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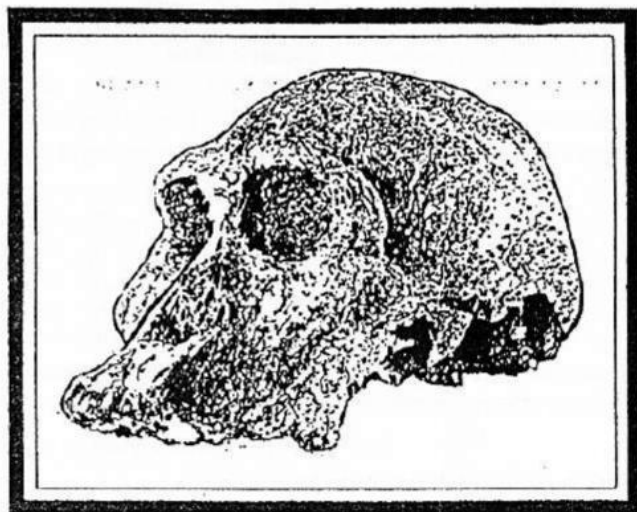
PAL

NEWS
NUUS



Biannual newsletter of the Palaeontological Society of Southern Africa
Halfjaarlikse Nuusbrief van die Palaeontologiese Vereniging van Suider Afrika
Vol/Band 11(2) June 1997

MRS PLES -



OUR DISTANT ANCESTOR ?

INTERESTING SOUTHERN AFRICAN FOSSILS:
"MRS PLES", otherwise known as *Australopithecus africanus*
celebrated her 50th anniversary on the 18th April 1997.

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Front Cover: "Mrs Ples" is the nickname of a fossil skull which is believed to represent a distant relative of *Homo sapiens* that lived 2.5 million years ago. The specimen was discovered by Dr. Robert Broom at the Sterkfontein Caves on 18th April 1947. Initially called "*Plesianthropus*" meaning "almost human", she is now called *Australopithecus africanus*. Mrs Ples is the world's most complete skull of this species.

FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings

It's been a busy 6 months since the last issue in December 1996. So far this year there's been the first National Festival of Science and Technology (SciFest'97) in Grahamstown (April 1997) - by all accounts, an overwhelming success. This seems to be an excellent way to promote science and in particular palaeontology, most institutions involved with Palaeontological research and education were there. Also just passed is the 50th anniversary of the discovery of Mrs Ples; there's been a lot of publicity around the event which has served to highlight human evolution, hominid palaeontology and of course palaeontology in general. Clearly people are hungry for fossil knowledge (certainly museum visitors really go for fossils), obviously there is an ongoing need to keep the public informed with regard to developments in the field. In order to do this successfully we need to optimize communications amongst ourselves within our community. I believe this will be achieved most successfully in a region such as ours where we have a small fossil community (and a wealth of internationally important specimens, with much untapped potential) if we can try to in a sense complement the work each other is doing. South Africa is crying out for better communication and understanding between people in all walks of life, if we're to survive successfully into the 21st century we need to create and maintain a culture of understanding and goodwill.

It looks as though with a bit of luck the 1998 PSSA conference will be in Namibia-check out El President Roger's note in this issue. Thanks to all those who've written in for this issue-the news looks pretty interesting.

All the best, take care
Patrick

NEWS FROM:

PATRICK BENDER, GEOSCIENCE MUSEUM, PRETORIA

It's been an entertaining and interesting few months since the last issue of PALNEWS. On the research front, Fiona Evans and I spent a few weeks in April going through most of the institutionalized Whitehill Fm palaeoniscid fossils. It became clear that this group is in need of major taxonomic revision-there will be a few new species for good measure, including a deep-bodied type of form. We will introduce the palaeontology community to these enigmatic fossils at the CAVEPS meeting in Perth, Australia in July. My research on Lower Beaufort Group (Upper Permian) palaeoniscids continues to gain momentum, I now have a good idea of the species composition at two of the major sites in the Lower Beaufort, namely: Wilgerbosch, New Bethesda, (Dicynodon Assemblage Zone) and Blourug, Victoria West, (unconfirmed Assemblage Zone), but probably older than the former site. I have almost completed preparation of specimens from the two sites (it's really been delicate, time consuming work with the odd measure of brutal hacking and chipping thrown in) but a couple of very good specimens have come to light, particularly in recent weeks two good *Atherstonia scutata* skulls, so at last I have some idea of the dermal skull anatomy. A few other very interesting key pieces in this Lower Karoo basin fish jigsaw have revealed themselves-Watch this Space ! There are at least 5 or 6 species at the two sites, with some interesting connections and potential for biostratigraphic correlation. I would like to get into the field early next year to look at biostratigraphic correlation from Victoria West across into the New Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet areas. I will present an update on this study at the Perth CAVEPS meeting after which I intend to study similar aged palaeoniscids in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney- Aluta Continua to Reunite Gondwana!

