PAL NEWS NUUS

Biannual newsletter of the Palaeontological Society of Southern Africa.
Halfjaarlikse Nuusbrief van die Paleontologiese Vereniging van Suider Afrik

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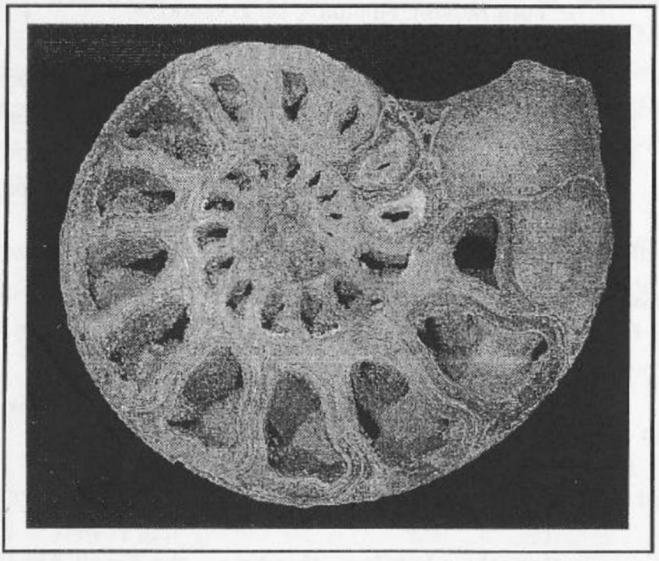

PALNEWS
PALNUUS

Vol/Bd. 13(2)
July 2001

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Front cover: Something less bony this time - the South African ammonite *Bhimaites* - for a full colour picture see *Life Etched in Stone* (Colin MacRae).

ROM THE EDITOR

reetings all palaeo-people! Firstly a word of thanks to all who ontributed to this issue - we have received word(s) from all over. udging from what little gossip I was exposed to, the last six months as been a fruitful period for many of our members. Except for the ormal day-to-day business of pushing back the frontiers of science, a umber of palaeontology students in South Africa have recently ompleted their studies, with (so I gather) some very exciting results. ongratulations to all the above!

ooking into the future, a couple of important conferences are coming o next year. The biggest is the *Earth Summit* held in September - ohn Anderson will say a little more about that. Earlier in 2002, two alaeontolgical conferences that you may be interested in, the *ymposium on Mesozoic Terrestrial Ecosystems* and *Gondwana 11* will be eld in June and August respectively. Have a look on pages 19-21 for ore information.

ll that remains now is to wish you an exiting 2nd semester 2001! May ou boldly go where only dinosaurs and apemen have gone before....
ohann

PSSA WEBSITE
The PSSA web page has been updated!
Visit it at:

http://www.ru.ac.za/pssa

NEWS FROM:
CAPE TOWN

Palaeobiological research is in full swing at UCT and the SA Museum in Cape Town. We're currently working on a wide range of animals - from therapsids to early mammals, and much younger mammals, from dinosaurs to birds and on a host of modern animals. We are a dynamic, enthusiastic group of people that are really excited about the work that we do. Here's what we've been up to lately:

Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan - As always, things have been really hectic! It's not easy keeping my students in line, as well as two young kids under the age of 5! I am delighted that my students are all progressing well with their research. I think we've made some really major progress in understanding the biology of several extinct groups of animals (see below). My own research has also been going quite well. Last year I presented a paper on my recent work on Cretaceous birds in Beijing at the SAPE meeting, and later in the year I attended the PSSA meeting in Pretoria where I presented a paper on the Malagasy birds. I also had the wonderful opportunity to travel to Japan (all expenses paid) and visit the exceptional new dinosaur halls of the Tokyo Museum of Natural History, and the Gunma Museum of Natural History. I also gave a series of talks about my research and spent time at the Science Institute in Tokyo.

