



DROPPINGS
FROM THE
GEOLOGICAL
CURATORS
GROUP

Coprolite is compiled and produced by Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP (tel 029 20 573265, fax 029 20 667332, e-mail Tom.Sharpe@nmgw.ac.uk). It is published three times a year in March, June and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Tom Sharpe by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 February, 1 May or 1 October.

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GCG website: <http://www.geocurator.org>

Treasurer's email

The last issue of *Coprolite* (No 34, March 2004) gave an incorrect email address for GCG Treasurer Sara Chambers. Apologies to those who tried it. The correct address is: Sara.Chambers@royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Ann Ainsworth**, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester; **David Baines**, Department of Geology, University of Leicester; and **John Betterton**, Halsemere Educational Museum.

Musical curators

Paul Davies, Curator of Fossil Plants and Bryozoa at the Natural History Museum has been appointed Registrar there. At the National Museum of Wales, **Trevor Bailey**, currently in a postdoctoral position in the Department of Earth Sciences

at Bristol University, has been appointed Curator (Palaeontology); **Christian Baars**, currently completing a PhD in Biosciences/Earth Sciences at Cardiff University, has been appointed to the post of Technical Research Officer; **David Thorpe**, a graduate in Earth Sciences from Cardiff who now works in the IT field, has been appointed Curator/Collections Data Co-ordinator.

Manchester Museum

In the Chairman's Report to the 2003 AGM in Ludlow, which was published in the last issue of *Coprolite*, I described the concern that we had felt during the year about the effects of the restructuring of the curatorial posts at the Manchester Museum. There are several issues arising from the report that require clarification.

It was stated that the Keeper of Mineralogy had been downgraded to Curator level. In fact, the post of Keeper of Mineralogy, which was on an academic scale, has gone, and has been replaced with the post of Curator of Mineralogy on a non-academic scale.

At the time of the AGM in early December, we had heard some disturbing reports about the disposal of archival material and museum fittings. On raising this with the museum, we were reassured to hear that the archives in question are still present in the museum.

The appointment of an experienced curator to the post of Curator of Palaeontology at Manchester is welcome news. He attended the May meeting of GCG Committee, described recent developments with the palaeontological collections at the museum and has fully addressed our concerns. We look forward to a fruitful working relationship with the Manchester Museum.

Patrick Wyse Jackson
GCG Chairman.

Newish publications

Evolution of fossil ecosystems by Paul Selden and John Nudds, 2004. London: Manson Publishing, ISBN 1 84076 040 0 (hardcover), £39.95, 160pp. ISBN 1 84076 041 9 (softcover), £19.95.

The geology of Northern Ireland - our natural foundation by W I Mitchell, 2004. Belfast: Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, 298pp. ISBN 0852724543, £10.00

Exploring the landscape of Assynt by Kathryn Goodenough, Elizabeth Pickett, Maaretn Krabbendam and Tom Bradwell, 2004. Keyworth: British Geological Survey, ISBN 0852724713, £12.00.

Lead mining landscapes of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by Ian Forbes, Brianlve Young, C Crossley, and Lesley Hehir, 2004. Keyworth: British Geological Survey, 98pp. ISBN 0902178202, £9.95.

The Cambrian fossils of Chengjiang, China. The flowering of early animal life by

Xian-Guang, H., Aldridge, R.J., Bergstrom, J., Siveter, D.J., Siveter, D.J. & Xiang-Hong, F., 2004. Oxford: Blackwell, xii + 233pp. ISBN 1 4051 0673 5.

Fossil Hunter: The Life and Times of Mary Anning, 1799-1847 by Thomas W. Goodhue, 2004. Academica Press, \$39.95.

Museum studies. An anthology of contexts edited by Bettina Messias Carbonell, 2004. Oxford: Blackwell, xxxiii + 640pp. ISBN 0 631 228306.