Here at the Geoscience Museum new permanent and travelling displays are keeping myself and other staff members involved. Of course we are in the process of trying to give the public what they want- more fossils, minerals and gemstones- we hope to complete a major new gemstone display this year. In terms of primary and secondary education (such a vital area of education where museums can stimulate so much inspiration), we provide worksheets to schools, the Transvaal Museum Education take over (great job Saskia, Anna and the rest), together with our Security and Education staff. We hope to take displays into the local township areas in the next year to try and supplement the school curricula.

BPI - MAY 1997 - MARION BAMFORD

Apart from the usual teaching, research, and contract work that keeps most of us very busy, the BPI has been involved in bringing palaeontology to the people. At the beginning of April the quarter size animated model of *T. rex*, still warm from the setting latex, and two life size models of *Tapinocaninus*, still glistening with wet paint, were carefully manoeuvred into a Frazers International pantechicon. Together with real fossils, posters, computer, etc. this unusual procession dashed down to Grahamstown for the new National Science Festival. (We thought a horse box would be more appropriate but they don't make them big enough.) The long days and longer nights' work of **Marvin Carstens, Richard Lewis, Marion Duncan and Joseph Fink** were worth every drop of sweat and #@%*!!!. The school kids, parents and adults flocked to see the strange and frightening beasts snap their jaws, wave their heads and breathe deeply! There were some serious enquiries about careers in palaeontology.

The beasts, nicknamed Fang and Fred by the media, did their bit again at the Wits Open Day on Saturday 10 May. The rest of BPI put on a good

show too but the noise and gnashing teeth were by far the most popular. The department also has an increasing number of schools visiting the museum, as well as having **Marion Duncan** visiting them. The interest in palaeontology is growing steadily.

James Kitching was back in the big city at the end of April to receive an Honorary Doctor of Science from the University of the Witwatersrand. We were all glad to see him and **Betty** again and very proud of his achievement. Congratulations Oomie!

Our post grad students are still on the verge of submitting their dissertations or theses. **Sue de Villiers** HAS submitted her thesis on Tertiary palynology from the West Coast and awaits the outcome impatiently. Sue has been awarded the Granville-Smith Scholarship for 1997 from the American Association of Stratigraphic Palynologists - Congratulations! Sue is moving to Cape Town soon as her husband has been transferred. We are going to miss her but wish her happiness and lots of pollen in Cape Town.

The organisation of the palynology symposium is going well and 80-100 delegates from all over the world are expected to attend. **Ann Cadman, Marion Bamford and Sue de Villiers** are still receiving registration forms for this "Third African Palynology Symposium" to be held at Wits from 15-19 September 1997. If anyone is still interested in attending the conference or the Cape Fynbos Field trip beforehand (5-14 September), please contact Ann at 106CAA@cosmos.wits.ac.za or fax: 011 403 1423. **Chris Gow** is on six months sabbatical. He's spending his time here in Johannesburg and is working away on his little beasties.

On a more personal note we must congratulate one of our former students, **Rob Fox** and his wife Cecilia, on the birth of their third son on 7 May. **Grigor Aitken** and Laura are also to be congratulated on the birth of their first child, Amy.

COUNCIL FOR GEOSCIENCE, BELLVILLE.

John Almond (Council for Geoscience) persists in seeking spiritual, and even intellectual, fulfilment in Precambrian to Palaeozoic waters. A recent onshore excursion in the Graafwater area together with Dr Simon Braddy (Manchester University, UK) involved hunting down elusive eurypterid (water scorpion) trackways from Ordovician paralic sediments of the lower Table Mountain Group (Graafwater Fm.). Our hunt proved unexpectedly successful; in particular, we were led by a kindly farmer's wife to an important track-bearing washstone first illustrated by Taljaard in the 1950's and subsequently buried by sand in front of her farmhouse. It originates from the same trackway surface at Skilpadsklip (named after the tortoise-like trackways) on the farm Brandenburg to which also belongs the huge slab exhibited at the Geology Department, Stellenbosch. By analogy (perhaps homology) with the behaviour of king crabs, closest living relatives of the Eurypterida, Simon speculates that such cross-cutting trackways record orgiastic spring tide mating frenzies on the beach by the light of Palaeozoic moon. We also found a few new examples of these very rare, palaeobiologically informative eurypterid trackways (*Petalichnus*) together other traces, including numerous examples of the enigmatic vertical excavation *Metaichna*. These striking sandstone pillars, which reach diameters of 15cm or more, typically occur in the same sandstone beds as the eurypterid tracks (both in the Graafwater and Peninsula Fms.), and have been attributed to the same arthropods (egg nests?), though a convincing burrowing mechanism has not been proposed and an abiogenic origin is also mooted. A restricted assemblage of shallow marine traces from the early Silurian Disa siltstones (Cedarberg Fm), recording the recovery of benthic infauna following the late Ordovician Gondwanan glaciation, was also collected in the Nardouwsberge near Trawal. During a subsequent holiday trip to southern Namibia the opportunity was taken to sample trace-rich beds of Late Precambrian (Nama Group) to Permian (Ecca Group) age. The

