



FROM THE  
GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP

*Coprolite* is compiled by Tom Sharpe, 49 Kelston Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 2AG and produced by Monica Price, University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW. It will be published three times a year in February, May and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Tom Sharpe by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 January, 1 April or 1 October.

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## From GCG's Chairman

A new era for the Group began in February with the publication of *Coprolite* which, thanks to the ministrations of Tom Sharpe and Monica Price, will benefit all members greatly. This year has also seen the publication of the splendid index to volume 2 of the *Geological Curator*, the result of very hard work by Peter Crowther and especially Justin Delair. My thanks to both.

On the Group's behalf, your Committee's Working Party on Training has produced a report, a *Proposed Training Schedule for Museum Geologists*, for much of which we are indebted to Chris Collins. This report has been sent to the Museum Training Institute and we are optimistic that our conclusions will be heeded. Members of the Committee have made significant comment on the NCC's *Earth Science Conservation - a Draft Strategy*, the final version of which was launched on 5 December in London, together with substantial supporting material. Every Geological Locality Recording Centre will receive a copy.

Consultation by Committee members was also sought by the Geological Society for its draft *Earth Science Education Directory* to which the Group contributed a section, largely taken from our *Thumb's Up* leaflet. *The Directory*, published in December, is for school teachers implementing the earth sciences component of the National Curriculum.

David Price of the Sedgwick Museum has masterminded the Group's efforts to commemorate the work of Bertie Brighton (1900-1988), Curator of the Sedgwick from 1931 to 1968. The A.G. Brighton Fund now stands at over £2000 and details of the commemorative medal and award to be supported by this fund will be announced in due course. We are grateful to David for his work.

Members of Committee have made comment on two issues which have aroused much

anxiety throughout the year. First, the trials and tribulations suffered at the British Museum (Natural History) have marked what is perhaps the greatest calamity yet to befall the profession. Among the protests was one in *The Independent* co-signed by your Chairman together with Presidents of the other major British scientific **societies**. The proposals in the corporate plan **are** now being implemented despite all protests. The Group must now concern itself with the succeeding annual plans in continuing attempts to influence decisions.

Second, Committee has deliberated on the case of 'Lizzie' (Westlothiana *curryi* in *litt.*) and its implications concerning the export of important natural history objects. Committee asked Mike Taylor (Leicester) to help us in our deliberations. Our view, communicated to Ian Rolfe for inclusion in the debate, is that we **are** generally in favour of fossils and minerals being included in a control system for the export of heritage items but that we have grave reservations as to the practicability of any system we could envisage.

The University Funding Council continues to stall in its supplying of finance for the 'strengthening' of care for university museum collections. Committee **are in** touch with this matter on various fronts including the Geological Society's Conservation Committee and we have been waiting patiently for progress. In view of the lack of it we will soon need to take further action. John Nudds (Manchester) is keeping tabs on the situation on behalf of Committee.

Of new initiatives, the **first** meeting of a Terminology Working Party will shortly be held consisting of your Chairman, John Martin (Leicester), Nigel Monaghan (Dublin), and **Philip** Phillips (Liverpool), in an attempt to produce a standard terminology for geological specimen curation, following on from the Guidelines.

With the help of Simon **Timberlake**, the Group is well on the way to finalising details of an annual Geological Collector of the Year competition, and we are very grateful to the Geologists' Association for the financial assistance that has been made available from their Curry Fund for this purpose.

We have an agreed text for a new publicity leaflet which is now at the design stage. With the assistance of Brighton designer Nigel Cunningham, the Group has taken on an improved image with the redesign of its letterhead, compliments slips and the cover of **Coprolite**. The next issue of the *Geological Curator* will also benefit from redesign.

The end of 1990 saw **Chris** Collins leave **Committee** after 6 years **untiring** service. He has been particularly active in the fields of specimen conservation and **curatorial** training and we are most grateful to him.

I am very much looking forward to another fruitful year in 1991.

