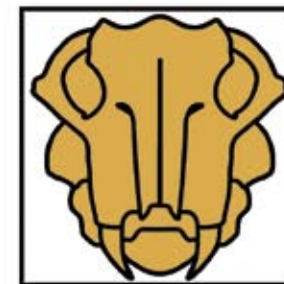


PALNEWS



BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PALAEOONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

(HALFJAARLIKSE NUUSBRIEF VAN DIE PALEONTOLOGIESE VERENIGING VAN SUIDER AFRIKA)

Vol/Band 17 No. 1

February 2009

Proterozoic Eon 2500 to 542 million years ago		Phanerozoic Eon 542 million years ago to present		
Neoproterozoic Era 1000 to 542 million years ago		Paleozoic Era 542 to 251 million years ago	Mesozoic Era 251 to 65.5 million years ago	Cenozoic Era 65.5 million years ago to present

amongst the earliest creatures known...	
Ediacaran fossils of Namibia	

Tonian Age 1000 to 850 million years ago		Cryogenian Age 850 to 630 million years ago		Ediacaran Age 630 to 542 million years ago	

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Front cover: 'Ediacaran fossils of Namibia' - produced by Namibia Post Philately, Windhoek (reproduced here with permission). For accompanying text and additional details see p. 28. Photograph provided by Ludwig Döhne.

EDITORIAL

Dear Friends and Members of the PSSA,

It is a little late to wish you all a happy New Year, with the festive season already only a distant memory, but I do hope you have all had a good start to 2009.

Many thanks to those of you who managed to find the time to send in some news of your activities. This issue of Palnews focuses mainly on the PSSA'08 congress, held in September. As always, it was a great pleasure to attend the congress, this time in the one-horse town of Matjiesfontein. The friendly atmosphere, cosy pub and beautiful, quaint Karoo setting all added to the experience. Many thanks to John Almond, Thalassa Matthews and Roger Smith for all their hard work in putting together an excellent and memorable congress. For those of you who didn't make it to PSSA'08, see page 21 for a list of presenters and their talks and posters. The extended abstracts of some of the presentations will appear shortly in *Palaeontologia africana*.

The last ten years have seen a big change in the availability of funding for palaeontological research in South Africa, largely due to the tireless efforts of PAST. How amazing that they have managed to distribute these desperately needed resources at so many levels and with such efficiency. It will no doubt become increasingly difficult for PAST to solicit funds from the private sector, and we must endeavour to support them in any way we can. However, as discussed by Billy de Klerk in his PSSA'08 Presidential address (p. 15), despite the pall of global financial gloom and doom hanging in the air, these are exciting times for palaeontologists in South Africa with regard to funds provided by the DST's African Origins Platform. We must make the most of these opportunities while they last!

Congratulations to Francis Thackeray who now holds the prestigious title of Director of the Institute for Human Evolution (IHE) at the University of the Witwatersrand -he will no doubt usher in a new era of vigorous and cooperative palaeoanthropological research at Wits.

Thank you to Ludwig Döhne for drawing our attention to the beautiful Namibian stamps that grace the cover of this issue. I have reproduced the accompanying text on p. 28. Stamps are such a great way to promote our field - how about a South African series depicting our broad palaeontological heritage?

Please keep those PALNEWS contributions rolling in - it is always great to hear what you have been up to.

Wishing you the very best for the year ahead,

Rose

PS: This year we celebrate two important palaeo-anniversaries - the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Burgess Shale by Charles Doolittle Walcott (see <http://basalt.geology.utoronto.ca/facultycaron/Walcott2009.htm>), and the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth (12 February 1809; see <http://www.darwin200.org/>).

ALBANY MUSEUM & RHODES UNIVERSITY

Rose Prevec

I am now in the second year of an African Origins postdoctoral fellowship at Rhodes University - many thanks to Bruce Rubidge and the DST for this opportunity!

Dr Emese Bordy (Rhodes University) and I have been investigating the geology and palaeofloras of the Emakwezini Formation in north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal over the past few years (thanks to PAST for providing much of the funding for this project), and we presented some of our preliminary results at the PSSA'08. Work is ongoing to describe the strange flora from the Somkele coal mine in more detail. There are also plans afoot to investigate the plant-insect associations represented in the flora with the assistance of Conrad Labandeira (Smithsonian Institution, USA), and to try and gain insight into the age of the deposits through palynological analysis, courtesy of Cindy Looy (University of Berkeley, USA).

Collaboration with Bob Gastaldo (Colby College, USA), Johann Neveling (Council for Geosciences, Pretoria), Cindy Looy and Sandra Kamo (University of Toronto, Canada) has continued, investigating the floral changes that occurred near the Permian-Triassic transition. The team has also taken a few steps back in time to the Guadalupian. A short reconnaissance field trip in early January searching for fossil floras and ash beds in the Abrahamskraal Formation proved highly successful, and confirmed our growing suspicions that the southern Karoo Basin has much to offer in the way of beautiful plant fossils.

Conrad Labandeira paid another highly productive visit to the Albany Museum here in Grahamstown, in early February. Conrad and I are continuing our evaluation of the plant-insect associations of latest Permian glossopterid floras.

Meanwhile, I am still working on glossopterid fructification taxonomy and hope to submit the second instalment on weird

and wonderful wings in the next few months. Steve McLoughlin (Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm), Roberto Iannuzzi (UFRGS, Brazil) and I are also still wrestling with a revision of the family Arberiaceae.