Ecce traces -mainly the complex tubes of Siphonichnus which are well-known from contemporary sediments of the Vryheid Fm. of Natal - can be seen riddling the desolate remains of the Mukorob (Finger of God; Auob sst.), though they are unlikely to have been responsible for its recent collapse.

Palaeozoic fish continue to fascinate, and distract. Further fieldwork with Fiona Evans on the upper Bokkeveld Group (Klipbakkop Fm.) of the Cedarberg has yielded additional material of sharks' teeth supporting a Mid Devonian/ Givetian age for this horizon as well as palaeoenvironmentally interesting traces (including marine arthropod burrows Cruziana) and sedimentological data. An attempt to follow up two records of fragmentary fish from the older (Eifelian) Tra Tra Fm. of the Bokkeveld Group proved fruitless for the time being. Fiona and I plan to trace the Mid Devonian fish-rich beds into the northern Bokkeveld outcrop area later this year. With fish remains now recorded from all three major subunits of the Cape Supergroup, the hegemony of the Karoo reptile in South African vertebrate palaeontology takes one more faltering step towards oblivion.

Following the discovery last year by J.N. Theron and colleagues of articulate brachiopods and rich marine trace assemblages within the highest Bokkeveld subunit, the Karoopoort Fm., we plan to focus in future on shallow marine facies and biotas (plants/ traces/shelly fossils/ palynomorphs) crossing the Bokkeveld/ Witteberg boundary as part of the Cape Supergroup Working Group programme (SACS Committee for Biostratigraphy). The rationale for maintaining separate group status for the Bokkeveld and Witteberg successions may need re-assessment.

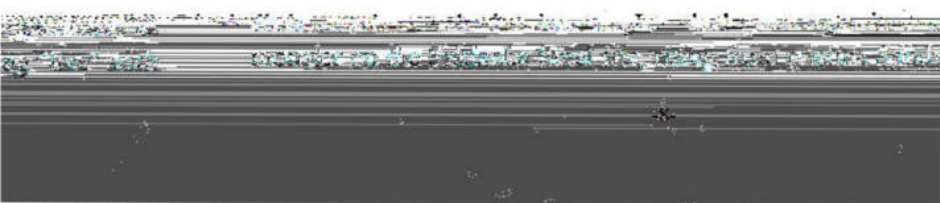
Dave Roberts (Council for Geoscience) continues to unearth exciting palaeontological material during his fieldwork on the coastal Caenozoic successions of the Western Cape. The growing metal and concrete

happily provided a further glimpse of West Coast life in the late Tertiary. Molluscs, phosphatised sharks' teeth, marine mammals, birds and other terrestrial fauna have been recovered from two deep excavations at the site. The fossiliferous horizon is situated at about 2m above mean sea level and is 2m thick. The excellent condition of some of the sharks' teeth, the presence of marine as well as terrestrial vertebrates and sedimentary facies suggest an estuarine setting, possibly of the proto-Berg River. The sequence is tentatively correlated with the Mio-Piocene Varswater Formation of the Sandveld Group.

BILLY DE KLERK, ALBANY MUSEUM, GRAHAMSTOWN

1997 has been quite the busiest I've ever experienced. The launch of the first National Festival of Science and Technology (SiFest'97) took place in Grahamstown for seven days during mid April. WHAT A BLAST!! Palaeontology had a particularly high profile during the festival as numerous palaeo folk from various parts of South Africa made the effort to attend. We all enjoyed a spectacle of some wonderful science in its many forms. Palaeontology was well represented with a number of lectures, displays and workshops being presented by the likes of:

- Bruce Rubidge and his team from the BPI at WITS,
- Roger Smith and Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan from the SAM,
- Francis Thackeray and his team from the Pretoria Museum. They brought Mrs Ples along as it was her 50th birthday.
- Lee Berger from the Wits Palaeo Anthropology Research Unit.
- I presented a "scientist in residence" program focusing on the recent dinosaur finds from the Eastern Cape (including "Kirky" the little carnivore).



these pages for the next month or two and access will be for PSSA members only as I would like your critical comment on the content, layout, spellingetc. I need your feedback!!!