RMC Eagar non-marine bivalves catalogue

John Nudds has produced a revised version of the *RMC Eagar Catalogue of Type and Figured non-marine bivalves in the Manchester Museum* (originally published in 1992). This new version brings the catalogue right up to date and includes Michael's final paper, published 2 months after his death in 2003. It is available only on CD. If you would like a copy for your museum library, contact Dr John Nudds, Department of Earth Sciences, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK tel +44 161 275 7861, fax +44 161 275 3947

Fossil, mineral and gem shows 2004

5-6 June Kempton Park Racecourse, Sunbury

12-13 June Newcastle Racecourse, High Gosforth Park

7-8 August Kempton Park Racecourse

Contact: The Exhibition Team, PO Box 72, Maidenhead SL6 7GB tel 01628 621697, fax 01628 680702, email info@rockngem.co.uk, www.Rockngem.co.uk

A boost for geological collections in the North East

Tyne and Wear Museums have been successful in achieving a grant of £96,000 from the Designation Challenge Fund, administered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, to re-store the entire geology collection at Sunderland Museum and to work on the documentation and conservation of the geological collections at both Sunderland Museum and the Hancock Museum in Newcastle. The project will allow Tyne and Wear Museums to employ two additional geology assistants to work on the collections over a two-year period.

A magnificent new plesiosaur for the Somerset County Museum

When local man, Nick Collard went fishing on the Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve he was not expecting to find a 1.5 metre-long plesiosaur! "I regularly walk this stretch of beach and hadn't noticed it before," he said. "The tide must have washed away some of the silt to reveal the fossil. I rushed home to consult my encyclopaedia and the County Museum later confirmed my once-in-a-lifetime discovery." Without his keen observation and quick thinking this rare and scientifically important specimen would have been lost to erosion by the tide. Plesiosaurs are very rare fossils and few museums in Britain contain their remains: not only did Nick find a complete specimen, but also one that was fully exposed and apparently beautifully preserved.

The excavation of fossil reptiles is exciting but can be difficult without damaging them. Furthermore, the coast, at this locality, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a National Nature Reserve (NNR) managed by English Nature – their permission is required, in the form of a permit, in order to collect fossils (*in situ*) by excavation. The specimen lay mid-foreshore and the site could not be visited until the following day, when a survey and risk assessment was conducted in partnership with English Nature's Reserve Manager, Robin Prowse. Since the movement of cobbles across the beach was just beginning to expose the bone, the museum responded quickly. The following day a field team carried out a three-hour rescue excavation, effecting complete recovery of the specimen and supporting contextual information.

The team of five used an abrasive wheel disc cutter together with hammers and chisels to remove the plesiosaur from the beach. Three natural joints, one showing some lateral movement offsetting the tail, transgressed the fossil and this meant that it was excavated in four blocks. The matrix consists of a weakly cemented, laminated mudstone held together largely by compaction. It is rich in ammonites ranging in size from a few millimetres to over 500 mm, and samples were collected for the purposes of dating. The heavy blocks were transferred to waiting transport by English Nature's six-wheel tractor: a splendid vehicle and great fun to drive! The blocks were carefully flushed to remove the salt in large tanks at the museum before being taken, wet, to the Palaeontology Conservation Unit of the Natural History Museum for slow drying under carefully controlled conditions - reducing de-lamination of the matrix.

English Nature has transferred the legal title of ownership to the museum on behalf of the landowner and the specimen has received the following accession number: 146/2003. The museum is currently planning a programme of post-excavation research work in conjunction with specialists and is selecting a contractor to prepare, conserve and cast the specimen. The animal appears to be a large juvenile and during its careful preparation we shall be looking very closely for any evidence of its last meal, gastroliths, coprolites, soft tissue preservation, pathogenic damage and any expression of skeletal development. We believe this is the first complete, fully articulated and unadulterated plesiosaur skeleton to have been collected in Britain for more than a century. Also, it is probably the only one with precise geographical and stratigraphical data: *A. bucklandi* Zone, Lower Sinemurian.