BERNARD PRICE INSTITUTE FOR PALAEOLOGY

WITS UNIVERSITY, JOHANNESBURG

The second half of the year is always a busy time for the BPI as most of our teaching activities are crammed into the second semester. Palaeontology at Wits is going through an exciting time. We are fundraising to improve the van Riet Lowe Building and also to renovate our collection storage and technical facilities. The Archaeology Department, which occupied the upper floor of the building, has recently relocated to the Wedge Building across the road, and the Institute for Human Evolution (IHE) will be moving into the space vacated by Archaeology. The housing of IHE in the same building as the BPI will mean that the two research Institutes (BPI and IHE) will be able to share preparation and other technical facilities. Sadly Charlie Lockwood, who was appointed as the first director of the IHE, died in a motorbike accident in London just a month before taking up the appointment. **Francis Thackeray** has now been appointed and we were pleased to welcome him to Wits, where he started on 1 February. He has already had a very rushed and busy start organising a celebration of Darwin's birthday on 12 February.

Much of the second half of 2008 was taken up preparing plans for the revamping of the palaeontology collections, and meetings with fundraisers and architects. Happily the project is progressing and we will hopefully begin with renovations in the next few months. Right now the top floor of the van Riet Lowe Building is getting a facelift for the IHE.

Most of the 20 strong BPI contingent to the PSSA'08 conference boarded a train in Joburg and after a night of relatively little sleep we alighted on the platform at Matjiesfontein. This was the start of a really enjoyable few days in the Karoo and we are indebted to John, Roger and Thalassa for superb organisation of a truly memorable meeting.

As reported at the conference, **Merrill Nicolas** has now emigrated to the UK, but fortuitously **Cynthia Kemp** has taken over the Beaufort Group fossil GIS project. Merrill combined the databases from the seven South African Museum collections which house fossils from the Beaufort Group (Albany Museum, Bernard Price Institute, Council for Geosciences, National Museum, Rubidge Collection, South African Museum, Transvaal Museum). Cynthia has now edited, streamlined and updated the database and it will shortly be ready to utilise as a national database facility. Research uses are infinite. For example the distribution of single or multiple species can be plotted on a topographical map of South Africa, spatial relationships between taxa can be viewed. Once the Geological Map of South Africa has been added, yet another valuable tool will be available for viewing fossil data.

The first confrontation of **Fernando Abdala** with the therocephalian world has been published. This contribution (in collaboration with B. Rubidge and J. van den Heever) was the redescription of the world's oldest therocephalians from the *Eodicynodon* Assemblage Zone of the Karoo and also discussed were therocephalian diversity and therapsid origin.

The description of a procynosuchid cynodont from the *Tropidostoma* Assemblage Zone (a joint venture with J. Botha-Brink), one of the oldest cynodonts in the world, has also been published. On the palaeobiological side, the description of the bone structure of South American traversodontid cynodonts (in collaboration with A. Chinsamy-Turan) was published last year.

Expecting to become part of the printed world this year is the description of a very interesting fauna of Middle Triassic age from Namibia, showing definitive links with eastern Africa, Antarctica and South American faunas (with R. Smith). Last year Fernando again had the opportunity to work on cynodonts from South America, and has described the first record of the typically African gomphodont cynodont *Diademodon* in the Argentinean Triassic (in collaboration with A. Martinelli and M. de la Fuente) and also provided additional evidence of sectorial toothed cynodonts in the Brazilian Middle Triassic fauna of Santa Cruz do Sul (with M. Bento Soares and C. Bertoni-Machado).

Lucinda Backwell and Francesco d'Errico published a paper entitled 'Early hominid bone tools from Drimolen' in the Journal of Archaeological Science in the second half of 2008. Here they presented the first description of fourteen bone tools from Drimolen, South Africa, dated ~1.5 to 2 Mya (Fig. 1). The pieces bear a wear pattern comparable to one previously described on early hominid bone tools from Sterkfontein and Swartkrans. Published abstracts of this research were presented at two conferences in the form of oral and poster presentations. In December Lucinda travelled to Bordeaux to work with Francesco on a manuscript entitled 'Assessing the function of early hominin bone tools'. The aim of this research is to refine the functional interpretation of the bone tools from Swartkrans and Drimolen using a multivariate analysis of roughness variables obtained from 3D topography of worn areas of archaeological, ethnographic and experimental bone tools using an interferometer (Fig. 2). This approach provides a new way to visually compare, characterise, and quantify bone modifications, which may have broad applicability in the fields of bone taphonomy and technology.



Figure 1. Bone tools from Drimolen. Lines indicate breaks. Scale = 10 mm.

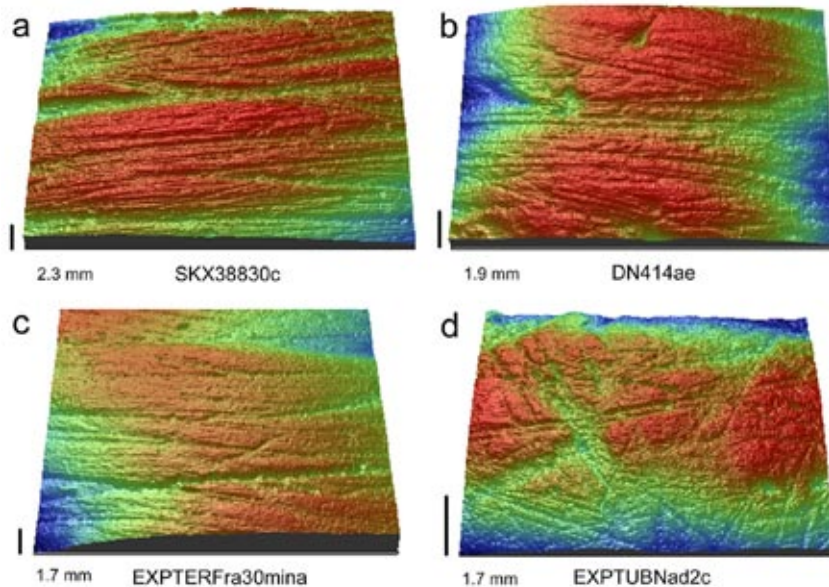


Figure 2. 3D images of use-wear recorded on bone tools from the early hominid sites of Swartkrans (a) and Drimolen (b), and experiments in which they were used to dig in termite mounds (c) and the ground for tubers (d).

