enrich the visitors' experience and provide them with a "full view." Each exhibit portal within the Center moves from a panoramic vista to specific landmarks and icons that tell a story, such as the canyon's ancient geologic formations, the art it inspires, and the Acjachemen spirit animals it supports.

Another unique and popular exhibit is the Center's "hands-on" Fossil Discovery Station. This exhibit functions like a colorful sandbox, filled with gravel and replicated fossils. Its bold CHPL graphics and flip lids raise curiosity about the adaptations of unusual wildlife that once roamed this land. Eager paleontology tots can brush the gravel aside with large paintbrushes and study the replicated skulls of a bone-crushing dog, false saber-toothed cat, and other denizens of the Oligocene and Eocene Epochs.

During the planning process, the designers realized that vibrant, eye-catching color and graphics would be critical to the success





of the exhibit. It's "hands-on" aspect also would require a material that could withstand intense use and high traffic, and retain its visual appeal over many years. That's why they chose iZone Imaging's durable custom high pressure laminate (CHPL) to showcase some of their exhibits.

In describing their relationship with iZone, Jennifer Rigby, Director at Acorn Group, and Laura Stahlberg, Principal at SoLa Creative said, "We have been working with iZone for close to 20 years and they've always been our first choice for CHPL."

The Laguna Coast Wilderness Experience is an excellent example of outstanding planning and creative design coupled with a durable material. The result is an attractive and attracting magnet that appeals to visitors of all ages.



Photo Courtesy of: Andrew Castellano