John Cooper, Chairman, 7 January 1991

*[This is a précis of the Chairman's Report presented at the Group's AGM held in December 1990 in York. The full report, along with those of the other officers will appear in the Geological Curator in due course.]*

## GCG Committee 1991

**Chairman:** John Cooper Booth Museum of Natural History, 194 Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 5AA Tel. 0273 552586

**Secretary:** Simon Knell Scunthorpe Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe DN14 7BD Tel. 0724 843533

**Treasurer/Membership Secretary:** Andy Newman Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PT Tel. 091 222 7418

**Editor:** Peter Crowther Bristol City Museum, Queens Road, Bristol BS8 1RL Tel. 0272223592

**Recorder:** John Nudds The Manchester Museum, The University, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL Tel. 061 275 2634

**Public Relations Officer:** Phil Doughty Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB Tel. 0232 381251

**Minutes Secretary:** Diana Hawkes Haslemere Educational Museum, High Street, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LA Tel. 0428 642112

**Committee:** Mandy Edwards Department of Geology, The University, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL Tel. 061 275 2000  
John Martin Leicestershire Museums, 96 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TD Tel. 0533 554100  
Monica Price Oxford University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW Tel. 0865 272950  
Tony Cross Curtis Museum and Art Gallery, High Street, Alton GU34 1BA Tel. 0420 82802

## New Members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: Maura Cahill, University College Galway; John Faithfull, University of Leicester; Simon Ridley, University of Leicester Museum Studies; and Stuart Ogilvy, Yorkshire Museum.

## Musical Curators

**Mick Stanley**, formerly Assistant County Museums Officer at Derbyshire Museum Service, has been appointed Principal Keeper of Museums at Hull and took up his post on 2 January.

**Haslemere Museum's new telephone number** Please note that the new telephone number of Haslemere Educational Museum is 0428 642112

## Overdue 1990 Personal Subscriptions

A substantial number of members have not yet paid their subscriptions for 1990. Would those members with guilty consciences please make their payments, along with their 1991 subscriptions, as soon as possible to the Membership **Secretary/Treasurer** whose address can be found on the subscription form on the centre pages.

## Forthcoming meetings and seminars

**14 March 1991** Haslemere Educational Museum, High Street, Haslemere  
GCG and Group for Education in Museums Seminar: Museums, education and the earth sciences

The earth sciences form an essential component of the National Curriculum. This seminar examines how museums can make the best use of their resources to meet these new demands

11.00 (Coffee from 10.30)

Speakers include:

Peter Brannlund, Bownstone Community College, West Sussex;

Hazel Moffat, Her Majesty's Inspectorate;

Mary Tolan, Reading Museum Service;

David Curry, St Albans Museum;

Kate Pontin, Leicestershire Museum Service;

Diana Hawkes, Haslemere Educational Museum

Meeting fee: £4.00, including buffet lunch.

Please complete the booking form on the centre pages and send it with payment (cheques made payable to GCG) to **Diana** Hawkes, Haslemere Educational Museum, High Street, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LA (Tel. 0428 642112) by **4 March 1991**.

**14-18 April 1991** University of Sheffield

**BCG/GCG** Curatorial Course.

For anyone wanting to brush up on current thinking about the **curation** of biological and geological materials, and especially useful for those studying for the Diploma.

Contact: Bob Toynton, Division of Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 85 **Wilkinson** Street, Sheffield S10 2GJ Tel. 0742 768555 ext. 4932

**6-11 May 1991** Ottawa, Canada

Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, 6th Annual Meeting and Training Workshop.

Contact: G R **Fitzgerald**, Canadian Museum of Nature, Earth Sciences (**Palaeobiology**), PO Box 3443, Station D, Ottawa, **Ontario, K1P 6P4**, Canada.

**4-5 June 1991** Perth Museum and Art Gallery, George Street, Perth

GCG Seminar and field trip: The words and the stones: geology displays for the public.

Contact: Mike Taylor, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, George Street, Perth **PH1 5LB** Tel. 0738 32488

**22-26 July 1991** Newcastle

Museums Association Annual Conference: Disputable facts: innovations in interpretation.