The specimen is currently on temporary display at the County Museum, Taunton Castle, while funding for the restoration project is raised. The museum is open, free, Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. For further information contact Dennis Parsons on (01823) 320209 or dwp@somerset.gov.uk. I would like to extend my thanks to Nick and the team for a job well done!

Dennis Parsons
Geological curator

Peter Russell is awarded Canadian medal

GCG member Peter Russell, curator at the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, has been awarded the E.R.W. Neale Medal of the Geological Association of Canada (GAC). The medal, for sustained outstanding efforts in sharing earth science with Canadians, has been awarded annually since 1995.

Peter has been one of the most active promoters of Earth Science Education in Canada by working at the grass-roots level with several hundred thousand children and thousands of teachers and members of the public over more than three decades. His energy has been phenomenal. He has judged at the Waterloo-Wellington Science and Engineering Fairs since 1971. From the late 1970s he organized and distributed the "Geoscience Slide Library" kits and notes and boxes of minerals, fossils and rocks, to assist teachers in the curriculum for Grades 4 to 6 throughout Waterloo Region. The Waterloo "Junior Naturalists' Programme" was set up and guided by him from 1979-1990, expanding into the "Science and Engineering Quest". Innumerable public and student field trips and EdGEO teacher training workshops have been run for over three decades. In the late 1980s he helped initiate and co-edit *What on Earth*; was the illustrator for Mineralogical Association of Canada's *Encyclopedia of Mineral Names* and has designed an interpretive logo for every issue of GAC's flagship journal, *Geoscience Canada*, since its launch.

Travelling exhibits designed by Peter have appeared at gem shows throughout Ontario and the United States. Teaching exhibits on groundwater have gone to Groundwater Festivals and Clean Water Fairs in six Ontario counties and are distributed as far away as Quebec. The "Wally and Deanna" cartoon booklet series have been wildly successful with children and more than 28,000 copies have been produced in three languages.

After his "retirement" in 1996 the University of Waterloo formally named the "Peter Russell Rock Garden" in recognition of his service. Subsequently under his imaginative guidance the Centre for Environment Innovation and Technology is being transformed, with Peter persuading the architects to build the five-storey building around a huge (9 m tall) monolithic block of stone that is now ensconced through three floors in the central hallway.

Peter Russell has excelled for over three decades in interactions with the general public, with teachers and particularly with children. It is estimated that he has talked to a minimum of 250,000 children and teachers over 30 years.

GAC Past President, Dr John Clague, presented the award during the GAC Awards Luncheon on 12 May 12 at the annual GAC-MAC conference at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario.

SYNTHESYS

A consortium of 20 European natural history museums and botanic gardens, all members of Consortium of European Taxonomic Facilities (CETAF) has been successful in securing a FPVI European-funded Integrated Infrastructure Initiative grant, called SYNTHESYS. The SYNTHESYS consortium is led by The Natural History Museum, London.

This five-year grant comprises two parts which together aim to create an integrated European infrastructure for researchers in the natural sciences.

Part 1 Access: which will enable European researchers to access the earth and life science collections, facilities and taxonomic expertise at the 20 institutions listed below in 11 national Taxonomic Facility Consortia (TAFs). The operational details will be developed over the coming six months. It is anticipated that SYNTHESYS Access will run in a similar format to the FPV IHP-funded ABC (Brussels), BIOIBERIA (Madrid), COBICE (Copenhagen), COLPARSYST (Paris), HIGH-LAT (Stockholm) and SYS-RESOURCE (London). The first call for proposals will be issued late Summer 2004.

Part 2 Networking Activities: comprises a series of five Networking Activities (NA) focused on creating a single 'virtual' museum service.

Complementarity NA will bring together information on the strengths of each institution's collections and expertise, thus leading to a co-ordinated European development plan.

Standards NA will set standards for the long-term preservation and access to the collections, and will assess the collections to identify priorities for improvement through mechanisms such as training courses.

