

National Trust puts creationism on show at new visitor centre

Posted: Thu, 05 Jul 2012

The National Trust has come under fire for including an exhibit in the new Giants' Causeway Visitors' Centre acknowledging the creationist view of how the world-famous stones were formed.

The National Trust had been under pressure from evangelical Christians to give equal prominence to its religious viewpoint in the new £18.5m (partly publicly funded) visitor centre at the UNESCO World Heritage Site on Northern Ireland's north Antrim coast.

Creationists believe the stones, which emerged from the sea-bed following intense volcanic and geological activity 60 million years ago, were formed around just 4,500 years ago as a result of Noah's Flood.

A transcript from an audio exhibit in the visitor centre reads:

Like many natural phenomena around the world, the Giant's Causeway has raised questions and prompted debate about how it was formed.

This debate has ebbed and flowed since the discovery of the Causeway to science and, historically, the Causeway became part of a global debate about how the earth's rocks were formed.

This debate continues today for some people, who have an understanding of the formation of the earth which is different from that of current mainstream science.

Young Earth Creationists believe that the earth was created some 6000 years ago. This is based on a specific interpretation of the Bible and in particular the account of creation in the book of Genesis.

Some people around the world, and specifically here in Northern Ireland, share this perspective.

Young Earth Creationists continue to debate questions about the age of the earth. As we have seen from the past, and understand today, perhaps the Giant's Causeway will continue to prompt awe and wonder, and arouse debate and challenging questions for as long as visitors come to see it.

Wallace Thompson, chairman of the creationist [Caleb Foundation](#) said he was pleased with the inclusion of the creationist view:

"We have worked closely with the National Trust over many months with a view to ensuring that the new Causeway Visitor Centre includes an acknowledgement both of the legitimacy of the creationist position on the origins of the unique Causeway stones and of the ongoing debate around this.

"This is, as far as we are aware, a first for the National Trust anywhere in the UK, and it sets a precedent for others to follow."

The issue of including creationist theories has sparked controversy in the past in Northern Ireland, when prominent members of the Democratic Unionist Party (who provided funding for visitor centre) lobbied for museums to include such opinions.

Stephen Evans at the National Secular Society said: "It's extremely disappointing to see the National Trust giving credence to bogus creationist explanations for this world famous heritage site. Visitors, many of whom will be children on school trips, expect to be informed at the new Centre, not presented with religious propaganda.

"We've seen how Christian fundamentalists have gained ground in promoting creationist nonsense in the United States; we must be vigilant and not allow those kinds of ideas to gain a foothold in this country".

A statement from the National trust said:

"The interpretation in the visitor centre showcases the science of how the stones were formed, the history of this special place and the stories of local characters.

"We reflect, in a small part of the exhibition, that the Causeway played a role in the historic debate about the formation of the earth, and that for some people this debate continues today.

"The National Trust fully supports the scientific explanation for the creation of the stones 60 million years ago.

A National Secular Society member in Northern Ireland has set up a [Facebook group to remove the creationist display from National Trust Centre](#).

National Trust members can make their views known to the Trust [here](#).

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