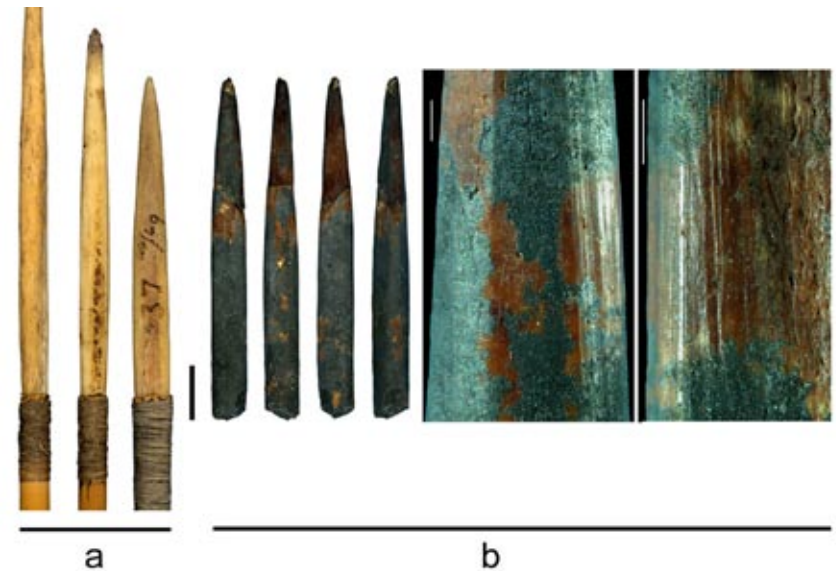


Figure 3. Examples of Bushman Type 4 bone arrow heads (a), which comprise robust bone points that insert directly into reed shafts, and are secured with a single sinew collar. Note the similarity to the bone point from Sibudu Cave (b). The close-up views show two facets covered by fine longitudinal striations produced by scraping with an unretouched stone edge. Scale bars = 10 mm.

A paper entitled 'Middle Stone Age bone tools from the Howiesons Poort layers, Sibudu Cave, South Africa', was published in collaboration with Francesco d'Errico and Lyn Wadley in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*. Voted one of the Top 100 Science stories of 2008 by Discover Magazine, this paper describes three bone tools: two points and the end of a polished spatula-shaped piece, from Sibudu Cave, dated to ~61 ka. Comparative microscopic and morphometric analysis of the Sibudu specimens together with bone tools from southern African Middle and Later Stone Age deposits, an Iron Age occupation, nineteenth Century Bushman hunter-gatherer toolkits, and bone tools used experimentally in a variety of tasks, reveals that one of the points parallels large un-poisoned bone arrow points from historical Bushman sites (Fig. 3). This pushes back the origin of

bow and bone arrow technology by at least 20 000 years, and corroborates arguments in favour of the hypothesis that crucial technological innovations took place during the Middle Stone Age in Africa. See Fig. 4 for a view from Lyn Wadley's excavation at Sibudu Cave of Silje Bentsen (PhD candidate, left) and Lucinda Backwell sorting material in November.



Figure 4. Life's tough. PhD candidate Silje Bentsen (left) and Lucinda Backwell sorting Middle Stone Age material at Sibudu Cave, KwaZulu-Natal.

In July and August 2008 **Marion Bamford** participated in the Koobi Fora Field School in Kenya to teach palaeoecology and collect fossil wood samples from the Plio-Pleistocene deposits, and then joined the Olduvai team again (Rob Blumenschine, Fidelis Masao, Jackson Njau, Ian Stanistreet, Harald Stollhofen and Rosa Albert). The team has been concentrating on Bed I deposits in Olduvai Gorge and writing up the data for a special issue of the *Journal of Human Evolution* for 2009.

At the end of September Natasha Barbolini, David Steart, Frank Neumann and Marion attended the dual conference of the International Organisation of Palaeobotanists and International

Palynological Congress at the University of Bonn, Germany. There were over 800 delegates but the fossil wood symposium was much more familiar with about 40 delegates. The PSSA conference in Matjiesfontein was also a very familiar occasion with researchers and students.

Marion was invited to give a plenary talk at the biennial conference of the Brazilian Society for Palaeobotany and Palynology in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil, in November. This was a very social affair and she also participated in a wonderful field excursion along the Coluna White which traverses the Carboniferous to Jurassic of the Paraná Basin.

The New Year started for Marion with a field trip to Kenya to collect fossil woods and seeds from the Early Miocene hominoid sites on Rusinga and Mfwangano Islands in Lake Victoria.

The palaeobotany section of the BPI has welcomed a new palynology post doc, **Frank Neumann**, who previously did a post doc with Louis Scott in Bloemfontein. He is working on Holocene cores from Lakes Sibaya and Teza in KwaZulu Natal, and Princessvlei in the Cape.

