

My Visit to the American Museum of Natural History

While waiting on line at the American Museum of Natural History to pay my entrance donation, I scanned the four walls of the entrance hall. Each contained a large tablet with a quote by Theodore Roosevelt on Youth, Manhood, Nature and the State. On the subject of Youth, Theodore Roosevelt had this to say:

“I want to see you brave and manly
I also want to see you gentle and tender
Be practical, as well as generous in your ideals
Keep your eyes on the stars
And keep your feet on the ground
Courage, hard work, self-mastery and intelligent effort are all essential to a successful life
Character in the long run is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations
alike.”

So what was I doing in a museum with such 19th century mottos? I had come to see a curiosity: a blanket woven entirely from the spittle of Madagascar spiders!

All the guards I asked for directions where I might find the blanket made of Madagascar spider spittle seemed to have heard of it and directed me to follow the Blue Whale one flight down.

The Blue Whale, a model of which hung from the ceiling of the Hall of Vertebrae. The real whale weighed 400,000 pounds. Well, as Teddy Roosevelt suggested, I kept my eyes on the stars and my feet on the ground and there, lo and behold, in another hall, the spider blanket was unobtrusively covering a rectangular table adjacent to a wall. It was egg yolk yellow and had a silky sheen. No one could possibly have imagined that this blanket, which looked more like a tablecloth, was woven from the spittle of spiders, and that the spittle strands were stronger than steel. Small captions gave this information and several other facts such as Madagascar spiders were carnivorous and ate each other. Thus, in order to harvest their spittle, they had to be separated! And that the blanket was woven France! Mon dieu!

Near me, a flock of people were surrounding a docent whose subject was Meteors, “You may touch this!” I heard him exclaim, as he stood in front of a large black shape which had fallen from the sky 18,000 years ago and fell to earth in Greenland.

Of course, everyone touched the meteor. Even I left my spider blanket to touch it. You might even say I almost petted it.

But the people from the meteor docent group never came over to my spider spittle blanket and I wonder why that was.