‘Dig It!’ Exhibit Visits North Carolina Natural Science Museum
Debbie Anderson

Developed by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History with support from BASF, the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), and local donors, “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil,” a traveling exhibition that explores the profound ways soil supports our lives, opened at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences on May 16.

“With a growing world population, new research and innovative practices are vital to managing this soil for increased food production,” says Dr. Emlyn Koster, director of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. “Soil has also been making headlines lately as the source of a novel antibiotic whose target pathogens have yet to develop resistance to the drug. The benefits of soil are vast and still somewhat uncharted.”

Using videos, hands-on models, interactive displays, and real soil samples, the exhibition presents an eye-opening and engaging story about soil, the “skin of the earth.” This exhibit was originally created and put on display at the Smithsonian in 2006 where it spent most of its time. In 2010, it began traveling to different museums across the country. Maxine Levin, USDA-NRCS soil scientist, was instrumental in gathering the soil monoliths together for the original Smithsonian exhibit. Since then, she has been following the exhibit around the county and volunteering her time and travel on behalf of SSSA to ensure that the monoliths are intact and ready for display.

When “Dig It!” crates arrived in Raleigh, the museum requested the assistance of soil scientists to clean up and triage the soil monoliths. Kent Clary (North Carolina State Soil Scientist), Milton Cortes (North Carolina Assistant State Soil Scientist), Debbie Anderson (Soil Survey Regional Director SSR-3), and Dan Wing (Soil Data Quality Specialist SSR-3) volunteered to work on the monoliths preparation and repair for display. Although most of the monoliths survived storage and the trip across the country with little to no damage, others needed some tender care. About a dozen needed some minor mending and patchwork, and there were a couple that needed major repairs. It was a tedious process to check the durability of each monolith and investigate them for loose pieces.

After passing inspection, they were strategically laid out and ready for mounting. “I am excited to see the exhibition after construction is complete,” says Clary. This is a very impressive exhibit and a great educational tool for the public. If you happen to be travelling through Raleigh, the exhibit runs through August 16.