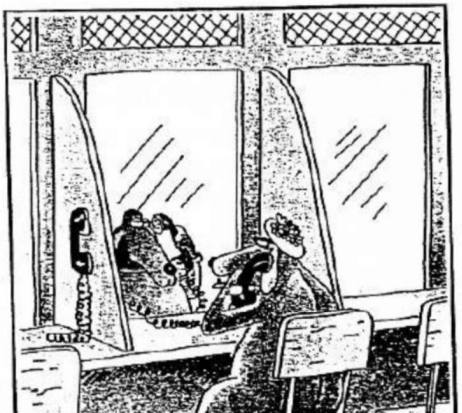
This year is considerably less hectic travel-wise. In July I will attend the 6th International Congress of Vertebrate Morphology (ICVM-6) meeting in Jena, Germany. I have organized a Dinosaur Biology Symposium at the meeting, and will present a paper on growth patterns of dinosaurs. I will also participate in the Mineralized Tissue Symposium and will present a paper about palaeobiological deductions from bone. Besides my work on fossil dinosaurs (birds included), I have also been working on bone depositional rates of modern birds and currently have

ckwise from the top left: Sanghamitra Ray, nnifer Botha, Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan, mara Franz-Odendaal.

a paper in review in the Journal of Morphology, and another recently submitted. On the science outreach side, I was really pleased that our Palaeobiology module for Honours students (in which Roger Smith, Herbi Klinger and Pippa Haarhoff also participate) once again drew students from Zoology and Geology. I've also been involved in the *Africa - Destinies and Origins* series of lectures organized by Maarten De Wit, and have given several popular level talks to various school groups and organizations. All in all- life's hectic but going great!

nnifer Botha - I am in the process of writing up my PhD on the laeobiology of several Cynodontia. I am examining the bone histology six cynodont genera and have found some interesting results garding their growth strategies. I presented some of this work at e PSSA last year. I also attended my first SVP conference in Mexico ty last year where I presented a paper on the bone histology of *ademodon* and *Cynognathus*. I met many leading scientists whom I eviously only knew by name and made a number of good contacts with ople carrying out similar kinds of research. I have recently published paper with Anusuya in the *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology* (see low). I intend to submit my thesis early next year and have begun king for a postdoctoral fellowship. Any offers?

mara Franz-Odendaal - I am currently in the final stages of my PhD



"Why'd you do it, Biff? I mean, I always knew car chasing was in your blood—but the president's limo?"

research with Anusuya and Julia Lee-Thorp working on the sivatheres (short-necked giraffes) from Langebaanweg (LBW). This Early Pliocene fossil site has an enormous diversity of fossils with several new species already identified. My work involves looking at skeletal and dental pathologies and defects in the sivathere collection in order to try understand the health status of this 5mya population. The study has been extended to include some of the other herbivores from LBW (rhino, hippo, equid and bovids) to determine whether these animals were also under similar stress. I presented a poster at the PSSA last year and have made much progress since then. I am looking forward to presenting my latest findings at the ICVM-6 in Jena (Germany) in July this year. Another aspect of my work involves reassessing the palaeoenvironment at LBW by means of stable carbon and oxygen isotopes. I analysed the carbon and oxygen isotopes of all the herbivores from one of the deposits at LBW. This work is mostly

ompleted and was presented at the International Congress on Bone iagenesis in Spain last year. It is currently under review for ublication.

have also been actively involved for the second year running at UCT's xhibit at Scifest (Grahamstown). This year, I designed and set up a ock fossil dig using casts of some of the LBW material. This activity as a great success with the school children. I did the same activity at ne South African Museum for International Museum day on the 18th ay. I am also currently teaching histology to the second year medical udents at UCT. Besides all these scholarly activities, I tied the knot March this year - hence the double-barreled surname! *Congratulations !! - Ed.*)

anghamitra Ray - It is almost a year since I left the Indian Statistical nstitute and started my postdoctoral fellowship at UCT. I have ettled down quite well in Cape Town and have made some new friends. am engrossed in trying to understand the biology of the most common nd abundant, yet not so well known, South Africa dicynodont genus - *iictodon*. My research includes biomechanics of the postcranial keleton specifically looking at posture and gait. I am also busy making hin sections in order to examine the histological variability of the keleton and growth pattern of this genus. From my PhD research on ndothiodont dicynodonts from the Lower Gondwanas of the Pranhita-odavari valley, Deccan, India, a paper has been published and another ill shortly be out in Palaeontological Research (see below).