Contact: The Museums Association, 34 **Bloomsbury** Way, London **WC1A 2SF** Tel. 071 404 4767

**25-31 August 1991 Plymouth**

Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Contact: **Michael Robbins**, c/o Polytechnic South West, Drake Circus, Plymouth **PL4 8AA**

**2-3 September 1991 Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery, Drake Circus, Plymouth**  
GCG Seminar and field trip:

Contact: Mike Bishop, **Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AJ** Tel. 0752 668000 ext. 4378

**9-15 September 1991 Dresden, Germany**

INHIGEO International Symposium: Museums and collections in the history of mineralogy, geology and palaeontology.

Contact: **Sekretariat der GGW, INHIGEO 1991, Invalidenstrasse 43, Berlin.**

**19-22 September 1991 Birmingham**

MPG Annual Study Weekend: Art and life. Bridging the gap between museums and the arts.

Contact: **Ann Bukantas**, Ferens Art Gallery, Queen Victoria Square, Hull **HU1 3RA** Tel. 0482 222750

**4-5 December 1991 Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St James's Road, Dudley**  
GCG Seminar and AGM: Recent developments at Dudley.

Contact: **Colin Reid**, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St James's Road, Dudley, West Midlands **DY1 1HU** Tel. 0384 55433

**23-25 September 1992 Edinburgh**

Joint meeting of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the National Museums of Scotland: Volcanism and early terrestrial **biotas**.

It is often thought that fossils do not occur in igneous and particularly volcanic, rocks. Yet fossil animal and plant assemblages are found in volcanigenic deposits of all ages, and they may be exceptionally well preserved because of the processes locally associated with volcanism. One such site, East **Kirkton**, Bathgate, has recently yielded a cross-section of an early Carboniferous terrestrial community. It includes not only the oldest known reptile, but also the first **terrestrial amphibian assemblage** to be found in the British Carboniferous. These are the oldest known, fully land-going **tetrapods**. They are accompanied by exceptionally preserved plants, and by **some** of the earliest proven terrestrial arthropods, including a metre-long scorpion. This biota is preserved within laminites, probably deposited in a lake affected by hot-spring waters. The lake was situated on the flanks of the West Lothian basaltic volcanic centre, in a **continental rift zone**.

A **3-day** meeting is being planned to discuss the significance of this biota, its relation to the enclosing rocks, and **the** relevance of similar situations elsewhere. Symposium sessions will be on: volcanic setting and activity; sedimentation and diagenesis; the biota; **palaeoecology** and taphonomy; and comparable biotas. About 20 speakers will



## Ludlow Museum

The Group was proud to honour John **Norton** MBE with a Life Membership on his retirement in December 1989 from Ludlow where he had latterly been in post as Assistant Keeper, and formerly as Curator of the Buttercross. The Group met in Ludlow in 1984 and in Shrewsbury in 1988 and naturally we have keenly awaited the filling of his post. We have looked for the continuance of his acclaimed work, and there has been some disappointment that the post remains unfilled. As members who attended the AGM will know, news reached me in York that a decision had been taken that his post would not be filled and furthermore that the geology collections would be moved from Ludlow to storage elsewhere. This news followed earlier information that the post was to be split into two, one for geology and one for biology, and which are to be funded on a short-term, contract basis. Clearly, this was a matter for **concern** and I wrote to Geoffrey **McCabe**, Chief Cultural Services Officer for Shropshire to ascertain the true situation.

I am pleased to say that he told me that there is no intention to move the collections. He has also written to me to describe the complications regarding the funding of John's post which indeed is currently envisaged as being split. As yet I am unclear as to whether the two new posts are part-time or full-time, or whether they are temporary or permanent.

Whilst I am happy to refute the rumours as they were put to me, the Group must continue to worry about the future of curatorial cover for the geological collections at Ludlow. We cannot be happy with any proposal other than the maintenance of a full-time geological curator.

