

The Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks, aka the Wild Center held its grand opening on July 4, 2006. It features a suite of interactive exhibits that invite guests to have multi-sensory experiences and encounters with nature, and to learn of the mystique and the greatness of this distinctive region.

Our company, exhibit fabricator Cost of Wisconsin Inc., aided in constructing and installing rockwork, simulated trees, and earthen textures for several exhibits and interactive labs that depict and teach about the natural topography and wildlife of Keene and Keene Valley (a valley located within the Adirondacks). Guests of all ages and abilities can experience the sights, sounds, and landscapes of the Adirondacks.

The Forest Lab teaches about the ecosystem of a forest floor. For this lab Cost constructed models of insects that inhabit the soil of the forest, scaled up 100 times actual size for a really close encounter. A cross-section shows how tree roots extend deeply into the soil. A space specially for younger visitors allows children to crawl under and to pop back up in a transparent dome, for a personal view of the forest floor - and a glimpse of a forest snake! In the Bog Lab, small children's propensity for exploring on all fours is further accommodated with an exhibit of ancient Adirondacks fossils.

The huge Creation Ice Wall, a reminder of the Adirondacks' icy past, towers over the Big Wolf Great Hall of the museum. Built of fiberglass, one section of this simulated glacier moves back and forth every few minutes and spews water and fog. The Living River exhibit that runs along one of the museum's walls begins with a plunge pool that flows into an upper trout stream, which continues on into a lower trout stream and finally ends in a trout pool. When guests approach the two streams for a better look, they find that there is a separate, demonstration stream where they can actually place their hands into the water and examine the rocks that lie there. Near the plunge pool is the Otter Exhibit, where a river otter gleefully plays amidst faux boulders and simulated tree logs.

We began construction of rockwork in the fall of 2005 with the creation of several dozen molds of rock formations found in the Adirondacks by architect Chip Reay. Brushing a thick, latex-type material onto sections of the selected formations completed these various molds. Eventually this latex seeped into the crevices of the underlying rocks and dried to a rubbery consistency in a period of about one day. Once dry, these rubbery materials were peeled and sent to company headquarters in Jackson, Wisconsin, where they

by Elsa Whiteville



Is it **Real**  
or is it **Latex?**

A Tale of Modern Fabrication and the Adirondacks



would be used as casts and filled with a fiberglass and concrete material. The resulting concrete molds were lightweight and turned into rock panels, then loaded into trucks, and shipped off to the construction site at Tupper Lake. Back at the museum site, crews assembled the various rock panels onto supports, and applied shotcrete between them, securing them into place.

Thanks to modern methods, technologies and materials such as those used for the Adirondacks exhibit, we fabricators are able to build ever-more realistic and convincing replicas of nature's splendor, which in turn provide better and more immersive guest experiences.



The Adirondacks, indoors: Cost of Wisconsin Inc. fabricated a variety of exhibits celebrating the natural glory of Adirondacks country. Shown here: a view inside the Wild Center. Previous page: the towering Creation Ice Wall. Photo courtesy of Tom Fisher, Cost of Wisconsin, Inc.



Elsa Whiteville is Public Relations/Marketing Assistant for Cost of Wisconsin Inc., a full-service specialty construction firm based in Jackson, Wisconsin with offices in Seattle WA, Orlando FL, and Dubai. Since 1957, the company has been creating exhibits and themed environments for aquariums, zoos, and museums, theme parks, casinos, hotels and retail.

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