UBLICATIONS 2000 -2001

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• Chinsamy, A and W. Hillenius. Dinosaur Physiology In: *The Dinosauria.*

• Chinsamy-Turan, A, The Status of Women in Science in South Africa. In: *Proceedings of the African Women in Science Meeting, Kenya.*

• Ray, S. Small Permian dicynodonts from India. *Palaeontological Research.*

Submitted

• Chinsamy, A. and N. Valenzuela. Skeletochronology of the tropical side-neck turtle *Podocnemis expansa*: a preliminary investigation.

"Saaaaaaay ... *this* doesn't look spoiled."

Chinsamy, A. and A. Elzanowski. Evolution of growth patterns in birds: ew evidence from bone histology.

Franz, T.A., Lee-Thorp, J.A. and A. Chinsamy. The Early Pliocene vironment of Langebaanweg, Southwestern Cape, South Africa, duced from stable light isotopes in fauna.

Ray, S. and S. Bandyopadhyay. Late Permian vertebrate community of e Pranhita-Godavari valley, India. *Jour. Asian Earth Sc.*

Ray, S. and T. Chakraborty. Lower Gondwana fluvial succession of the nch-Kanhan valley, Satpura basin: Stratigraphic architecture and positional controls. *Sed. Geol.*

Ray, S. and A. Chinsamy. A basal tetanuran dinosaur (Theropoda) oth from Late Triassic of Southern Africa?

Ray, S. and A. Chinsamy. The postcranial anatomy of the Permian cynodont *Diictodon*: functional and ecological considerations.

ARTHUR CRUICKSHANK, LEICESTER

The last six months have been largely spent in (a) preparing to go to New Zealand (b) going there and (c) coming back and trying to sort out the discoveries made there, in conjunction with Norton Hiller and his co-workers. On one of my previous visits, while doing the rounds of local plesiosaurian sites, Ewan Fordyce, Craig Jones and I visited the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch to have a look at their plesiosaurian material. The historically important species in the New Zealand fauna is Mauisaurus haasti, but defined on a hind limb and some iffy vertebrae. The femur is quite distinctive, so the species is good. In the museum there is an almost complete skeleton, and to cut the story short, Norton had asked me if I was interested... As a piece of advice never, never fly to New Zealand by way of Malaysia...or if you do, stop off somewhere for three days to recover your breath.

To continue - I spent about five weeks there, and so far we have put together a draft MS which is now in the revision stage. Palaeobiogeographically the New Zealand Cretaceous plesiosaur fauna is well linked to the Antarctic, but strangely little similarity exists with the North American faunas. But then these need serious revision, so something might come out of this project, soon, as logic might suggest. The mosasaurs on the other hand, do have links with North America. So watch this space,as always! The joint project with Ewan Fordyce on the cryptoclidid is now (I hope) firmly into the *Palaeontology* production system, and so should appear late this year or early next. I might even have a hope of putting the finishing touches to my Windhoek PALSOC conference contribution! In the meantime my jointly supervised (with Sarah Gabbott), student (George Ilioupolis, working on Pikermi giraffes and bovids), is coming (in June) to work with Roger Smith to see another fluvial system, undisturbed by tectonics, in the Cape.

I think that's it. Summer was yesterday! **Arthur Cruickshank**

ARLINGTON MUNYIKWA, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, ULAWAYO.

nce June last year it has been very difficulty to carry out fieldwork Zimbabwe because of the fast-track land redistribution programme. ost of the palaeontological sites are in areas, which are affected by e distribution programme, hence are in accessible. The research tivities were therefore confined to the Palaeontology Department. ost of the time of the period under review was therefore devoted to mputerisation of the collection and preparation of gorgonopsian and osauropod material from Gokwe and Sentinel Ranch respectively.

arlington's MSc dissertation entitled "*Cranial morphology of a imitive dinocephalian from the Madumabisa Mudstone Formation, imbabwe.*" was accepted with minor corrections (*Congrats Darlington - d.*). He has now completed the corrections and is waiting for aduation next month.

r Logan Zondo, a Technical Officer (fossil preparator) passed away February 2001. Although he had retired from the National Museums d Monuments of Zimbabwe, he used to participate on field excursions d fossil preparation on contract basis. Among the notable people he s worked with is Dr M A Raath at Queen Victoria Museum in Harare, w known as the Museum of Human Sciences. We sadly miss him.