Raoul Mutter joined the BPI in September as a Postdoctoral Fellow to undertake research on Karoo-aged fishes. Over the past two years, research on his largest long-term project, the Permo-Triassic faunal fish turnover, has received a major boost and has taken him and his collaborators to important collections and field work in Brazil, Russia, Canada and several European countries. He completed his job and Marie Curie fellowship at the Natural History Museum in London (UK) successfully and joined the BPI late last year to work with Bruce Rubidge and his 'Karoo Team' in order to give the Karoo fishes a voice on this scenario. Despite apparent absence of fish fossils in the earliest Triassic, his first four months here at Wits have already produced valuable insight in patterns of actinopterygian distribution in eastern Gondwana and across that peculiar boundary. Fishes make up more than

50% of the record of Permo-Triassic vertebrates, inhabited all aquatic realms and their fossil remains can be expected today to contribute substantially to our ideas about the 'mother of all extinctions'. Do not only watch this space! Contribute!

<http://www.permotriassicfishes.org/>

Luke Norton had a busy year in 2008, starting off with a trip to Cape Town to attend the SABI phylogenetics workshop presented by Drs Pablo Golobov and James S. Farris, and hosted at UCT. After this, the year was spent juggling between working on his masters dissertation predominantly, and a project based in France using the synchrotron at Grenoble to scan a dinocephalian skull with a view to understanding tooth replacement patterns. The aim of his masters project is to establish a growth curve of specimens belonging to a single genus of Gorgonopsia. Some of the initial findings were presented at PSSA-Matjiesfontein in September. The project is being supervised by Bruce Rubidge and Fernando Abdala. Luke also travelled to the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF), France twice last year to learn what synchrotron is all about and to begin processing data produced at the ESRF. This is part of a collaborative project involving Paul Tafforeau (ESRF), Bruce Rubidge and Billy de Klerk. So far the collaboration has yielded some interesting results, with many more to follow once the data processing has been completed.

Also working with the same supervisors, **Saniye Atayman** who hails from Turkey is undertaking the daunting task of having a re-look at the taxonomy of tapinocephalid dinocephalians. She has amassed the worthwhile specimens from all collections in South Africa and is in the process of having them prepared. In addition she travelled to the Palaeontological Institute in Moscow (Russia), and also the University of Tuebingen (Germany) to study additional material. This project is part of the larger project of Bruce Rubidge to assess biodiversity changes through the *Tapinocephalus* Assemblage Zone.

Recent publications

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- Backwell, L., d'Errico, F., 2008.** Early hominid bone tools from Drimolen, South Africa. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35, 2880-2894.
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- Berger, L.R., Churchill, S.E., de Klerk, B., Quinn, R.L., 2008.** Small-bodied humans from Palau, Micronesia. *PLoS ONE*, 33(3), e1780 (9pp).
- Botha-Brink, J., Abdala, F., 2008.** A new cynodont record from the *Tropidostoma* Assemblage Zone of the Beaufort Group: implications for the early evolution of cynodonts in South Africa. *Palaeontologia africana* 43, 1-6.
- Chinsamy, A., Abdala, F., 2008.** Palaeobiological implications of the bone microstructure of South American traversodontids (Therapsida: Cynodontia). *South African Journal of Science* 104, 225-230.
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NATIONAL MUSEUM, BLOEMFONTEIN

Jennifer Botha-Brink

The last several months at the National Museum have been busy as usual. In July, I visited NECSA, Pelindaba for a few days with my student, Dewald du Plessis, to help him neutron scan several cynodont skulls for his MSc project. I had never visited NECSA before so it was quite an eye-opener!

In August, Sean Modesto, Emily Byington (both from Cape Breton University, Canada) and I visited the Bethulie and Aliwal North Districts for a couple of weeks and found some very interesting and exciting fossils. One of these fossils is a 95% complete, articulated *Erythrosuchus* skeleton, which is currently being prepared and will be put on display during 2009 as part of a temporary exhibit for Darwin's birthday celebrations. We were also lucky enough to find 10 specimens of the rare *Lystrosaurus maccaigi* from a new locality we had never visited before. The specimens range from juvenile to adult and some of them include postcranial material. Not only does this discovery significantly increase the number of *L. maccaigi* specimens known, but it will also hopefully shed light on the morphology and ontogeny of this rare Permian *Lystrosaurus* species.

In September, my assistant Elize Butler and I attended the PSSA meeting in Matjiesfontein where Elize presented a poster on her *Galesaurus* thesis and I presented a paper on my dicynodont bone histology work. Although I was dreadfully ill and spent most of the conference in bed, it was lovely to see everyone again, even if it was just for short periods of time. What I did

not know at the time, and part of the reason why I was ill, was that I was pregnant! So 2009 is going to be a rather eventful year for me.

Most of October was spent lecturing undergraduate students at the University of the Free State and I've spent the rest of the year organizing and completing a palaeontology Braille exhibit, wrapping up my dicynodont bone histology project (which practically turned into a PhD!), a project on archosauriform bone histology and a description of a new leptopleuronine procolophonid from the *Lystrosaurus* Assemblage Zone, which Sean found a year or so ago. I'm hoping to finish several other projects in the next few months before the new arrival makes its appearance, so it's going to be another busy few months ahead.

Recent Publications

Modesto, S. and J. Botha-Brink. 2008. A new archosauriform reptile from the Lower Triassic *Lystrosaurus* Assemblage Zone of South Africa. *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology* 28(3): 914-917.

PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION

Gideon Groenewald

Gideon's recent activities have included a rescue mission recovering some exciting fossils from the Normandien Formation in the Drakensberg escarpment. The fossils were uncovered during excavations by Eskom, at the site of their new Ingula Pump Storage Scheme, about 50km west of Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal (Fig. 5). In a collaboration that does SA heritage proud, Eskom has been assisting Gideon in the removal of some of this material. First to be discovered was a well-preserved tree fossil, estimated to be about 30 m long (Figs 6 & 7). Part of the tree has been excavated for display in the Eskom Information Centre (Fig. 8). Also discovered, just before an excavator was about to break it, was a "tandeman". Although damaged by dynamite, part of the skull could be saved (Fig. 9).