Databases NA will coordinate the development of collection databases across Europe to create an integrated, distributed European collection database system. New collections NA (such as tissue samples for molecular study) will establish common policies and methodologies.

New analytical methods NA will assess techniques from other disciplines (such as CT), and assess how they might be applied in systematics and other natural history studies.

The Networking Activities will add value to the integrated access that will be provided to the scientific community by the 20 institutions (via the 11 national TAFs).

Main beneficiaries of the integration process will be the European research community in the biosciences and geosciences, and particularly those researchers with an interest in biodiversity.

The Consortium includes the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, the Museum fur Naturkunde in Berlin, the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Sweden, the National Natural History Museum, Naturalis in Leiden, the Naturhistorisches Museum in Austria, the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, and the Hungarian Natural History Museum, as well as the universities of Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and botanic gardens in Edinburgh, Kew, Germany, and Belgium.

Publish in *The Geological Curator*

GCG's journal, *The Geological Curator*, which is published twice a year, provides a forum for publication on all aspects of the curation of geological materials. Not all contributions need be in the form of formal papers for peer-review. *The Geological Curator* offers scope for publishing a wide range of short papers, notes, observations, experiences and discussions, of a theoretical, historical, technical or practical nature, as well as exhibition and book reviews and long-running series such as *Collections and collectors of note* and the invaluable *Lost and found*. The journal is distributed widely to institutions both in the UK and overseas, as well as to our own members.

If you have an idea for publication, or have a contribution ready, or would like more information about publishing in *The Geological Curator*, contact the Journal Editor, Patrick Wyse Jackson, Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland tel +353 1 608 1477, fax +353 1 671 1199, e-mail wysjcknp@tcd.ie

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

Thursday 24 June 2004 Augustus & Gwen John Room, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

GCG Workshop: Identifying fossils 4. Trilobites

An overview of our current knowledge of trilobites by Dr Bob Owens, drawing on specimens from the extensive collections at the National Museum of Wales.

1000 Coffee

1030 Morphology, taxonomy, evolution and palaeobiogeography of trilobites

1230 Lunch in a nearby pub (payable locally).

1400 Practical identification session, using appropriate monographs

1600 Close

Meeting fee: £5.00.

Please complete the booking form in the March issue of *Coprolite* and return it with a cheque for the meeting fee (payable to GCG) to Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP tel 029 20 573 265, fax 029 20 667332, email Tom.Sharpe@nmgw.ac.uk **by Thursday 17 June.**

Thursday 21 October 2004 National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

GCG Seminar: Geology in Partnership

The last couple of years have seen a growing trend, spurred on by Government policy, for national museums to work more closely with regional museums through partnership schemes and strategic commissioning. Through loans and touring exhibitions, prestigious objects from the national collections are being displayed around the country. What partnership projects have been undertaken, what benefits does this bring, and what are the pitfalls? What projects are coming out of regional hub funding? Where does geological material fit into this and how can we maximise the profile and use of our geological collections?

- 1030 Coffee and registration
- 1100 Welcome
- 1105 Loans between national and non-national museums. New standards and practical guidelines: Ray Barnett, Bristol City Museums
- 1130 The partnership scheme at the Natural History Museum: Milly Rosier, Natural History Museum
- 1200 Benefiting from National/Regional Partnerships: Steve McLean, Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne
- 1230 Lunch (In local pubs)
- 1400 Working in Partnership through the North East Regional Museums Hub: Bill Griffiths, North East Regional Hub Manager
- 1430 Getting geology into non-geological displays: Steve Howe and Tom Sharpe, National Museum of Wales
- 1450 Geology in art exhibitions: Richard Bevins, National Museum of Wales
- 1510 A conservator's perspective: Caroline Buttler, National Museum of Wales
- 1530 Tea
- 1545 Discussion
- 1615 Close

Meeting fee: £5.00.

If sufficient interest is expressed, it may be possible to arrange a field visit on Friday 22 October.