OHN ANDERSON, NATIONAL BOTANICAL INSTITUTE

eeping Gondwana Alive"

ith the bid to host the Earth Summit (Rio+10) won by South Africa, great flurry of activity has been unleashed on a broad and remarkably verse front. September 2002 is far nearer at hand that one might mfortably choose, yet the mega-event is an exceptional spur to action.

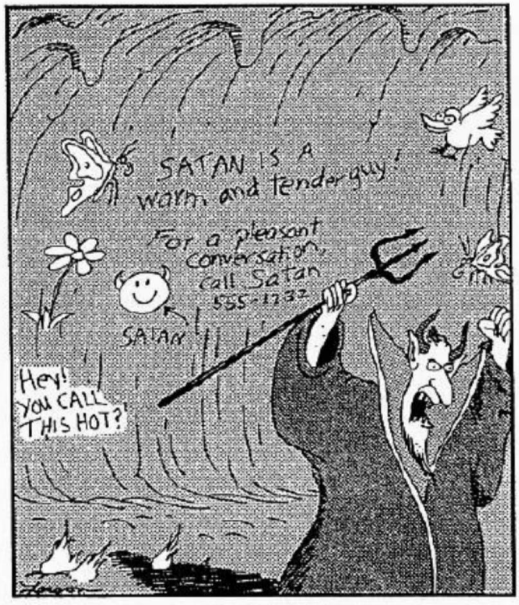
On an almost weekly basis the "*Gondwana Alive society*" is molding partnerships with organisations on convergent or intertwining missions: "*Peace Parks*", "*Ecoport*", "*AfricaCubed*", "*Community Development Network*" and "*Southern Connection*" are but a few of many. The assembly of names, in itself, suggests a powerful synergy. Together we will prevail, alone we will fail. "Keeping Gondwana Alive", stemming the Sixth Extinction, earnestly requires that six billion persons bond in common purpose.

TOM MASON, ARMAGH PLANETARIUM, ARMAGH, NORTHERN IRELAND

I read in PALNEWS all about the great work that is being done by the palaeontology community since I left RSA for Ireland's greener pastures. Billy de Klerk's baby dinosaurs and Roger Smith's Karoo work regularly show up on my satellite TV programmes. Congratulations guys, and keep up the good work.

I am writing to keep you posted on my activities, sadly much curtailed, as I seem to spend more and more time trying to obtain large amounts of money from recalcitrant providers. In between time I have been doing some interesting outreach work in schools that draws heavily on my South African experiences. I do a Stone Age technology presentation to primary school children that involves hunting dangerous cardboard boxes with a San bow and poison arrow kit that I collected in Namibia a few years ago. I also show the children how ancient humans lived and collected their food. We eat the fresh stuff that I collect from my veggie patch for demos. In RSA I'm sure it could be a tax deduction!

Dinosaurs are a perennial favorite, and I have some nice Canadian fossil dinosaur eggshell and American and French egg reproductions with unborn and just-born babies that allow me to present a show on



Graffiti in hell

aby dinosaurs and nesting behavior. The Florida alligator skull is a good op, as are the South African shark jaws. I have lost count of the nall ones who have had their heads in the toothy mouths. Blood and poo d bodily fluids are a really big hit. Do remember to use them in your lks. I have some nice slides of mammal-like reptile carnivore poo that took from samples that Roger collected in the Karoo, and other xamples of steaming piles from other animals. I used to talk about oring stuff, now its all crap - ☻.

or the teeny weenie people I have some lovely glove puppets, also from ne US and Canada, so that the small fry can get into a dialogue with ne scaly friends. It can stimulate a lot of chat, and sometimes ntrums, when someone's question is missed in the cacophony. The

watchword is FUN, and as long as everyone gets a chance to say their bit, and handle the merchandise - it's cool.

The latest big thing here, like RSA, is that the local government is keen to target social need and exhort us to make a point of going to thos schools where the poverty data show there is a cluster of les privileged folk. I have to demur when they talk about poverty here, a Irish poverty is quite luxurious by African standards. Lack of doubl glazing, no car, parents out of work etc are taken as social need indice here. You can see the similarities, but real grinding living-in-a cardboard-box poverty is certainly less endemic than in the shantie around Cape Town, Jo'burg and Durban.