The URL address is:

<http://www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/pssaindx.html> OR

<http://www.ru.ac.za/departments/am/pssaindx.html>

Once I've made the suggested alterations I'll post these pages live and use a more appropriate address - something like <http://www.pssa.ac.za>

Preparation work on the newly discovered small teropod dinosaur, which has been nicknamed "Kirky", has continued over the past number of months and is now nicely exposed. The good news is that our grant proposal to the Dinosaur Society for research and travel money, jointly submitted by my colleagues from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in the US, has been successful. Apart from funds for additional preparation and equipment the grant provides funds for me to travel to the US later in the year to visit four museums in the US that have major dinosaur collections for purposes of comparative anatomical studies on the Kirkwood theropod. During September and October I will be travelling to Long Island New York and will be based at SUNY at Stony Brook. From there I will visit the American Museum of Natural History in New York; Field Museum, Chicago; Yale - Peabody Museum in Boston and finally the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Who says dinosaurs can't take you anywhere??

Drs Cathrine Forster, Callum Ross and Scott Sampson will again be visiting the Museum in June and July this year as part of their "Summer Field Season" - brrr!. They are also be bringing four graduate students from SUNY to help with all the work at this time. The plan is to do about a week of lab work - describing the many dinosaur bits that we have found in the past two years and then travel to the field area in the Addo and

Kirkwood districts to look for more material and map those sites that have been productive to date. Hopefully Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan of the South African Museum/UCT will also be able to join us.

FIONA EVANS, ZOOLOGY DEPT, STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Here I am at the Western Australian Museum in Perth writing my contribution to Palnews! My MSc on the palaeobiology of the Waaipoort Formation is now behind me and I am continuing this research for my PhD. A complete revision of all of the palaeoniscoids in the Waaipoort, some more sedimentology on the Waaipoort, and comparisons between the Late Carboniferous- Mid Permian South African specimens and similar-age fish faunas from other parts of southern Gondwana will all dove-tail and enlarge upon my previous studies. I recently lead a Geological Society field trip jointly with John Almond and Deville Wickens to some well-exposed Waaipoort outcrops in the Laingsburg area. Some very useful sedimentological and palaeoenvironmental discussions ensued, points of which I hope to explore later in the course of the year. We also examined the so-called diamictite deposits in the upper Witpoort Formation, which also contains a fossiliferous black mudstone unit with a stratigraphic setting similar to that found in the Grahamstown vicinity. It was a mad rush to complete last-minute casting and photography before I was off to Perth. Yesterday, my first day at the museum, John Long gave me a guided tour of the fossil fish stores at the Western Australian Museum which was a real treat for any palaeontologist! There are some amazing specimens which have been prepared out from the limestone nodules from Gogo in the Kimberley district, to reveal near-perfect 3-D specimens of palaeoniscoids, crossopterygians, sharks, acanthodians, and placoderms. The fish fauna from Antarctica is also immensely rich and well-preserved. John has

already set me the task of acid-etching a Gogo palaeoniscoid skull to help me visualise the extra dimension to my laterally preserved 2-D Waaipoort impressions of palaeoniscoids and thus better understand their eating mechanisms as well as the complete anatomy of the skull. There is a lot for me to learn here, and I will have plenty to do, casting specimens, as well as making comparisons of the Early Carboniferous Mansfield palaeoniscoids with those from the Waaipoort Formation. At the CAVEPS conference, starting off slightly more informally with the field trip to Gogo, I will be presenting two papers, one on the Waaipoort Formation palaeoniscoids, and the other a joint talk with Patrick Bender on palaeoniscoids from the Whitehill Formation. The latter will include a discussion of some well-preserved skull material collected late last year on a joint trip with John Almond and two visitors from Brazil: Prof. I. Pinto and Dr K. Adami-Rodrigues who were working on the pygocephalomorph crustaceans which occur in a higher zone in the same formation. I was also involved in some further exciting collecting of Late Devonian disarticulated shark, placoderm and acanthodian material in the upper Bokkeveld of the Western Cape which I recently finished casting. Specimens collected in September last year, as well as museum collections are forming the basis for a joint talk at CAVEPS involving John Long, Eric Anderson, John Almond, myself, Patrick Bender and Dr Theron, and further publications are expected. I hope to do some more travelling later in the year, and further field work in the Eastern Cape.

KINSTUFF:

"Water is composed of two gins, Oxygen and Hydrogin.
Oxygen is pure gin. Hydrogin is gin and water."

