



Coprolite

Droppings from the
Geological Curators' Group

No.2 May 1990



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.

New Honorary Member for GCG

The Geological Curators' Group is pleased to announce that John **Norton** MBE has accepted Honorary Membership of the Group. John retired on 22 December 1989 after 30 years as Curator of **Ludlow** Museum. A full appreciation of John **Norton** and his work will appear in the *Geological Curator*.

New Members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members:

Anne Bone, Chichester District Museum; **G. Lucy**, Great **Dunmow**, Essex; **Mark Mauther**, Geological Museum, University of British Columbia; **Steven G. McLean**, Leicester; and **A. Nicol**, Leicester.

GCG Committee

At a meeting on 8 February, the following members were coopted on to GCG Committee:

Rosina Down, Biology Department, **Medowar** Building, University College, Gower Street, London. **WC1E** 6JB

Mick Stanley, Derbyshire Museums Service, John Turner House, The **Parkway**, Darley Dale, **Matlock**, Derbyshire. **DE4** 2FW

Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cathays **Park**, Cardiff. **CF1** 3NP

Musical Curators

John Thackray, formerly with the Geological Museum exhibition team, is now Archivist at the Natural History Museum. At Perth Museum, **Anne Abernethy** has been appointed Assistant Keeper of Natural Sciences and took up her post on 5th March. **Caroline Buttler**, formerly on a Royal Society postdoctoral fellowship at Trinity College Dublin, has been appointed Geological Conservator at the National Museum of Wales for two years from 5th March.

Forthcoming meetings and seminars

7-11 May 1990 Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago
5th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.

The provisional **programme** includes sessions on pest **control**, museum hazards and safety, problem solving, and a symposium on the conservation of exhibit specimens.

Contact: David Willard, Bird Division, Field Museum of Natural History, Roosevelt Road at Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL **60605**, U.S.A.

21-22 June 1990 Museum Building, Trinity College, Dublin
GCG Seminar and Fieldtrip: Geology in Irish Museums.

This, **GCG's** first 'foreign' seminar, will provide a rare opportunity to get to know the main geological museums and collections in Ireland and to compare their development with British institutions. There is much of historical importance in the Irish collections, and much of relevance to museums in Britain.

Wednesday **20 June**. This day will be available for early arrivals to see collections of particular interest in Trinity College (Geology Today **5, 213**), the National Museum (Geological Curator **3(9)**, 528) or the Geological Survey of Ireland (please give advance notice as some material is in storage).

Thursday **21 June**. Seminar: Irish Geological Collections

9.30 Registration - Museum Building, **Trinity** College, Dublin.

10.00 Welcome - Prof. C.H. Holland.

10.05 The Geological Museum and Collections of Trinity College c.1780-1990' - **Patrick Wyse Jackson**, followed by tour of the Museum.

11.00 Coffee.

11.30 The James **Mitchell** Museum - a museum of a museum in University College, Galway' - Dave Harper.

12.00 'Geological Collections of the Ulster Museum, Belfast' - **Phil Doughty**.

12.30 Lunch. Move to Geological Survey of Ireland at Beggar's Bush.

2.00 'Geological Survey of Ireland Collections' - **Andy Sleeman**, followed by opportunity to view exhibition Down to Earth and collections.

3.00 Move to National Museum of Ireland.

3.30 Coffee

4.00 National Museum of Ireland Collections' - Nigel Monaghan, followed by tour of the Museum.

5.15 Reception (hosted by Department of Geology, Trinity College).

6.00 Dinner in Trinity College (**Price** £5.00)

8.00 Lecture: 'Some thoughts on the history of Irish Geology' - Prof. G.L. Hemes **Davies**

Friday **22 June**. : Some gems in the geology of the Wicklow Mountains
Fieldtrip leaders: Nigel Monaghan and **Patrick Wyse Jackson**

9.30 Assemble in the car park of the Geological Survey of Ireland. This **trip** will examine the nineteenth century **Pb/Zn/Ag** mines and the metamorphic aureole around the Leinster granite in the monastic valley of Glendalough; will pass through the glacial spillway at the Scalp; and will stop at Ballybetagh Bog, County Dublin from where many Giant Irish Deer skeletons were exhumed.

We will return to Dublin in time for participants to catch transport from the city.