Another thing I have been doing is working with physically and mentall challenged folk. If you have not tried it, it is very rewarding and wel worth the effort. I have a new plan to go out into the field locally, an at one of the quarries I can get a specially adapted, wheelchair-friendl bus right up to the outcrop, so that the people can get out, see an touch and collect brachiopods, crinoids and corals. The rocks are Lowe Carboniferous, about 350 million years old, and the old muddy seabe layers, forming bedding planes within the thick limestone sequence, ar easy to spot. It all goes to show that things here have changed. Whe these animals were alive, Ireland was a subtropical paradise like th Bahamas and Florida: the drawback is that it was under 10 metres o warm seawater. The main difference nowadays is that the water is muc colder, it falls incessantly from the sky, and I worry that some of th wheelchair folk may need four-wheel-drive and scuba sets to avoi drowning. Best wishes guys --

Tom Mason

FRANCIS THACKERAY, TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

I attended a conference of the *American Association of Physical Anthropology* in Kansas City in March. A highlight was news of the discovery of *Kenyanthropus platyops*, recently described by Dr Meav Leakey and her colleagues in *Nature*. This "flat-faced" hominid is date between 3 and 3.5 million years, and may be ancestral to *Hom rudolfensis* which has recently been attributed to *Australopitheci rudolfensis*. I am interested in the Kenyan discoveries because the bes representative of *Homo/Australopithecus rudolfensis* (specimen KNM ER 1470) has similarities with our South African flat-faced "robust australopithecines from Kromdraai and Swartkrans. The nature o relationships between these and other hominids continues to be subject of great debate.

Another exciting new hominid from Kenya has been described b Brigitte Senut and Martin Pickford, which was a topic of muc discussion at the Kansas City meeting. It certainly looks human-like, an comes as a great surprise with its date of circa 6 million years!

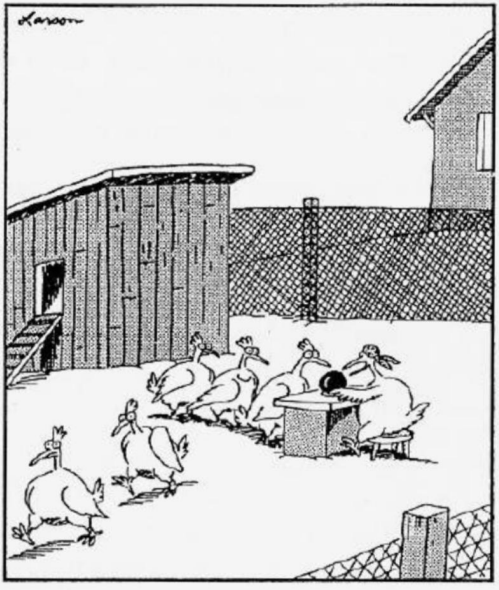
I am currently associated with a *"Human Origins and Past Environments* programme (dubbed *HOPE*) at the Transvaal Museum. Several researc projects are underway, including the palaeomagnetic analyses of calcit and breccia from both Sterkfontein and Kromdraai, and CT scans o hominids. I am working on CT scans of "Mrs Ples" with Jose Braga, J Treill and others from France as part of an international projec associated with a database dubbed *INDABA* (an acronym for a INternational DAta BAse). I continue to be involved with severc heritage awareness initiatives.

Francis Thackeray

COUNCIL FOR GEOSCIENCE

The last few months have been active ones at the CGS, with March seeing **Patrick Bender** completing of a project concerning the preliminary investigation of a number of new fossil fish finds from the continental Early Triassic freshwater, Beaufort Group, *Lystrosaurus* and *Cynognathus* Assemblage Zone deposits. Fascinating new fossils include a number of lungfish toothplates, and the snout fragment of a long nosed needle-like ray-finned fish. The Upper Beaufort Group fossil fish assemblage now consists of a pretty varied collection of "wonderous-water-dwellers" which in addition to the abovementioned new finds, includes coelacanth, shark, and plenty of actinopterygians. Perhaps significantly, ichthyofaunal comparisons tend to confirm indications that parts of the *Cynognathus* Assemblage Zone are comparable in age to the Blina Shales, the Arcadia Formation, and the Knocklofty Formation, of Australia - even more recent *Cynognathus* Assemblage Zone fossil fish remains indicate the potential for enhanced global Upper Beaufort Group correlation with regard to Australia. This new research also shows the relevance of reconsidering Early Triassic fish-fossil-finds from other African countries such as Angola and Zimbabwe, and from China, Madagascar and Russia (research is continuing.....).

