

Earth – always a frontier of evolution

By Dr. Rob Benson, associate professor of geology

The simple elegance of evolution as scientific explanation, the quintessential application of the scientific method, is the deep appeal of “evolution” to this geologist. By nature, geology is more a science of prediction than experimentation, integrating many components of other sciences. To stand before monolithic walls of eroded rock, and touch rock layers containing million year old fragments of past life is to truly read a paragraph in the Earth’s history. To see how that very life has changed form in such myriad ways throughout time is nothing short of marvelous.

Examining a pattern of life diversifying and evolving in response to changing conditions evidenced in the rock record is fantastic enough. But being able to infer conditions elsewhere in the geologic record, predict environment occurrences and the life within, to envision the world as it once was invokes a deep satisfaction and appreciative understanding that is difficult to describe. For me the question is not “what evolution means to me,” but what doesn’t it mean.