Figure 5. Eskom's Ingula Pump Storage Scheme, KZN



Figures 6 & 7. Eskom-assisted excavation of a 30m long fossilised tree.



Figure 8. Patricia Groenewald and part of the fossilised tree.



Figure 9. Unidentified vertebrate fossil rescued in the nick of time.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Sandra Jasinowski

Happy New Year to everyone! Jim and I moved to Cape Town in early January after spending Christmas in snowy Canada. The warm South African weather was a bit of a shock to our systems, since it was -33°C when we left the Canadian prairies! After shedding our winter gear, we started the process of setting up house in Cape Town. I'll be at the University of Cape Town for the next 2 years working with Anusuya on the cranial function of dicynodonts. My email address has changed to sandra_jas@hotmail.com.

TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

Francis Thackeray

As of February 2009, Francis Thackeray has been serving as the Director of the Institute for Human Evolution at the University of the Witwatersrand. He stepped down as Director of the Transvaal Museum in January. He worked at the museum for about 20 years, first in 1971, again for periods in 1975 and 1980, and then from 1990 until the present, first as Head of the Department of Palaeontology and Palaeoenvironmental Studies, and subsequently as Director of the museum. He comments "I have enjoyed working with the dedicated staff of the Transvaal Museum. My association with HOPE (the Human Origins and Past Environments programme) will continue while I am based at Wits, in collaboration with colleagues from France and South Africa. I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead, recognising that the IHE (Institute for Human Evolution) can become the leading palaeo-anthropological Institute in Africa, and of the leading institutes of its kind in the world".

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Christian Sidor

University of Washington, USA

Despite not visiting South Africa in a few years, Christian Sidor has been on the continent quite regularly. For the past two years, he has done fieldwork in the Ruhuhu Basin of southern Tanzania along with Ken Angielczyk and Bill Simpson (both Field Museum), Roger Smith (SAM), Linda Tsuji (Humboldt Univ, Berlin), Sterling Nesbitt (AMNH), Seb Steyer (MNHN), and several local colleagues. This May-June, Sidor will be in Morocco for the first North African Paleontological Conference and then in Zambia in July for fieldwork in the Luangwa Valley (with Smith, Angielczyk,

and Steyer). Along with his graduate student, Adam Huttenlocker, Sidor and Smith will be describing new therocephalian material from the lowermost Lystrosaurus zone this year, among other projects.

Arthur Cruickshank **Scotland**

Again my apologies for non-attendance at the Matjiesfontein meeting.

We had a very good introduction to Balinese life instead, which allied to our youngest and dearest's wedding was quite an experience!

More good news is that the Elgin (Late Permian) fauna is about to undergo a renewal of exhibitions with the award of a grant. It might also mean a renewal of study of the fauna, as over the years a trickle of specimens has been added to the collection, and it all needs a through reworking. Watch this space.

Late last year Jeff Liston of the Hunterian Museum was given the job of sorting out a large text compiled by Bob Appleby, late of the University of Wales, on 'The Ichthyosauria'. We have proceeded to the stage of a semi-final MS, but the third member of the triangle has had to finish another contract before the final version of these very fish-like reptiles can be completed. But watch this space.

Leslie Noe and I are finalising the remnants of my work on early Plesiosaurs, which takes off again 'soon', but definitely in the near future.

This is being paralleled by Mark Evans and Richard Forrest reviewing some early (Liassic) plesiosaurs and studying the evolution of the basic plesiosaurian skeleton for PhD's. Hopefully to be seen within the coming (passing?) year...but watch this expanding space.

I have had the chance of having quite long, constructive, e-mail conversations with Steve Tolan, who runs an educational

charity in Zambia at Chipembele, on the Luangwa River. He is trying to accumulate a library of publications dealing with Zambian tetrapods (this fact probably well-known to the Southern African community), and on his recent visit to the UK we met up for a very useful discussion on the things doing in that part of the Greater Karoo. Much reminder of my Tanzanian youth!

Meanwhile back to the rain!

Yours sincerely,
Arthur

Thomas (Tom) Lehmann **Senckenberg Forschungsinstitut und Naturmuseum,** **Frankfurt am Main, Germany**

In my last report, I wrote that I planned to stay in Berlin as a Post Doc at the Museum für Naturkunde for another year. Well, things didn't exactly go this way.

In June, I applied for a position at the Senckenberg Research Institute in Frankfurt (Germany) and received a positive reply. I am now, since the 1st October 2008, working on the Mammalian Fauna of the World Heritage Palaeontological site of Messel (Eocene, about 47 Ma). This is a new world for me, and it will take some time to get used to these strange animals who lived next to this toxic lake: kangaroo-rats like *Leptictidium*, archaic bats like *Archaeonycteris*, the lemur-like Primates *Europolemur*, the tree-living *Kopidodon*, antic horses like *Propalaeotherium* (some preserved with stomach contents and/or foetuses), and even the oldest-known ant-eater *Eurotamandua*. The study of these beasts, which could have been the models for the "Ice Age" movies, will lead me to work more on Eurasian and American material. For those interested in such faunas, don't hesitate to contact me.

But I am not giving up the Neogene! No, No! For instance, I published a revision of some Pliocene East African fossil aardvarks that look remarkably like the ones I described in Chad and which prove, once more, that the rift valley was not a barrier to genetic and faunal flow (Lehmann, 2008 Fossil Record). Continuing with aardvarks, I am busy working on the ontogeny of the living ones, and would like also to define once and for all the status of the 18 doubtful extant sub-species within the framework of the IUCN-Mammal Red list (see <http://research.calacademy.org/research/bmammals/afrotheria/ASG.html>). In this regard, a foetus aardvark has, for the first time, been μ CT scanned thanks to the Helmholtz Institute in Potsdam. Finally, my long paper on the phylogeny and systematics of the Tubulidentata should be out in spring of next year (Lehmann, in Press Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society).