HEIDI FOURIE, TRANSVAAL MUSEUM, PRETORIA

As usual we are very busy. The Department of Palaeontology has recently employed a new technical assistant, Annie Vorster, who will be busy with acid and mechanical preparation. Annie will also be sorting the microfauna from Swartkrans and Kromdraai.

Francis Thackeray, Katherine Mathers and I went to the Grahamstown Science Festival in April. I must say that for a first time it went very well. We had a big exhibition hall which was divided into two parts. The original Mrs Ples was exhibited in a special display unit, and we also arranged a display on human evolution. It was a busy week with lots of interested visitors. We congratulate the Grahamstown Foundation for the wonderfully successful festival which was enjoyed by everybody.

Before we went down to Grahamstown, we had the Mrs Ples 50 anniversary, the striking of the coin and the Broom Memorial Lecture delivered by Prof. Dawkins of Oxford University.

I am having a good time helping Laura Panko and Richard Blob. They are two very keen mammal-like reptile palaeontologists from Chicago.

My work on my thesis is also going forward and I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In the next issue I will give a conclusion on my findings. The web page is great - thanks to Billy de Klerk.

Notice: For excellent casts of Transvaal Museum specimens, try:

Waldeck Studios
340 Boundary Road
Brakpan
Tel: (011) 744 2192
Fax: (011) 740 5076

Contact Jack van Zyl for a list.

CHRIS GOW, BPI PALAEONTOLOGY, WITS
UNIVERSITY, JOHANNESBURG

Advert for Pal News.

The following rare and valuable collector's items offered for sale:-

ROMER, A.S. 1956. The Osteology of the Reptiles.

----- 1967. Vertebrate Paleontology.

Both autographed by the author.

Contact Chris Gow at the BPI.

Otherwise, I'm on sabbatical for six months getting some papers out.

NORTON HILLER, CANTERBURY MUSEUM, NEW
ZEALAND

I am pleased to report that I finally have a permanent post. My position as Curator of Geology at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch was confirmed at the beginning of the year. I am now busy coming to terms with all sorts of museological business but I do have a little time to get some research going. With the help of a couple of associates, I have several projects on the go. Apart from my own continuing work on brachiopods, we have two vertebrate projects under way. One deals with vertebrate microfossils of Lower Devonian age and numerous tiny acanthodian and placoderm scales are currently being extracted from a limestone. The other project tackles vertebrates at the other end of the size scale. We are presently preparing a new description of a species of plesiosaur and hope to present a paper on the brute at the CAVEPS meeting in Perth at mid-year. I see from the literature on the conference that several South African representatives will be there. I look forward to downing a few frosties with some of my old mates!

TOM MASON, ARMAGH PLANETARIUM,
NORTHERN IRELAND

I received PALNEWS today..... I am still interested in RSA doings....and look forward to hearing more. You may be interested to know that I have contracted Marion Duncan of Joseamar to supply me with casts for a display on mammal-like reptiles and their kin which will be in my Earth Science display area. I am currently negotiating to try and obtain a mounted skeleton of Megalosaurus to be transported from Dublin to Armagh for the summer display. I assume that you have all heard that Jurassic Park Pt 2 is scheduled for release in the summer. My display will be tied to an animatronic exhibition of dinosaurs and their babies which will be held in Belfast at the Ulster Museum at the same time. We hope that the same public will visit both sites. Life here is very different of course, and although it has been a very dry winter so far, in Ireland all things are possible. I was in Dublin before Christmas and gave a paper on work that Roger Smith and I had carried out in the central Namib. It was on fossil playas and I will likely be at another gathering in Belfast in February. I plan to increase our geological "exposure" from what has been exclusively space based so far. I also heard from Norton Hiller the other day and he is now confirmed in his curator post in New Zealand, doubtless he will tell you himself.

Regards for now,

Tom

Sorry, should have been alles van die beste, Tom

DAVE NORMAN, SEDGEWICK MUSEUM, CAMBRIDGE, UK

News has been a bit slow in coming from Cambridge of recent. The only excuse is general busyness - but that is rather feeble, since we are all pretty equally busy. Two of my research students Paul Barrett (now a research fellow at Trinity College here in Cambridge - working on dinosaurs and herbivory) and Ian Jenkins (working on cranial mechanisms in synapsids - a paper in which he was a co-author with Gillian King has just appeared in *Palaeontology* 40(1)) have had extended periods in South Africa and discovered, as I did, your amazing hospitality and friendliness; so even if it is vicarious, at least I am keeping some measure of contact with you all. This is further reinforced by my daughter Emma who is, as I write, working in Boys Town, Genazzano (just north of Durban) as a volunteer helper for a year before going to University back here in England. My activities have taken a number of directions. The museum has taken its toll, what with far too much management and admin, developing and completing a new exhibition on Jurassic Sea Life, and heavy involvement with the UK National Science Week initiatives; however this has clearly been time well spent because the profile of the museum, within this extremely competitive university (it is probably highly appropriate, given where he was trained, that the departments operate within a system which is uncannily similar to Charles Darwin's Natural Selection) has risen sharply, and we are now actually being actively supported, rather than sniped at as an expensive luxury. Teaching continues to be a thoroughly enjoyable burden, with a number of popular courses at undergraduate level both in Zoology and Earth Science Departments, and a slow but steady trickle of PhD students to keep me from getting too crotchety or complacent as old age creeps up on me. Research has concentrated on a backlog of work that has built up in past years, and is being released by a bit of creative time-management. Most importantly

