Course Description:
The cold, windswept prairies of the Laramie Basin looked very different 150 million years ago, when herds of dinosaurs moved through a semitropical, forested landscape populated by a diverse fauna of insects, lizards, and even small mammals. How do we know this? The Jurassic Morrison Formation, home to some of the most famous dinosaurs known from North America, preserves fossils of a diverse and fascinating biota. Join us as we explore the concepts and methods of paleoecology to better understand not only these captivating dinosaurs but also their contemporaries, along with the climates, landscapes, and floras and faunas of other Mesozoic terrestrial and marine deposits exposed on the Allen L. Cook Spring Creek Preserve. Our time traveling will also extend to local and regional evidence for biotic and environmental change leading to the present day ecosystem, along the way hunting for signs of human use of the pre-historical and historical landscape. This course is a one-of-a-kind introduction to the fundamental practices of paleontology, ecology, and archaeology, with a strong emphasis on field techniques. Additionally, the experience will be broadened by interactions with students from the University's Studio Arts Department and by delving into fictional and non-fictional literature set in the area, historical accounts of the Laramie region, and discussions of the political and ethical issues surrounding land use in the West. Students will take numerous short field trips to other study localities and into the nearby Medicine Bow Mountains for learning, hiking, and recreation. A multi-day field trip will explore the broader geology, paleontology, archaeology, and ecology of the state of Wyoming, including visits to Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Thermopolis hot springs, Green River Formation fossil collecting sites, and the Killpecker Dune Field.

The Allen L. Cook Spring Creek Preserve:
The Spring Creek Preserve consists of 6100 acres of land located near Rock River, Wyoming, the deeded portion of which was donated to the University of Pittsburgh Honors College in 2005 by neighboring rancher Allen Cook. This remarkable property contains fossil-rich exposures of the Jurassic Morrison Formation, including pristine dinosaur bone-bearing beds, as well as outcrops of other Mesozoic marine and terrestrial deposits. A few miles west of the site is Como Bluff, the world famous location of dinosaur excavations dating back a century. Evidence of pre-historical and historical use of the landscape abounds on the Preserve, including flakes and points dating back at least 9000 years, fire hearths, grinding stones, and large numbers of teepee rings, along with the original grade of the 1869 Transcontinental Railroad and nearby ghost towns and train robbery sites. Ecologically, the Spring Creek Preserve is located within a narrow valley of mixed-grass prairie at an elevation above 7,000 feet, bounded on either side by forested mountain ranges. Abundant wildlife include pronghorn, swift foxes, badgers, prairie dogs, and numerous raptors including golden and bald eagles.

Publicity
The Spring Creek Preserve and this course have been the subject of widespread publicity including illustrated articles in the Washington Post Magazine (August 8, 2006) and the Pittsburgh Post Gazette (http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07175/796785-115.stm).
Staff:
Instructors are drawn from the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh Department of Geology and Planetary Science and curators at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, along with guests from the University of Wyoming.

Accommodations:
Lodging will be provided at the Longhorn Lodge in Rock River, Wyoming, along with many nights of camping (tents provided) on the property. The class will camp during the multi-day field trips.

Credits, cost and schedule:
The course will extend from June 20 to July 31, with arrival and departure from Denver, Colorado. Participation in the course earns six honors credits at the University of Pittsburgh at a cost of approximately $600 per credit (in-state). This fee includes tuition and all room and board costs but excludes airfare to and from Denver.

For further information and booking, please contact:
Edward L. McCord, Ph.D., J.D.
University Honors College
3600 Cathedral of Learning
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: 412-624-6886
FAX: 412-624-6885
emccord@pitt.edu