

LIFE!

The Beacon - 4

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January 19, 2006

The AMAZON Trail

Exhibit brings Brazilian jungle to town

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As you walk in, the mysterious sounds and evergreen surrounding sooth the body. The snakes, fish and water streams on display capture your attention. The scientific games make you feel like a kid again.

This and much more is part of the Amazon Voyage exhibit at the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium.

World-renowned scientists from major universities (including FIU) and ecological organizations from North and South America have put together years of research in this 5,000 square foot interactive exhibition.

Philip Stoddard, professor for the Department of Biological Sciences, is glad to have some of his work on display.

"It's opportunities like this that you can take things that you have generating in your expeditions and laboratories and bring it out to the public and make it part of the general knowledge," Stoddard said.

Stoddard's display titled "Electric Fish" focuses on the way knifefish generate low-voltage electricity and use their electric fields to navigate and communicate. He traveled to the Amazon many times researching this and worked on his findings at FIU.

"The electro fish recording came out of the lab at FIU and a number of things here are things we discovered at FIU," Stoddard said. "It's a nice opportunity to see basic research being put into the public

ground from FIU. We have contributed to the knowledge of this exhibit."

Stoddard also co-wrote many of the descriptions on every exhibit and wrote them in a way to help people understand them.

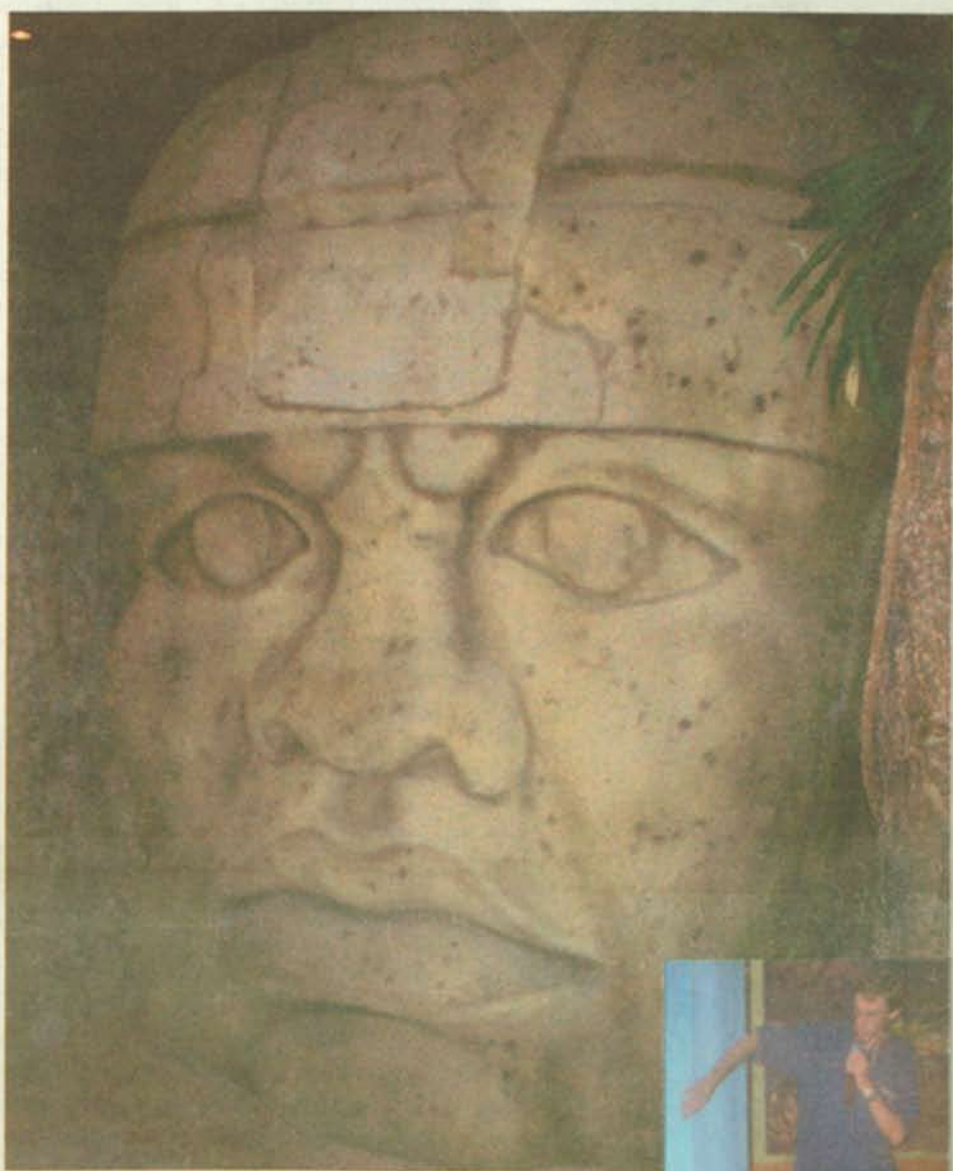
"Being a teacher, you learn to explain things to people on many different levels," Stoddard said. "You work hard to make it interesting for adults and understandable by children."

The museum is set as various stops along the Amazon River. Through hands-on activities, original multimedia presentations, live fish in tanks from the Amazon, live demonstrations and much more, the exhibit has something for everyone. Work from artist Ray Troll is also featured across the entire museum.

Despite the various displays of the Amazon, a computer, nothing to do with the nature of Brazil, seemed to attract plenty of attention. Titled "Age Machine Wrinkles," the computer takes a photo of a person and is able to access a prediction of how they will look up to 25 years down the line.

There is also a special walk along a bridge where there are several artifacts from Central and South America both authentic and replicated. One in particular, a big head titled "El Rey," is a full size replica of a Mexican Olmec monument standing nine feet tall of the original that dates 1100 BC.

The exhibition will be in Miami for a limited time. It will soon travel to Washington D.C. for a presentation at the Smithsonian Institution. It then will begin a five-year tour of U.S. museums across the country.



LEGENDS OF THE HIDDEN TEMPLE: "El Rey" (above) is an impressive replica of the 1100 BC statue. Phillip Stoddard (right) discussed his "Electric Fish" discoveries in hopes of making it commonly understood. HARRY COLEMAN/THE BEACON