Also in the Neogene, I continue to work with Kieran McNulty et al. on the excavation at Rusinga Island (Lower Miocene, Kenya). In July 2008, with a very small team, we scouted another island - Mfwangano - for fossiliferous sites. Believe it or not, we even found the partial skeleton of an aardvark! How lucky am I?! So as I am writing this report, I am getting ready for the next mission there, in January 2009, and hope to be able to gather more aardvarks, and more dassies. Other excavations will of course be focused on the Messel Pit but, given the "pleasant" German weather, they will not occur before June 2009.

I am missing South Africa a lot, and I will do my best to be present for the next PSSA Conference (well...at least the cashier will be happy to get my membership renewal ! :)).



Fun to be in the field in Africa again (Rusinga Island, 2007)



Yes, with a single touch of my finger, I plastered this partial skull (Rusinga Island, 2007)

PSSA '08



PALAEONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
15th Biennial Meeting, Matjiesfontein, September 2008

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Presented by Dr Billy de Klerk at the 15th Biennial Meeting of the PSSA at Matjiesfontein, 12th September 2008

Mr Chairman and fellow palaeontologists

It is for me a singular honour to address you this morning at the opening of this, our 15th Biennial Meeting of the Palaeontological Society of South Africa. It has been a great honour for me to have been president of the Society for the past two years trying to come to grips with the many challenges facing our particular science in South Africa - things like promoting palaeontology at all levels, including teaching and research, and supporting the teaching of evolution as part of the school science syllabus. Also becoming increasingly involved in SAHRA Palaeontology Heritage Assessment work etc. Funding in our science has always been a bit of a problem and here I would in particular like to thank the NRF, and the Palaeontology Scientific Trust (PAST) for the important role they play in funding research projects, bursaries and educational outreach initiatives.

I would like to briefly focus on a few areas where a measure of success has been achieved and where we are still faced with challenges in the future.

Firstly the **African Origins Platform**

As many of you well know the African Origins Platform is one of the five focus areas of the DST that will generate human capital in science, and develop knowledge generation in areas of basic sciences where South Africa displays a competitive advantage. These sciences are strategically divided into distinctive areas of knowledge and geographical advantage.

The responsibility to strengthen areas of geographical advantage is a key priority of the Science Platforms Unit and they are:

African Origins	Antarctic Research
Astronomy	Biosciences/Marine Research
Space Science and Technology/Physics	

It is heartening to see that the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has eventually implemented the funding recommendations that were so carefully teased out a few years ago for the African Origins Platform. You may recall that the process all started about four years ago in 2004 when the DST arranged the round-table "bosberaad" near Pretoria that included both palaeontologists and archaeologists in South Africa. It is somewhat disappointing that the ideal funding model as envisaged by the scientists, and thrashed at the time, is not quite ideal from our perspective. Government holds the purse strings so in effect we must play their game.....

It has taken a couple of years now to get the recommendations made by the task group, consisting of colleagues Roger Smith, Bruce Rubidge, John Parkington and Bob Brain, to be partly implemented and we need to thank this team for their efforts in giving of their time in this laboured process.

So the AOP with its various programmes has been launched. Not quite in the kind of format that we would have envisaged but at least it is on track and palaeontologists can now apply for funding to promote Palaeontology on an annual basis in the month of September - this very month. In fact it was only last month that the DST sent out invitations to a wide spectrum of palaeontologists to attend a symposium this month to celebrate 10 years of South African diplomatic relations with China. As the DST put it 'The palaeo-sciences have been identified as one of the scientific areas for the 10 year celebrations with the theme

"Meeting between Little Foot and the Peking Man" - opportunities for bi-lateral Collaborations are now a reality.

It would also appear that implementation and support of the African Origins Platform now potentially creates an opportunity to develop palaeotourism in a more structured way and is also creating ways to convey the message of palaeontology to the general public. The challenge is up to us, and our collaborative colleagues from abroad, to identify projects and ways and means of utilising the funding that is now available through the AOP as it currently stands.

It is gratifying to see that the following research funds have been made available:

1. Karoo Research (R600 000/year for three years - mainly for bursaries but also for projects and equipment. These funds will benefit institute like the BPI at Wits, the National Museum Bloemfontein, Iziko Museum, Albany Museum and the Council for Geosciences.
2. AOP West Coast Fossil Park (R900 000/year for three years) - Dr Thalassa Matthews
3. National Museum in Bloemfontein where Jennifer Botha-Brink will be setting up an histology laboratory with a budget of some R200 000.
4. Hominid Research - R900 000

On the down side however it must be noted that with all this funding, no long-term palaeontological job opportunities have been secured in Museums and Universities. The few employment opportunities that have been created are in the form of short-term soft positions for service providers. This short sighted approach will inevitably result in a situation where we

will be faced with adequate funding but no human capacity to do anything! The challenge now is to convince all levels of Government from DST, National Education Dept., and in particular its sub-levels at provincial levels like the Department of Sport Recreation Arts and Culture which funds provincial Museums, to actively fill palaeontological posts that have been "lost" over the years and to appoint palaeontologists at institutions where posts have, for a number of years, been unsuccessfully motivated for. It is a travesty that in a small city like my home town of Grahamstown we have two highly qualified palaeontologists without tenured posts! Unfortunately it seems to me that our heritage, apart from the very recent and political sort, is not greatly valued in South Africa. That means that the objectives and agendas of scientists and administrators at big museums/ departments are often at odds.