Please complete the booking form on page 11, and return it, with a cheque for £5.00 made payable to GCG, to Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP tel 029 20 573 265, fax 029 20 667332, email Tom.Sharpe@nmgw.ac.uk **by Monday 11 October.**

28-31 October 2004 Natural History Museum and Czech Geological Survey, Prague

GCG Study Visit

This year's study visit will be to Prague, to the Czech National Museum and the Czech Geological Survey, two institutions with superb collections of fossils and minerals. For more information about the National Museum, see <http://www.nm.cz/english> and for the Geological Survey <http://www.cgu.cz/>

Thursday 28 October Arrival

Friday 29 October Visit to the Czech Geological Survey and the Czech National Museum

Saturday 30 October Field excursion to the Lower Palaeozoic of the Barrandian with a visit to geopark of the Museum of the Bohemian Karst in Beroun.

Sunday 31 October Depart

Further details will be posted on GCG's website. To register your interest in this study visit contact: Andrew Ross, Department of Paleontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD tel 0207 942 5492, fax 0207 942 5546, email A.Ross@nhm.ac.uk

**9 December 2004 Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool
GCG Workshop: Meteorites, impactites and tektites**

An overview of what meteorites can tell us about the origins and evolution of the Solar System. This one-day training session is designed for the non-specialist who wishes to find out more about the oldest 'rocks' in our collections. An emphasis will be placed on being able to identify a meteorite, tektite or impactite just to help with those numerous awkward enquiries that we all get (the family heirloom is often just a piece of blast furnace slag). Meteorights and meteowrongs will be stressed in order to assist with identifying the impostors and help clarify some of the popularly held misconceptions about meteorites.

1100-1500

Meeting fee: £5.00

Contact: Alan J Bowden, Curator of Earth Sciences, National Museums Liverpool, William Brown Street, Liverpool, L3 8EN tel 0151 478 4367 fax 0151 478 4350 email alan.bowden@liverpoolmuseums.org

18-19 January 2005 Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne.

GCG Seminar, 31st Annual General Meeting and Field Trip: Planning for disaster, rescue and specimen relocation.

This seminar will examine the range of situations that require collections to be moved to temporary or indeed new permanent locations. This is becoming more common in the light of major Heritage Lottery Developments when collections have to be moved off site until the development is complete, and then returned. How is such a major task planned and undertaken? What are the resource implications and where do the collections go? How are the collections cared for during their absence and how are they organised? In addition to considering these questions there are a number of potential case studies which may be examined during this seminar. We will also be considering the ways in which curators can plan for disasters and the rescue of collections should a major event occur which threatens the museum.

The second day will allow us to examine some of the best known exposures of the Permian strata of the Sunderland district. This will include a chance to see exposures of the basal Permian Sands at Claxheugh Rock and the Zechstein Reef at Tunstall Hills. Time permitting we will also examine some of the coastal exposures between Sunderland and South Shields such as the collapse-brecciated Concretionary Limestone at Marsden Bay, the axis of a major dune ridge at Frenchman's Bay and a spectacular marine sequence at Trow Point.

To offer papers please contact: Steve McLean, Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765, fax 0191 261 7537, email s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

Other meetings

31 July 2004 Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester

Geoscience Open Day

Contact: Dr Phil Manning, Curator of Palaeontology, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

5-7 November 2004 National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

Geofest@Cardiff

A weekend of geological activities in southeast Wales, including the Geologists' Association Annual Reunion on Saturday 6 November, hosted by the South Wales Group of the Geologists' Association.

Contact: Geofest@Cardiff, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP www.geofest.swga.org.uk

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21 October 2004
GCG Seminar: Geology in Partnership
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff
BOOKING FORM

Title.....Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone.....

e-mail.....

I will be attending the seminar on 21 October

I would be interested in a field trip on 22 October

I can provide transport for people on the fieldtrip

I would like details of local accommodation

Please return this form with a cheque for £5.00, made payable to the Geological Curators' Group to: Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP **by Monday 11 October.**

GEOLOGICAL
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GROUP



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