In terms of the CGS Pal Dept - we continue to update our fossil databases - and are considering making certain collections info available on a webpage format. **Linda Karny** has been busy reorganizing our palynology database, thereby ensuring that our palynology collection, representing decades of research, will remain a useable, national asset, even though we no longer have a resident palynologist. In recent months **Hanah Mazus** has been seen in the halls of the Council again as she used our facilities to conduct contract work. It is good to see that her skills are not entirely lost to the Palaeontological community. **Ria Putter** has, above and beyond her normal duties, also been involved in some way in



"Whoa! Another bad one! ... I see your severed head lying quietly in the red-stained dirt, a surprised expression still frozen in your lifeless eyes. ... Next."

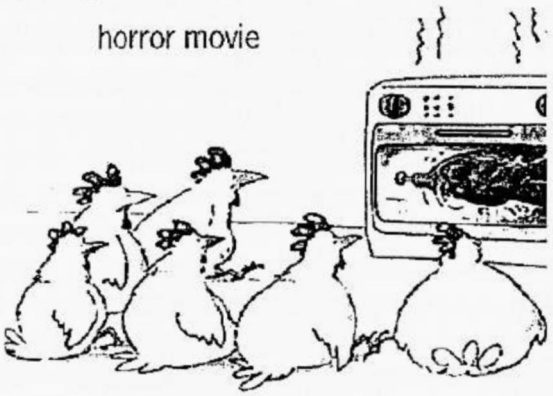
some Museum Park complex's activities and helped organize the Council's participation in a number of public outreach events like International Museum Day in Mamelodi, Scifest in Grahamstown and various open days.

Johann Neveling experienced a quiet, but busy six months trying to wrestle his thesis into submission. At this stage he is at the "oh so close, but so very far" point. Fortunately a short fieldtrip during the latter part of April provided some relief from this tedious grind. This little expedition was put together by Ross Damiani (BPI) and the rest of the team consisted of Charlton Dube (BPI), Adam Yates (Univ. Bristol), Sean Modesto (R. Ontario Mus., Toronto) and Frans Tshabalala

(formerly CGS). The aim was to look for (and hopefully find) some new or interesting fossils in the *Lystrosaurus* Assemblage Zone. In the end, after two very productive weeks in the field, quite a number of interesting and intriguing specimens were brought back to the BPI. These fossils now have to be enticed out of their rocky homes for us to have a closer look at them.

NEWS FLASH

In the previous issue we reported on Brigitte Senut and Martin Pickford's find in East Africa. Well South African palaeontologists have been at it again! Earlier this year Lucinda Backwell (PURE-BPI), together with Francesco d'Errico (University of Bordeaux), made news headlines when their work on fossil bone tools from Sterkfontein, Swartkrans and Drimolen were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. Their work confirmed what earlier workers could only speculate on - that early hominids included termites in their diets and used specific bone-tools to 'hunt' their small prey. This again highlights the importance of the South African palaeontological heritage. For more info go to www.iol.co.za, use the Search facility and go to 16 January 2001.



UPCOMING CONFERENCES.....

1 - VIII International Symposium on MESOZOIC TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSYTEMS

This conference, held every four years, aims to stimulate and facilitate the exchange of ideas between geologists and biologists with a common interest in understanding the terrestrial ecosystems of the Mesozoic era. The scope of the meeting will include all aspects of terrestrial palaeoecology from sedimentology to systematics, climate modelling to biomechanics, palaeobiology, vertebrate, invertebrate and plant taphonomy, ichnology and much more. Technical sessions will run over four days and one day, Wednesday 24 July, will be devoted to local excursions and visits to the South African Museum collections.

Dates: Sunday 21 July - Friday 26 July 2002

Symposium venue: Breakwater Lodge, ideally situated in Cape Town's popular V & A Waterfront.

Field Trips:

Pre-Symposium

- Early Cretaceous (135 million years) Algoa Basin and possibly Gamtoos Basin - Port Elizabeth area, RSA.