An even more disturbing reality is the inadequacy and lack of understanding of what palaeontology is really all about amongst many of the senior Museum managers and their government principals, who are the ones making decisions about posts etc. As an aside, on the topic of posts, it is heartening to see that institutions like the BPI and others have made fantastic progress over the past decade to increase the number of students in palaeontology, but we still have inadequate posts or viable career opportunities for the best of their graduated. This problem also translates into the fact that SA palaeontology is just at or below critical mass, which means it is very difficult for the community to support any outreach or 'marketing efforts' on a sustainable basis. I also get the impression that the internal workload (admin, teaching etc.) of all palaeontologists has increased over the last decade, which further detracts from time available for (pal) community activities and may generate a feeling that everybody is struggling to keep his/her respective head above water? Maybe we are also guilty of an every-man-for himself attitude?

SAHRA matters

It is encouraging to see that heritage legislation managed by SAHRA is now being effectively implemented with all major civil engineering and property development projects now being required to have Palaeontological Impact assessments carried out as part of overall project. As a consequence a number of opportunities have opened up for palaeontologists.

A. Palaeontological Heritage Impact assessments consultancy

As a result of this added consultancy work opportunity for palaeontologists, the PSSA as a professional body, must as a matter of urgency set up an accreditation committee to evaluate practitioners who have indicated that they are willing and in a position to do consulting work as and when required. The SA Archaeological fraternity have done the ground work in this regard and without too much effort we could modify and adopt their code of practice to suite the palaeontologist. We need to address this issue NOW as already some environmental consultancy companies have been doing/writing off the palaeontology components of the heritage assessments - Coega Harbour development being a case in point. Most of this Heritage Impact work is currently done by palaeontologists employed in Museums or Universities but I see that with the ever increasing workload in this area there is certainly more of an opportunity for independent consultants to go solo. Those practising scientists engaging in this type of heritage assessment consultancy will also have to be registered as a member of SACNASP.

Technical Reports - To assist SAHRA with palaeontology heritage assessment an initiative was launched to provide technical reports for the various provinces to provide SAHRA and developers a quick guide as to the fossil potential of various strata underlying certain areas where development is planned. A palaeontological technical report has been initiated for the Northern and Eastern Cape and will be completed soon.

John Almond and I will be discussing this issue later at this meeting. These technical reports will provide a first stop for SAHRA and the engineering and consultancy companies to assess the need for a palaeontological assessment. This information can in time be placed on the PSSA and/or SAHRA website where it can easily be accessed. This first stop information is not intended to weaken the position of palaeontologists that conduct impact assessments.

B. Palaeontological Heritage Legislation

The issue of permitting through PHRA's - Provincialisation of permits is still a thorny issue. SA palaeontologists are saying in one voice that the function of Palaeontological heritage management must be done at a National level rather than through provincial offices - for a number of very good reasons. A sensible way forward here would be to have a permanent palaeontologist on staff at the SAHRA office in Cape Town to handle all Palaeo matters. We are a small enough group creating, I would think, a workload for a single well informed person rather than decentralising to Provincial level using the PHRAs' model. With one voice I know that members of the PSSA would like to see their concerns relating to this issue be readdressed and I believe there is still time to address and change the legislation in the very near future. - We must act now!!

On the Education Front at school level

It is encouraging to see that our SA Education system has decreed that the subject of Evolution will be included in the Grade 10 science syllabus from next year on. With this change there will inevitably be the knee-jerk reaction of fundamentalist groups that will have to be countered and of course the teachers on the coal-face will need all the support they can get in terms of having sound information, solid teaching skills and relevant materials.

At an earlier PSSA Executive meeting Ian McKay reported that there was already a great need amongst teachers for support in teaching evolution. A suggestion was also tabled that the Society should consider putting together a booklet (also available in PDF format for emailing purposes) that can provide a base teaching aid.

In terms of countering the insidious fundamentalist reaction to the teaching of evolution at school, I believe the PSSA could provide teachers with support and be more proactive in our approach. As an example the society has a stock letter that could be published in local media to refute criticisms raised by fundamentalist groups. This letter will be made available on the PSSA web page and members could refer objectors to read it or download it for publication in local media as and when required. In essence we could provide a web based resource to support teachers and ally the fears of the misinformed general public. Here I'd like to thank Ian MacKay who drafted the letter.

Of course we will also always rely on the initiatives of enterprising palaeontologists who made that extra effort to publish books on the subject, pitched at informing an enquiring general public. These popular books also provide great teacher support. Publications that have made a difference in the past two to three years would include:

1. 2005 McCarthy & Rubidge - 'Earth & Life'
2. 2006 - 'The Microstructure of Dinosaur Bone: Interpreting Biology through Fine Scale Techniques'
3. 2008 - The most recent and colourful reference published this year by Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan and illustrated by Luis Rey - 'Famous Dinosaurs of Africa'. This well written and wonderfully illustrated book has certainly placed the dinosaurs of Africa into focus and caters for both children and adults alike.

A relatively inexpensive book at around R100/copy it is well within the budget of parents with children with enquiring minds.

Authors of these books must be commended for their efforts - it certainly makes our professional lives a lot easier to have African palaeontological information at our fingertips.

I also believe that Francis Thackeray's presidential vision (I think in 2000) : "I have a dream" of somehow providing a cast of the skull of Mrs Ples for each school in the country, has huge merit both from a teaching aid perspective and also in the creation of employment for some worthy entrepreneur.

Here we must also doff our hats to PAST - In particular Andrea Leenen and Greg Melville Smith in expanding their Walking Tall (Tobela's Story) theatre production that conveys the story of evolution to school children - at present in Gauteng and now in the Eastern Cape on a trial basis. In the last two months we now have a three-man theatre group based in Grahamstown doing daily productions of this entertaining evolution piece in local urban and rural schools.