John A. Cooper, Chairman

## Recapturing the Initiative - Yorkshire Museum, York

6 December 1990

### GCG Seminar Report

From a York perspective it must seem as if the archaeologists have a powerful grip on the initiative and the public imagination. Six very able speakers **examined** the validity of that feeling and viewed the question from both historical and modern viewpoints. In his opening address **Brian Hayton**, Director of the Yorkshire Museum, gave a brief history of that venerable institution and explained how it was taking the initiative. From rich and powerful beginnings the fortunes of the Museum declined until it was "**ditched**" by the City Council as a museum without hope. Since 1974, a new and very businesslike approach has been adopted by the County Council, which has invested heavily in the museum and which now successfully competes for visitors with the many other attractions York has to offer. A series of major temporary exhibitions - including geological ones, such as *A New Look at Dinosaurs* and the forthcoming *Chinese Dinosaurs* - pulls in the visitors and makes profits. A radical approach was needed to

the financing of big exhibitions. The Museum is now allowed to keep its profits and plough them back into new exhibitions. But he emphasised that this heavy **investment** in the front of the house is balanced with appropriate curatorial resources, for there is a firm belief that good exhibitions are built on well curated collections and sound research. The Yorkshire Museum boasts that it is one of the few museums today able to increase resources for **curation** in these very depressing times.

Dr. Jack Morrell of Bradford University examined the history of the rivalry between geology and archaeology. It did appear that geology had a kind of heroic age in the last century, founded on major discoveries, propounded by heroic individuals and supported by august institutions. He listed the characteristics which gave geology the edge over the back-breaking tedium of archaeological work and kept it in the public eye. But with the advent of conservation, environmental and landscape issues have surged ahead and archaeology has been right up there with them. It is now an urgent mission to rescue, record and interpret the evidence of the people of the past.

Dr P. Addyman, Director of the York Archaeological Trust drew out other characteristics in favour of archaeology having the upper hand but he emphasised that it was the **apocalyptic** threat to archaeological sites that led to the establishment of Rescue. This powerful lobby helped improve teaching, brought about the creation of County Archaeologists and Archaeological Units, led to new laws and the creation of the Institute of Professional Archaeologists. All this has largely left museums behind, although they have benefited from growth in collections and improved scientific recording. The perceived problem this cause in museum conservation, recording and storage could be seen as a **platform** to ask for more resources, he said. But the key to the real success of archaeology - in York at any rate - is in imaginative interpretation and interaction with the public. He gave a very **brief** history of the York Archaeological Trust - which is a permanent excavation team established as a result of **the** Rescue initiative. Their fieldwork excited the public and led to **the** appointment of an Education Officer, helping to create a favourable climate. The exciting results lead to better interpretation and interaction with the public. The famous Viking Jorvik Centre and the new ARC (Archaeological Resources Centre) strive to capture young hearts and minds.

The afternoon's speakers showed quite clearly that all was far from doom and gloom in the geological world and that outside the walls of the City of York the initiative was indeed being recaptured, even if some of us didn't realise it. Ian **Rolfe** described several successful ventures where glorious **victories** had been snatched against **the** odds. He cited the successful 'Mr. Woods' Fossils' exhibition, which attempted to make the greatest impact from a pitiful display budget by concentrating on the human angle producing a travelling exhibition about the man and his fossils. In publication they resorted to collaboration with another agency to publish a book that had been waiting unsuccessfully for years. The result was vastly superior to earlier expectations. And in the field of specimen acquisition **Ian** was successful against all odds in preventing the export of "**Lizzie**" - the key early reptile specimen. But more than this



it demonstrated that scientific material could attract the kind of money normally reserved for the art world; it led to questions in Parliament about the protection of fossil specimens and in the process the cause of palaeontology was well publicised.

Dr. Graham Durant showed that geology had been well served in the various exhibitions and extravaganzas that Glasgow has staged over recent years. He urged us to be opportunists and to base our conduct on present circumstances, not on principle. Almost any situation could be given a geological dimension, if imagination and an opportunist spirit were employed. For example, the Garden Festival in 1988 may not seem at first to offer an opportunity for geology, but finance was available to be tapped, so in the Time Trek Pavilion they were able to tell the story of the colonization of the Earth by plants. It was seen by 400,000 people, many of whom were new to geology, and it resulted in new specimens for the Hunterian Museum.

Phil Philips, in a talk full of practical tips, described the new initiative at Liverpool in getting the public to interact with specimens from the natural history and geology collections. This idea had evolved into the Natural History Centre after many years of experience and experiment and the process of refinement continues. Through the centre people are able to do novel things, such as handle specimens, use microscopes, talk to staff (!), have specimens identified, activities for youngsters, learn more about the reference collections and specimens on display and take courses on specialist topics. All this helps to break down barriers, to make geology more approachable and so improves the status of geology in the mind of a public which sometimes cannot tell the difference between an archaeologist and a geologist.

Congratulations to Paul Ensom for arranging a stimulating seminar. The lessons of the day would seem to be: get David Attenborough talking even more about geology and less about termites; exploit the urgency and excitement of the conservation movement if possible; use modern interpretive techniques to tell a good story and interact with the general public as much as possible; see your problems as challenges and opportunities. Above all, keep looking for those opportunities and turn them to your advantage.

Martin Warren, Cromer Museum

## Newish Publications

*Nature Conservancy Council 16th Report covering the period 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990.* Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, 1990, 184pp. ISBN 0 86139 682 0.

*The making of modern Britain. Death of an ocean. The rocks of the Lower Palaeozoic* by M. J. Harley, T. Nield and A.P. McKirdy. Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, 1990, 16pp. ISBN 0 86139 666 9.

*Big mouths and long necks. The Plesiosaurs. Fossil sea-monsters of ancient times* by M.A. Taylor and J.G. Martin. Leicestershire Museums Service Publication No. 110, 1990, 24pp. ISBN 0 85022 287 7. £1.50

*Vertebrate palaeontology, biology and evolution* by M.J. Benton. Unwin Hyman, London, 1990, 390pp. ISBN 0 04 566001 8. £45 (hardback), ISBN 0 04 566002 6. £14.95 (paperback).

*Pitldown: a scientific forgery* by F. Spencer. Oxford University Press/Natural History Museum, 1990, 298pp. ISBN 0 19 858522 5. £17.95

*The Pitldown Papers 1908-1955. The correspondence and other documents relating to the Pitldown Forgery* edited by F. Spencer. Oxford University Press / Natural History Museum, 1990, 294pp. ISBN 0 19 858523 3. £30

*The Highlands Controversy. Constructing geological knowledge through fieldwork in 19th century Britain* by D.R. Oldroyd. University of Chicago Press, 1990, 448pp. ISBN 0 226 62635 0. £23.95

*Principles of geology* by Charles Lyell. First edition Volume 1 facsimile, introduction by M.J.S. Rudwick. University of Chicago Press, 1990, 586pp. ISBN 0 226 49794 1. £14.25

*Gems, granites and gravels. Knowing and using rocks and minerals* by R.V. Dietrich and B.J. Skinner. Cambridge University Press, 1990, 180pp. ISBN 0 521 34444 1. £15

The Russell Society has published the latest issue of its *Journal*, volume 3, part 2, 1990. ISSN 0263 7839, Details from: Roy E. Starkey, 15 Warwick Avenue, Brompton, W8 5AP, London

### New geological magazine

*Geoscientist* is the title of a new magazine to be launched this year by the Geological Society. It will replace the *Geological Society Newsletter* and the *British Geologist* and will be published six times a year. *Geoscientist* will contain short features, geonews, book reviews, new products, correspondence, and job situations as well as a diary of events and Specialist Group meetings. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Dr Roger Beck, Editor-in-Chief, *Geoscientist*, The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0N.

### South-Eastern Collections Research Unit (SECRU) revived

Natural science collection data research, which had come to a halt in the south-east in 1984 through lack of coordination, was revived in 1989 when the Museums and Galleries Commission asked Jim Bateman to undertake this role. A Working Group made up of representatives from each county was formed and by early 1990 enquiry forms and record sheets had been drawn up. The county representatives are the key factors in the data gathering process. Within their areas, they contact the owners of collections, whether they are institutional or private. Provision is made for curators to visit collections where the owner feels unable to supply the data that are required. Arrangements have now been made for all of the data to be entered on computer at the Museums Documentation Association.

Data are now beginning to come in and it is clear that **there will** be a vast amount of it, largely because of the great number of private collectors residing in this area, which covers Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Greater London, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands.

The form of the register has recently been discussed, and it seems clear that this will be produced using various types of electronic publication, including microfiche and a range of computer software. The ability to use data presented in these forms has been carefully considered and SECRU feels certain that no-one who seriously wished to acquire information would be prevented by a lack of access to the appropriate hardware.

The present **timescale** for the project suggests that the bulk of the data will be in by March 1992, and publication should be possible within a few months of that time.

We have in the south-east the largest source of collection material, namely, the Natural History Museum. At first they felt unable to cooperate, largely because they thought that the **task** was too formidable and that they lacked the staff resources. We reached a stage **when** it was clear that there was no hindrance to gaining access to the data, but we would have to employ outside staff to do this. Gladly, there has been a change of heart and it has now been agreed that data on the scale we require will be supplied by their own staff.

Jim Bateman

## **Earth Science Conservation in Great Britain - A Strategy**

The **Strategy** was launched on 5 December in Westminster before a very large audience of invited guests including most practising **earth** science conservationists in Britain, **MPs**, government officials, nature conservation and wildlife trust representatives, other interested earth scientists and some media people. You may have missed notice of the event in the national press as coverage was minimal, however your local press will probably have given more space to what is essentially seen as a locally-based strategy. 'The strategy is a detailed and practical guide to solving **problems** facing earth science conservation today. It provides an overview of the need for earth science conservation, the means by which it can be effected, and the bodies most able to take an active role.' These are Sir David Attenborough's words **from** the foreword which precedes the summary and rationale for **earth** science conservation. The strategy itself has six themes viz: Maintaining the SSSI network; Expanding the RIGS network; Developing new conservation techniques; Improving site documentation and **the** conservation of samples; Increasing public awareness; and Developing international techniques. There are considerable appendices producing a handbook of earth science conservation techniques.

Not surprisingly museums, GCG and geological local records centres within the National Scheme figure very largely in all six themes. If you haven't already received a copy then contact NCC at Northminster House in Peterborough as the home is a must for your library shelf. NCC are to be congratulated on the production of the strategy which as a world first will, no doubt, be a model for other countries to follow

Mick Stanley, Hull Museums

### Scottish Shale Oil Museum

Work has begun on the construction of a Scottish Shale Oil Museum at Livingston in West Lothian. Scotland was the birthplace of the oil industry, when James "Paraffin" Young developed a method of distilling oil from coal and from the Carboniferous oil shales of the Midland Valley. The new museum is part of the Almond Valley Heritage Centre which already receives 12,000 visitors a year. British Petroleum has contributed £15,000 for the construction of a simulated shale mine at the Museum, and has also donated a further £6,000.

From AIM *Bulletin*, October 1000

### Travelling exhibitions sought

The Geological and Mining Museum in Sydney, Australia, which reopens in March as The Earth Exchange is seeking details of travelling exhibitions being staged by British museums during the next few years. The Earth Exchange is particularly interested in exhibitions on gems, minerals and jewellery, but would consider other geological exhibitions which had mass appeal. Please contact Tina Broad, The Earth Exchange, Hickson Road, The Rocks, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia. Tel. 02 251 2422 Fax 02 247 7157 241 1400.

### January pin-up...

The January 1991 *Museums Journal* coverperson is none other than the Secretary of our august organisation in characteristic pose. Shown hard at work surveying the 'geological collection in a branch museum of a major county museum service', he seems to have turned a rather sickly green colour. The collection doesn't look too well either.

An article on the the current state of geology in museums, 'Museums on the rocks', by Simon Knell and Mike Taylor appears in that issue of *Museums Journal*.

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