a series of papers are coming out on Asian ornithischian dinosaurs, which is helping to increase our general understanding of ornithopod dispersal and evolutionary patterns in the Cretaceous and also may shed a little light on the origins of hadrosaurid (duck-billed) dinosaurs. In addition a detailed description of *Scelidosaurus*, one of the earliest well-preserved ornithischian dinosaurs is being undertaken - along overdue piece of work since it was originally described by Richard Owen in the 1860s; this was previewed at the SVP in New York in 1996. Again this is an exciting piece of work because the animal has been prepared out of the matrix, and will again provide a pointer to the early diversification of ornithischians; this dinosaur contrasts quite markedly with the approximately contemporary South African ornithischians *Lesothosaurus* and *Heterodontosaurus*. A major paper on the taxonomy and systematics of the genus *Iguanodon* which is owed to the Natural History Museum is causing me some sleepless nights. There is also the small matter of a fairly hefty festschrift in honour of Alec Panchen which I have been editing and should be out in the Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society in September of this year, oh, and of course a new textbook on Vertebrate Palaeontology for Cambridge University Press to be finished as well. On a more amusing note I was fascinated to learn, in the space of one week, that an earlier (1994) book of mine (Prehistoric Life: the rise of the vertebrates) had just won the Golden Trilobite Award of the Paleontological Society of America and that the publishers had decided to reissue said book! There is something truly heroic about this sort of timing of events! So, in true Cambridge fashion (or so the world would have you believe) I will quietly retire to my study in my carpet slippers and powdering gown with a large bottle of whisky and ask not to be disturbed for another decade.

FRIEDEMANN SCHRENK, HESSISCHES LANDESMUSEUM
DARMSTADT, GERMANY

Hi, I thought I should prepare a small note in order to update our Hominid Corridor Research Project (HCRP) in Malawi for Pal News: New Hominid-Find in Malawi: The first *Australopithecus* from South East Africa

A 2.5-2.3 Million year old Hominid Fragment was discovered in the Karonga District of Northern Malawi by the Hominid Corridor Research Project (HCRP). It was found in August 1996 at a new Locality (Malema site) and has now been prepared in the State Museum of Hesse in Darmstadt, Germany. A first analysis of the upper jaw fragment bearing two molar teeth double the size of modern *Homo sapiens* teeth shows that it belonged to a robust australopithecine, probably *Paranthropus boisei*. This is the second Hominid-find in Malawi after the discovery of a 2.5-2.3 Million year old mandible of *Homo rudolfensis* in the Karonga District in 1991 (from Uraha site, ca 50 km south of the new site). Together with the new specimen this demonstrates a co-existence of early Homo and early Paranthropus in South East Africa. At the new site together with hominid remains turned up fossil remains of giraffes, antelopes, elephants, hippos, pigs and crocodiles. The fauna shows a certain degree of overlap between the Eastern and Southern African faunas. Research at the new site will continue in June 1997, and we hope for more hominid remains from this interesting new locality.

ROGER SMITH, SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUM, CAPE TOWN:

If it's not too late, I would like to canvass opinion as to the dates for next years PSSA conference. I have asked the GSO Namibia to consider hosting the conference and to provide the field vehicles for a short excursion. The options are 14-18 September or 21-25 September 1998.

Please note that the later dates will not leave much time to get to the SVP conference in Salt Lake City which runs 30 September -3 October 1998.

Members with comments, support or otherwise please contact Roger Smith at (021) 24 3330 or rsmith@samuseum.ac.za.

FRANCIS THACKERAY, DEPARTMENT OF PALAEOLOGY, TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY AT THE DISCOVERY OF MRS PLES CELEBRATED LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

In March this year I was invited to represent South Africa at the International Science Festival in Edinburgh. It was a very succesful festival - to my mind just as successful (in terms of organisation and substance) as the first South African Science Festival, held in Grahamstown in April 1997. On both occasions, attention was focused on "Mrs Ples", the most complete cranium of *Australopithecus africanus*, discovered at Sterkfontein in April 1947. This year (1997) we celebrate the 50th anniversary of that discovery, and it was nice to mark this anniversary at an International Science Festival in Scotland since Broom was a Scot (born in Paisley). At the Edinburgh Festival, I paid tribute to

Broom when I delivered a lecture entitled "Old Fossils and the New South Africa". I was proud to place a cast of "Mrs Ples" next to the South African flag for that lecture.

The 50th anniversary of Mrs Ples was marked in various ways, locally and abroad. While in the United Kingdom, I visited Tom Kemp in Oxford, and donated to the University Museum a cast of Mrs Ples. Tom showed me what was left of the original structure of the building where Darwin's ideas on evolution were discussed in the famous debate between Wilberforce and Huxley, at the University Museum, in 1860. Tom has an office next to that of Richard Dawkins; unfortunately Dawkins and I missed each other in Oxford, but we were pleased to have him in South Africa to deliver the Robert Broom Memorial Lecture ("Is Evolution Progressive?") in April, in Pretoria. It attracted a great deal of public interest. Richard Dawkins also spoke at the Science Festival in Grahamstown, in April. Dawkins' visit to this country thus coincided closely with 50th anniversary celebrations of Mrs Ples who was on public display in both Pretoria and Grahamstown. A 24 carat gold coin featuring Mrs Ples was minted in April. The first coins were struck by Professor Dawkins and the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST). The public exhibition featuring Mrs Ples was opened by Roger Jardine, Director-General of DACST. I am very grateful to Heidi Fourie, Annie Vorster, Lize Bronner, Saskia Kempff, Verity Lloyd and many others for helping with the 50th anniversary celebrations, which have served to promote public awareness of South Africa's palaeontological heritage.

KIDSTUFF:

"The skeleton is what is left over after the insides have been taken out and the outsides have been taken off. The purpose of the skeleton is something to hitch meat to."

PALAEONET CHAT GROUP:

I picked the following release up on the PALEONET chat group and thought it may be of use for Pal News?? Cheers Billy

Palaeontologica Electronica - Call for Papers: The first electronic paleontological journal - Palaeontologica Electronica - is now accepting papers for volume 1. Palaeontologica Electronica is an internationally-sponsored, peer-reviewed general paleontological journal of the widest possible scope. Technical contributions in the form of papers, editorials, book reviews, announcements, etc. from any branch of paleontology (micropaleontology, palynology, invertebrate paleontology, paleobotany, vertebrate paleontology) or related biological discipline and on any topic will be welcome within its pages. These contributions will come from members of the professional paleontological and biological communities in the same way that contributions to standard print-based paleontological journals are authored and submitted. All technical papers will be reviewed by professional paleontologists and biologists (using advice from an international panel of associate editors), edited to be accessible to non-specialists, and published as html documents accessible to all with Internet connections via the World Wide Web (WWW). The publication of descriptive taxonomic papers-especially those having to do with the naming of species and higher taxa-will not be encouraged in Palaeontologica Electronica at the present time because the current codes of zoological and botanical nomenclature do not recognize electronic publications (though we expect this situation to change in the foreseeable future). All other types of formal paleontological and biological papers will be considered. Unlike traditional print-based journals, Palaeontologica Electronica will be highly graphical in both format and content. Authors will be encouraged to make use of colour

in their figures and tables and to include high-resolution digital images as illustrations. Moreover, Palaeontologica Electronica will encourage active experimentation with animation, 2D and 3D modelling of morphologies, online access to databases, and the creation of online data analysis tools. There will be NO PAGE LIMIT and NO PAGE CHARGES for articles published in Palaeontologica Electronica, though all articles will be edited to optimize their information content. This freedom from normal print-publishing overheads is made possible because of the unique advantages of the digital format and because there will be no analogue to paper, typesetting, and distribution costs. Each volume of Palaeontologica Electronica will also be available free-of-charge via the WWW for one publishing year. After this time, archive copies will be available to individuals and institutions on CD-ROM from the Paleontological Society and the Palaeontological Association. Authors wishing to submit manuscripts for review should consult the WWW addresses listed below for style and format guidelines. We would prefer that manuscripts be submitted to either of the executive editors as electronic word processor documents (MS-Word or WordPerfect for Macintosh or Windows platforms preferred), with figures submitted in GIF, TIFF, JPEG, or EPS graphics formats (minimum resolution for review: 200 dpi). Tables may be submitted as tab-delimited text files, or as MS-Excel worksheets (both Macintosh or Windows versions accepted). If you cannot match these formats please contact the editors for alternatives. Hard-copy manuscripts will be accepted for review, but will require additional time to process. [Note: if you need to submit a hard-copy manuscript please contact one of the executive editors prior to the actual submission.] Manuscript files may be sent as compressed archives on 3.5" floppy disks to the executive editor's surface mail addresses, as e-mail attachments (by prior arrangement with the editor) or deposited in a public ftp site (by prior arrangement with the editor). Additional information about Palaeontologica Electronica and Author Guidelines are available from the following WWW addresses:
<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/Paleonet/pe/glines.html> (North America)