Post-Symposium

- Mesozoic ecosystems of the main Karoo Basin: from humid braidplains to arid sand sea
- Triassic plants of the Molteno: a palaeobotanical extravaganza

General Information: Block bookings have been made at various hotels within walking distance of the Symposium venue. Exciting tours and day excursions will also be offered.

Further information & queries: Please contact Mrs Sally Elliott:

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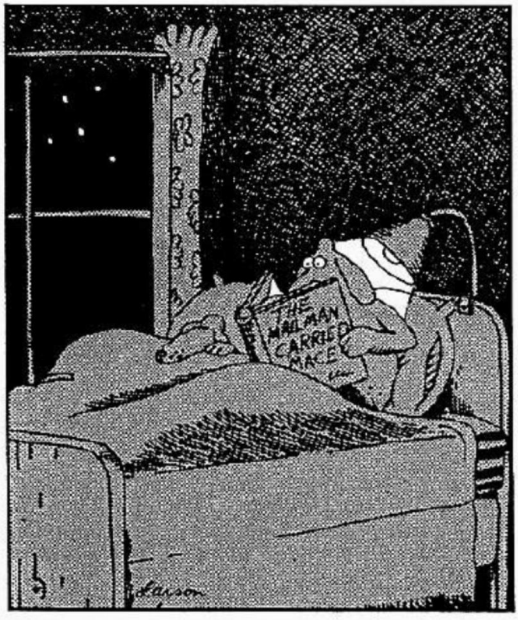

B - GONDWANA 11 - CORRELATIONS AND CONNECTIONS

The dispersed fragments of the Gondwana supercontinent contain a remarkable record of how the Earth system has changed through time. The central theme of Gondwana 11 will be connections that can now be made between the evolution of the Gondwana lithosphere, biosphere and atmosphere, and important events and markers to be dated with high precision.

Dates: Sunday 25 August - Friday 30 August 2002

Venue: University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

A large variety of accommodation is available within short distances of the University campus ranging from luxury hotels to budget motels. Halls of Residence have been reserved.

Field trips:

One-day trips in the middle of the conference will provide opportunities to either explore the massive intraplate Miocene volcanoes of the Banks Peninsula, or traverse from the Canterbury Plains to the spectacular spine of the southern Alps, crossing Gondwana fore-arc terranes.

Pre and post conference field trips will focus on:

- Collagé of Gondwana Terranes: A summary of the 8 major terranes that record the active margin of Gondwana from Cambrian to Cretaceous.
- North Island Volcanic Province: The Taupo Volcanic Zone of North Island with emphasis on the caldera structures, physical volcanology and petrology.

- Permian - Jurassic rocks, Southland: Examination of thick mainly marine arc, forearc and backarc volcanic and volcaniclastic deposits and their mutual relationships.

For more info: Please contact Susannah Hawtin, Administrator, Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand.

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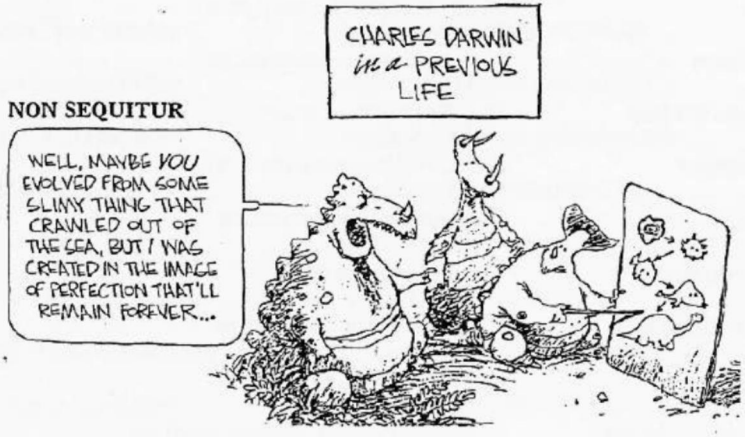

"Blast it, Henry! ... I think the dog is following us."

"Well, lad, you caught me fair and square. ... But truthfully, as far as leprechauns go, I've never been considered all that lucky."

Reminder:

Deadline for contributions for the next issue of ***PalNews*** *is* **30 November** 2001