Meeting fee: **£3.00**

Please complete the booking form on page 11, and send it with payment (cheques made payable to **Patrick Wyse Jackson**) to:

Patrick Wyse Jackson, Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland. (Tel. **0001 772941 ext.1477**) by Monday 24 May **1990**.

17-20 September 1990. Open University, Milton Keynes

38th Symposium of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Comparative Anatomy.

Contact: Dave **Martill**, 38th VPCA Symposium, Department of Earth Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

27-29 September 1990 Sussex University, Brighton

Society for the History of Natural History: Gideon **Mantell** Bicentenary Meeting.

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

10-11 October 1990 Cromer Museum, Norfolk

GCG Seminar and Fieldtrip: Collecting and identifying Pleistocene material

Wednesday **10 October**. 11.00 am (Coffee from 10.30 am) at Red Lion Hotel, **Brooke Street**, Cromer. Speakers include:

- Tony Stuart (Norwich Castle Museum) : Vertebrates and extinctions
- Bob **Markham** (Ipswich Museum) : The **Foxhall Jaw** - a detective story
- John Wymer (Norfolk Archaeological Trust) : Man in the Pleistocene
- David Ward : Processing techniques for Pleistocene material
- Martin Warren (Cromer Museum) : Latex peels from soft sediments
- Rogan Jenkinson (Creswell Crags Visitor Centre)

Thursday **11 October**.

Fieldtrip to the spectacular coastal sections of the Cromerian Interglacial and the Anglian Glaciation between West **Runton** and Sidestrond.

Leader: Martin Warren.

Meeting fee: **£5.50** (includes buffet lunch, tea and coffee)

Please complete the booking form on page 11, and send it with payment (cheques made payable to GCG) to:

Martin Warren, Cromer Museum, East Cottages, Tucker Street, Cromer, Norfolk. (Tel. 0263 513543) by Monday **1 October 1990**.

6 December 1990 Yorkshire Museum, York

GCG Seminar and AGM: Recapturing the initiative.

Contact: Paul Ensom, Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens, York YO1 2DR. Tel. 0904 629745

September **1991** Dresden, German Democratic Republic

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

Contact: **Sekretariat** der GGW, INHIGEO 1991, Invalidenstrasse 43, DDR-1040 Berlin.

Exhibitions 1990

Dinosaurs Past and Present

Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh	1 Mar - 27 May
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff	16 June - 30 Sep
Natural History Museum, London	1 Nov - 3 Feb 1991

Dinosaurs alive! / Dinamation

City Art Centre, Edinburgh	28 Feb - 3 June
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff	16 June - 30 Sep

The Dinosaur **Roadshow**

Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne	until 27 May
Derbyshire Museum Service	8 June - 15 Sep
Scunthorpe Museum	22 Sep - 17 Nov
Doncaster Museum	Nov 1990 - Jan 1991

The Legacy of Ice

Rowley's House Museum, Shrewsbury	12 May - 23 June
Dudley Museum & Art Gallery	30 June - 11 Aug
Walsall Museum & Art Gallery	18 Aug - 29 Sep
Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry	8 Oct - 17 Nov
Malvern Museum	24 Nov - 5 Jan 1991

The Great Gloucestershire Dinosaur Discovery

City Museum and Art Gallery, Gloucester	20 Oct - 26 Jan 1991
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Giants, Gems and Jewels

Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow	3 Apr - 2 Sep
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Monsters of the Deep

Yorkshire Museum, York	13 Apr - Jan 1991
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Gem & Mineral Fairs

British Lapidary and Mineral Dealers' Association

26-27 May 1990 Watershed Media Centre, Canons Road, Bristol

25-27 August 1990 Crown Hotel, Harrogate

20-21 **October** 1990 Holiday Inn, Swiss Cottage, London

Fair **Organiser:** John F. Turner, **Glenjoy**, 19/21 Sun Lane, Wakefield, West Yorkshire. Tel. 0924 373786

Newish Publications

Richard Tayler has published his *Rocks and Minerals Catalogue 46*, available from Richard Tayler Minerals, Byways, 20 Burstead Close, **Cobham**, Surrey, **KT11 2NL**. Tel: 0932 62340

Journal of Biological Curation Volume 1 Number 1, 1989, has been published by the Biological Curators' Group. Details from: Dr. J.H. Matthias, Leicestershire Museums Service, 96 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TD. Tel: 0533 554100

British Regional Geology. The Northern Highlands of Scotland by G.S. Johnstone and W. Mykura. HMSO, 1989, 229pp. ISBN 0 11 884460 1 £6.00

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Earth Sciences edited by A. Allaby and M. Allaby. Oxford University Press, 1990, xxi + 410pp. ISBN 0 19 866146 0 £20.00

SSCR Journal Volume 1 Number 1, February 1990 is the new quarterly news magazine of the Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration. Further information from Fiona Butterfield, 100 **Holeburn** Road, Newlands, Glasgow G43 2XN. Tel: 041 637 4149

Two old crocs: Steenosaurus, Metriorhynchus and relatives by M.A. Taylor, J.G. Martin & A.R.I. **Cruikshank**. Leicestershire Museums Publication No.105, Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service, 1990, 16pp. ISBN 0 85022 276 1. £0.75.

Journal of the Russell Society (the Journal of British topographical mineralogy) **Vol.3** Part 1. 1990 is now out, and includes papers on alstonite and **barytocalcite** from South Wales, identification of minerals using x-ray diffraction, the supergene minerals of **Low Pike**, Caldbeck Fells, chromium minerals from the Lake District, and much more. £3.50. Available from Roy **Starkey**, 15 Warwick Avenue, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 2AH, who also has back issues (£2.50 each.)

Forthcoming:

Minerals of the English Lake District: Caldbeck Fells by M.P. Cooper & C.J. **Stanley**. British Museum (Natural History), 1990, 160pp. ISBN 0 565 01102 2 £14.95. Available from Publication Sales, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD (please include 10% for p&p).

Forthcoming (cont.):

Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve. A geological handbook and field guide by A. Cutler, P.G. Oliver and C.G.R. Reid. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Leisure Services Department and Nature Conservancy Council, 1990, 28pp, £1.00. Available from Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, **St. James's Road**, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 1HV, or Nature Conservancy Council, Northminster House, Northminster Road. Peterborough PE1 1UA.

Information Sheets

GCG is exploring the idea of producing a series of information sheets which could be used by museums throughout the country for answering enquiries or for sale in museum shops. The Group's role could be to act as a coordinator or clearing house for the production and distribution of leaflets, ensuring that there is no repetition of work and encouraging a standard format. Additionally, GCG could provide the expertise to write a leaflet on a particular topic if a museum lacks the necessary specialist, or the Group itself could produce leaflets perhaps with, say, the reprographics section of a museum service's local authority. As a first step, I would be most grateful to receive copies of any such leaflets that are already available and to hear of any suggestions of topics for leaflets which members feel would be useful to them.

Tom Sharpe, 49 Kelston Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 2AG

Earth Science Review: Museums and Collections

It seems that the long drawn-out process of the Earth Science Review Museums & Collections Exercise described by Jim Kennedy at the GCG Newcastle meeting in September 1989 and summarised by Peter Crowther's recent editorials in the *Geological Curator*, may eventually bear some fruit. The Steering Committee, chaired by Kennedy and comprising curators from the other four Collection Centres, has been led to believe that the monies recommended by the Universities Funding Council (UFC) appointed assessors last May have been scheduled for release from 1st April this year.

If this happens, the five Collections Centres at Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham will receive sufficient funding to enable them to provide vastly improved levels of care for their collections and to be equipped to look after if necessary any collections which become at risk through closure or reduction of other university earth science departments.

There has been much misunderstanding over this exercise, mainly through a lack of communication from the UFC to the Steering Committee and especially to non-Collection Centre departments. It was never the intention that Collections Centres would pillage less fortunate departments, but merely that a safety net would be established whereby collections could be rescued if the non-Collection Centre departments felt that they could no longer give them adequate curatorial cover.

Non-Collection Centre departments which employ their own curators may retain their entire collections (with the possible exception of type and figured specimens) and indeed will be invited to bid for a share of an additional £100K to be provided by the UFC. Those departments which have been substantially reduced or closed altogether, however, may wish to dispose of redundant collections and the Collections Centres exist to negotiate the transfer of such material.

Local authority museums may prefer to see such collections from their local geology departments be transferred to them rather than be moved out of the area. This decision is entirely up to the university department concerned, but, of course the proposed UFC funding will not cover such eventualities.

Roll on April 1st and let's hope the whole exercise has not been a Fool's Day joke!

John Nudds

The Manchester Museum, 14 March 1990

Geology and Black Country World, Dudley

Black Country World, the focal point for Dudley's heritage strategy, is the umbrella organisation for the four visitor attractions on Castle Hill - the zoo, castle, Black Country Museum and Dudley Canal Trust. Over £6 million has been invested in developing all of these sites mainly through the building of new, exciting exhibits. In the long term it is hoped that visitors will be able to travel between attractions on a miniature mono-rail link, although each will retain its own identity. A hotel and conference centre is also planned in the coming years.

What is so exciting about Black Country World is that geology is the **lynchpin** of the entire project. **Castle Hill** is riddled with limestone mines and quarries. Many of the latter were converted to create unique pens for the zoo animals - notably the polar bears. The Singing Cavern experience re-creates life inside a limestone mine. The Black Country Museum reconstructs local life in the early 20th century, when the economic fabric of the area was based entirely on the exploitation of local resources - coal, **fireclay**, limestone and ironstone. Even the castle is constructed of local limestone and owes its prominent position to **Wenlock** Limestone strata folded during **Devonian** times. The new exhibits will further emphasise these geological links.

Towards the end of 1989 a walk-through mining experience was opened at the Black Country Museum. This depicts a typical late 19th century Black Country coal mine on the 30 foot Thick Coal', and is set to become the museum's most popular exhibit.

The Canal Trust have also taken up the geological theme. A new tunnel linking Castle Mill basin to the Singing Cavern via Little Tess Cavern houses a new audio-visual display on the formation and mining of the **Wenlock** Limestone, featuring illustrations of many of the fossils in Dudley Museum. The most exciting project is the new zoo exhibit, the **Geochrom**, a quite **revolutionary** concept combining live zoo exhibits with

spectacular museum-type displays akin to those of the **Epcot** Centre at Disneyworld. The theme of the Geochrom is the story of life on Earth - seen specifically from Dudley's point of view. This is being done by re-creating in a very theatrical way, the various palaeoenvironments experienced locally over the past 420 million years (tropical seas, coal forest, deserts, temperate forest, glacial etc.) complete with the flora and fauna of the time, and then in adjacent display areas creating the modern equivalent of these ancient environments using the zoo animals. Artificial rock faces containing fossils emphasise the ecological and morphological links between past and present life forms.

By adopting this approach, the evolution of life can be demonstrated, showing very poignantly the processes of extinction, fossilization and survival. Phase 1 of the Geochrom opened on 27 March. It is a tropical house containing creatures as diverse as butterflies and crocodiles. The adjacent exhibition area contains reconstructions of **Silurian** and Carboniferous Dudley and has a strong ecological message.

As Dudley's geologist 'on site', Black Country World has given me a tremendous opportunity to stretch my creative muscles in a way that other museum geologists can only dream of doing. However, it leaves the future of the geology gallery in Dudley Museum up in the air - it is unlikely that the council would be prepared to invest considerable sums in making major changes when so much time and energy is being invested on Castle Hill. In the meantime, therefore, changes in these displays are taking place only at a gradual pace.

Colin Reid
Dudley Museum and Art Gallery

Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia

The Library and Paleontology **Departments** of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia are delighted to announce the re-discovery of original packing lists that accompanied several large collections purchased by one of the Academy's founders, **T.B. Wilson**, in the mid **1800's**. Among the collections documented is our large holding of **Etheldred Benett** material. The lists include a specimen number, identification, locality and sometimes additional geological notes. When the additional information supplied by these "Catalogues" has been integrated into our database, an annotated listing of all our holdings of **Benett** material will be published. In the meantime, any questions regarding the Academy's holdings of **Benett** specimens or those closely allied collections also acquired by **T.B. Wilson** (**Charlesworth**, Griffith and others) can be addressed to Elana Benamy or Earle E. Spamer, Invertebrate Paleontology, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, 19th and the **Parkway**, Philadelphia, PA19103, U.S.A.

Clashbennie Quarry, Perth

Mike Taylor, Keeper of Natural Sciences at Perth Museum, would like to hear from any museum with specimens (probably fish) from the Upper Old Red Sandstone of this locality. Mike can be contacted at Perth Museum and Art Gallery, George Street, Perth PH1 5LB. Tel, 0738 32488

Theft from Natural History Museum, Vienna

Nine fine specimens of apatite were stolen from a display case in the Natural History Museum in Vienna just before Christmas. They comprise 3 specimens from **Knappenwand, Untersulzbachtal, Salzburg**; 3 from **Stillupgrund, Zillertal**; 1 from **Epprechtstein, Fichtelgebirge**; and 2 from **Panasqueira, Portugal**.

Should you be offered this material, or if you would like detailed descriptions, please contact Prof. Dr. Gero Kurat, Naturhistorisches Museum, Burgring 7, 1014 Wien, Austria.

Adopt a Researcher

I was pleased to find *Coprolite No.1* had landed in my post-bag (and felt grateful for the restorative powers of petrification!). Seeing **Barbara Pyrah's** sadly early retirement announced, reminded me first to thank her for all the hard work she put in on the collections at York. I also recalled that one of her perennial complaints was that visiting researchers too rarely tried to inform the curators of what they had done with material borrowed. This made her job of keeping **track of citations to type material etc.** difficult.

This moan was, and still is, undoubtedly true but the problem seems a two-way one. How many provincial curators **treat** researchers as parasites? I was really shocked by the differences I found in attitudes to 'research' in the last two museums I was seriously involved with. That in England, whose geological collections I had been researching at my own (and not inconsiderable) expense for years, showed no interest in my project at all. Offers to read and comment on my first draft were made at the curatorial end but when I asked for its return it was without comment. More than one attempt in writing to get the museum's Director involved in trying to publish it (in the town's bicentenary year), did not even receive the courtesy of a reply...

On my first-ever visit to the United States on the other hand, I visited a museum which had acquired a large number of important British geological collections from 1828. Here the difference in attitude to research on their collections was total. Despite having no geology department (fossils are looked after by broad-minded malacologists or botanists) the curators and Director were interested in what I was trying to do (again without **any** ear-marked funding to help). My all too short visit was followed by an invitation to become properly involved in further rescue-curation of their collections with a copy application to their National Science Foundation for funding.

The symbiosis between curator and researcher we hoped for when the GCG was founded has, I fear, never materialised. As the Group has got more 'professional' [sic] it has tended to more and more exclude those who are not involved in that profession. So, in 1990 what about "adopting a researcher", if you can find one.....? If **he/she** is in academic geology **he/she** will already know the stopwatch is on **him/her** over the next four years to monitor what **he/she** 'produces'; driven by some lunatic **the-bigger-the-pile-the-better** philosophy (how very appropriate your *Coprolite* title!). When Lord Chilver (the new Chairman of the Universities 'Funding' Council) gave his famous interview about the future of academic research (*Times Higher Education Supplement* 14.10.1988) he was specifically asked about the real problems which would face the funding of historical research "in a market economy". He urged that "the whole business of writing about history, the drama based around it, the theatre, all hinge on university research... Let them (i.e. the theatres and museums [where the results of historical research are presented]) penetrate the **field of endeavour** to which they should be logically locked. This simply has not happened with scientific collections in this country. Collection research is surely one field in which it should have been?"

Hugh Torrens 31 January 1990

Acquisition Policies

GCG has always been willing to advise potential donors of geological material as to where their donations might be most welcome and useful. At the moment, its advice is based on the limited information held by the **Group's Recorder**, and by the knowledge of the various members. As 'Registration' sweeps the country, all institutions **seeking** to register with the Museums and Galleries Commission must produce a valid acquisition policy. It would greatly assist the Group if it had copies of these acquisition policies as they relate to geological material, to provide a **firm** reference point for any recommendations. To this end, I am establishing a file of such policies and would be glad to receive copies from all institutions. Even if you haven't registered yet, if you have a policy document please could you send it to me.

Simon Knell, GCG Secretary
Scunthorpe Borough Museum & Art Gallery,
Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, DN15 7BD

Personal subscriptions for 1990 are now overdue!

If you haven't yet paid your subscription for 1990, please rush your cheque to Andy Newman, GCG Treasurer, Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PT:

U.K. Personal Subscription	£7 per annum
Overseas Personal Subscription	£9 per annum