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The sponsors of Palaeontologica Electronica are: Paleontological Society; Palaeontological Association; Cushman Foundation for Foraminiferal Research; Sociedad Espanola de Paleontologia; British Micropalaeontological Society; Canadian Association of Palynologists
Sincerely,

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KIDSTUFF:

"Many dead animals in the past changed to fossils
while others preferred to be oil."

PSSA WWW PAGE:

Dear PSSA Member (on the WWW)

The URL address is: <http://www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/pssaindx.html>
(OR: <http://www.ru.ac.za/departments/am/pssaindx.html>)

Once I've made the suggested alterations, I'll post these pages live and use a more appropriate address - something like <http://www.pssa.ac.za>

Cheers for now - I look forward to your comments.

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INTERNET PALAEO-SITES

Hi, all you Palaeo-people!

I've spent some time on the Internet checking out some interesting Palaeo-sites for both amateurs and professionals alike. Some of these sites are fun, while some are more factual and informative. It is also good to see that so many other palaeontologists are putting their names and addresses on the Net, so feel free to contact some of these people and get some international contact going!

Here are the addresses of this issues' sites, as well as a short summary of the subjects covered. Enjoy your surfing!

FUNKY DINOSAUR ARTICLES is great for amateurs at <http://www.conet.net/dinosaur/docs/articles.htm>. You can see how the dinosaurs for Jurassic Park and the upcoming Lost World were created, and many other "funky" dinosaur things.

Also for the fun-loving trilobite people out there, **KEVIN'S PAGE OF DEATH** is a must. At <http://www.ualberta.ca/~kbrett/index> you can find info about trilobites, references and most importantly, a nice list of references to other cool sites!

For those of you interested in human origins, try the **HUMAN ORIGINS** Homepage at <http://www.pro-am.com/origins>. This site has article about the latest hominid finds and the oldest stone tools yet discovered. There are also links to Employment sites for fieldwork opportunities overseas. There are also links to On-line journals such as Nature and the Journal of Human Evolution. A site worth checking out.

For casts, have a look at **EXTINCT SKULLS** at <http://www.skullduggery.com/extinct.htm>. You can download images of the cast available (mostly dinosaur and hominid crania) and then order them directly if you are interested.

Finally, check out the **PALAEONTOLOGY RESOURCES PAGE** at <http://www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/users/mount/paleont.html> for a really exhaustive list of good sites, including things useful to students such as codes of nomenclature, glossaries of terms in zoology and much more.

In the next issue, I'll be bringing you more sites to keep you up to date with the World Wide Web. Feel free to e-mail Patrick with any more sites you might find in the meantime.

Cheers,
Sally.

PSSA MEMBERS ON EMAIL:

This list will be updated on a regular basis as I receive new or changed addresses.

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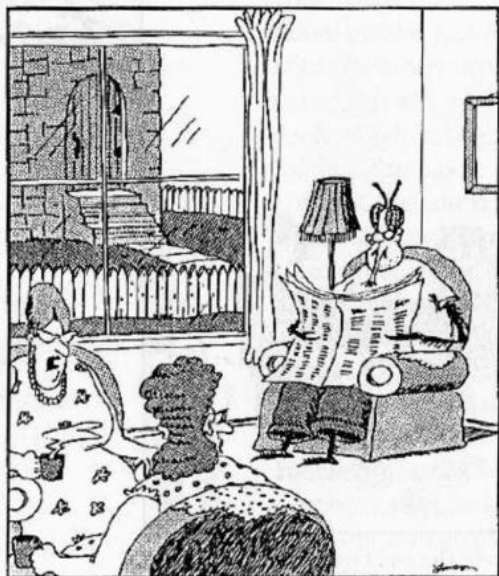


*The
Far Side*

"Well, actually, Doreen, I rather resent being called a 'swamp thing.' ... I prefer the term 'wetlands-challenged mutant.'"

REMINDER:

Deadline for contributions for the next issue of PAL NEWS is 15th November 1997 (Preferably e-mail, otherwise on disk. We Wordperfect 5.2 (Ed)).



"So George says, 'I'm goin' over there and tellin' that guy to shut that equipment off!' ... So I said: 'George, that guy's a mad scientist. Call the cops. Don't go over there alone.' ... Well, you know what George did."

are using