Many of the points that I have raised are familiar to us all and our past president Prof. Bruce Rubidge outlined these and other concerns at our Grahamstown meeting in 2006, but it's worth reminding ourselves of those that still need our attention.

I thank you

Dr Billy de Klerk

PSSA President: 2006 - 2008

Minutes of the 15th Biennial Meeting of the Palaeontological Society of southern Africa

14 September 2008

1. Welcome

The chairman and outgoing President, Billy de Klerk, welcomed all to the 15th BGM of the PSSA. He thanked the sponsors, organisers and delegates at the conference.

2. Apologies

Ian McKay, Thalassa Matthews. The late Charles Lockwood was remembered.

3. Minutes of the previous BGM (Grahamstown 10th September 2006)

Accepted as a true reflection (proposed by Mike Raath; seconded by Bruce Rubidge).

4. Matters arising

DST African Origins programme

Billy de Klerk thanked the task team involved in establishing this research funding programme. However, he noted that few long-term employment opportunities are available, and the need to convey to government the necessity of filling palaeontological posts.

Bruce Rubidge encouraged museums to engage Dr. Gilbert Siko, and suggested inviting him to attend conferences and field trips. Those interested in collaborating with China to contact Gilbert Siko [Gilbert.Siko@dst.gov.za].

Development of palaeotourism and palaeotourism protocol
Bruce Rubidge and John Almond to draft a one page protocol and send to PSSA Members for comment.

Palaeontologia africana

Marion Bamford (Editor) to e-mail PSSA Members with reminder of abstract submission deadline.

PSSA archive

Billy de Klerk reported that the archive will reside in the Palaeontology office at the Albany Museum, Grahamstown. He reported no records (minutes, abstracts, memorabilia) for 1982 and 1984 meetings, and appealed to anyone with information to please forward it to him.

Palnews

Members expressed great satisfaction with the new electronic format, and thanked Rose Prevec for her time. Palnews to be distributed by e-mail (high and low resolution) and posted on the PSSA website.

Web page

Merrill Nicolas no longer resides in South Africa. Roger Smith suggested outsourcing this task. Roger to follow up with Thalassa Matthews.

5. Treasurers report

The financial report for 2006-8 was presented by Lloyd Rossouw. Bank charges were deemed too high. Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan suggested internet banking instead of a cheque account. Lloyd to enquire about better options, including with Standard Bank, a sponsor of PAST. Lloyd to liaise with Andrea Leenen regarding a Standard Bank contact, and a 'charity' account. International Membership fees to be paid in 4 to 6 year cycles

instead of annually. Membership fees to increase to R100. Retired Members and student rates to stay the same.

Lloyd to work out Society expenses on an annual basis to get a better idea of Membership fees in future.

6. SAHRA issues

6.1 Permits

Mary Leslie reported that many Members do not have excavation/ collection permits, and appealed to Members to get them. She asked that annual reports on activities be submitted regularly.

Mike Watkeys queried the issuing of offshore permits. Mary to discuss in person because of time constraints.

6.2 Accreditation and compliance issues

Billy de Klerk reported that SAHRA is encouraging heritage impact assessment and consultancy. An Accreditation Committee needs to be established as a matter of urgency. Palaeontology should adopt the approach used by archaeology. Consultants need to be registered. Billy to send out a list of assessors, and forward the updated details to Mary.

Billy called for a single well-informed palaeontologist at national level to centralise tasks.

Bruce Rubidge and Billy de Klerk to write to SAHRA and DACT. A draft to be sent to Mary for comment first.

7. Venue for next PSSA meeting in 2010

KwaZulu-Natal.

8. Election of new Committee

President: **Johann Neveling**

Vice President: **Jennifer Botha-Brink** (proposed by Neveling; seconded by de Klerk)

Treasurer: **Lloyd Rossouw**

Secretary: **Lucinda Backwell**

Editor Palnews: **Rose Prevec**

Additional Member: **Deano Stynder** (proposed by Neveling; seconded by Raath)

9. General

Billy de Klerk raised the issue of evolution education, and suggested a committee be established to assist teachers in this regard. He voiced support for Francis Thackeray's idea of distributing a Mrs Ples skull to every school in South Africa, and expressed gratitude to PAST and Walking Tall for their education initiatives in previously disadvantaged areas.

Bruce Rubidge encouraged a close link between PAST, Ian McKay and Pippa Haarhof for education outreach.

Nothing further and the meeting was closed.

PAPERS PRESENTED AT PSSA'08

The following is a list of oral and poster presentations given at PSSA'08. Keep an eye out for the extended abstracts which will be appearing in *Palaeontologia africana*.

- Abdala, F.**, Martinelli, A.G., Bento Soares, M., de la Fuente, M. & Ribeiro, A.M. South American Middle Triassic continental fauna: biostratigraphy and correlation.
- Almond, J.E.**, Buatois, L.A., Gresse, P.G. & Germs, G.J.B. Trends in metazoan body size, burrowing behaviour and ichnodiversity across the Precambrian-Cambrian boundary: ichnoassemblages from Vanrhynsdorp Group of South Africa.
- Atayman, S.**, Rubidge, B.S. & Abdala, F. Taxonomic re-evaluation of tapinocephalid dinocephalians.
- Backwell, L.** & d'Errico, F. Additional evidence of early hominid bone tools from South Africa - first attempt at exploring inter-site variability.
- Bamford, M.** Fossil woods from the early Pleistocene hominin site, Area 1A, Ileret, northern Kenya.
- Barbolini, N.** & Yates, A. