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Oct. 5, 2009

Media Web site: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

<p>Press preview: Wednesday, Oct. 14; 9 - 10 a.m. Ripley Center</p>
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“Panamanian Passages” Exhibit Showcases Panama’s History

“Panamanian Passages,” a bilingual exhibition that takes visitors on a journey through Panama’s natural and social history, opens in the Smithsonian’s Ripley Center Concourse Wednesday, Oct. 14. The exhibition was organized by the Smithsonian Latino Center, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama and the Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panamá. It is part of “Panama at the Smithsonian,” a series of 18 public programs and educational activities in Washington, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Panama held throughout 2009 and early 2010.

“Panamanian Passages” will be on view in the Ripley Center, located west of the Smithsonian Castle, from Oct. 14 to May 31, 2010. It features 55 objects and specimens on loan from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, STRI, the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum, the Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panamá and a private collector. Some of the objects on display include archeological ceramics, archival materials and everyday objects from the Canal Zone, such as license plates, bronze employee identification tags and a clock that was used to count down the remaining time until the final transfer of the Panama Canal to Panamanian control at noon Dec. 13, 1999.

The exhibition graphics come from archival sources in Panama, Colombia, Spain and the United States and include reproductions of engravings, maps, paintings and photographs. The Smithsonian’s Horticulture Services Division has collaborated with the exhibit team to stock the Ripley Center Concourse with living plants and an orchid display to reflect the botanical diversity of Panama.

“Panamanian Passages” highlights key chapters in Panamanian history, from early indigenous settlements to Panama’s 20th-century struggle for sovereignty.

“Panama’s assertion of sovereignty over the Panama Canal has been accompanied by the generation of new knowledge about Panama’s past. This process of rethinking history has been led by Panamanians themselves,” said Aims McGuinness, exhibition curator and associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. “‘Panamanian Passages’ draws on this new knowledge to offer glimpses at some of the most important events in the history of Panama from the rise of the isthmus into the present.”

“Panama is a magnificent natural experiment that united two continents and divided one ocean,” said Eldredge Bermingham, director of STRI. “Set among the backdrop of a rich history, ‘Panamanian Passages’ allows visitors to experience this phenomenon and illustrates the bridge between culture, science and people.”

“This exhibition has been a pan-Institutional initiative, as well as a collaborative venture, in an attempt to offer visitors a multidimensional understanding of Panama, from science to art to the humanities,” said Eduardo Díaz, director of the Smithsonian Latino Center.

STRI, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is the only unit of the Smithsonian Institution outside of the United States. The institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the diversity and importance of tropical ecosystems.

The Smithsonian Latino Center is dedicated to ensuring that Latino contributions to arts, sciences and the humanities are highlighted, understood and advanced through the development and support of public programs, scholarly research, museum collections and educational opportunities at the Smithsonian Institution and its affiliated organizations across the United States.

The Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panamá has the mission to preserve, research, interpret and highlight the history of Panama and its Canal by providing a rich variety of exhibitions and educational experiences to better the understanding of the nation, culture and history. It is a member of the International Council of Museums and the American Association of Museums, and it was the first museum outside the United States to become an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution.

To visit the online exhibition of “Panamanian Passages” and learn more about the “Panama at the Smithsonian” program series, go to <http://latino.si.edu>. For general Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000 or TTY (202) 633-5285.

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