



MICHAEL VOORHIES shows fossil bones from a marine reptile that were recovered last year near Center and are like those described by 1880s explorers Lewis & Clark. Voorhies helped set up the display at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park near Royal.

Ashfall upgrade

Improvements more than double space for exhibits

By **BERNADINE HUGHES**
News Correspondent

ROYAL — Visitors at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park near here will see some major improvements this season.

Most noticeable is an addition built onto the park's visitor center.

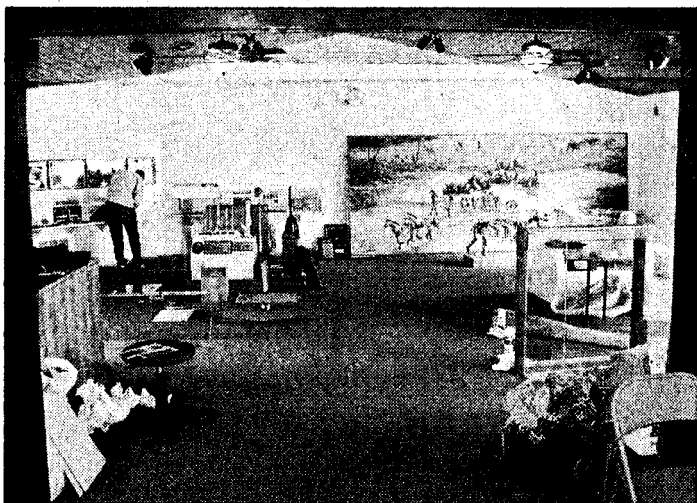
"A room has been added, which will more than double our existing display space," said Rick Otto, park superintendent. "It will also enlarge the gift shop. All of the Ashfall exhibits will be moved into the new addition."

Now on the west side of the building are an office and a small room for meetings and classes.

The addition was funded by private donations.

Also new is an exhibit commemorating the journey of explorers Meriweather Lewis and William Clark up the Missouri River and prepared by staff from the University of Nebraska State Museum. One case displays fossils like those found and described by the explorers 200 years ago.

"Some of the fossils came from the collection in Lincoln, and some were found near Cen-



THIS IS A VIEW of the newly expanded visitor center at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park near Royal.

ter, Niobrara State Park, Ponca and towns along the way," said Michael Voorhies, curator of vertebrate paleontology at the state museum who was helping set up the exhibit recently.

"Lewis and Clark themselves never got as far from the river as Ashfall, so they didn't have a chance to find any rhinos, but they found a lot of animals that lived in the ocean," he added.

The one fossil they did bring back was the jawbone of a fish, Voorhies said. It was recorded by Lewis in an Aug. 6, 1804, journal entry. The exhibit has photos of the actual fossil they found, plus part of a similar

fish jaw collected by university staff.

A short walk from the visitor center is the Rhino Barn. It houses the skeletons of rhinos and animals that suffocated in a storm of falling ash from a volcano that erupted millions of years ago in present-day Idaho.

Later this summer, latex molds will be made of the rhino skeletons.

"Once (museum staff) get done, they will be able to create plaster casts or replicas of the skeletons. Visitors will be able to watch this process take place," Voorhies said.

Ashfall opened for the season May 1.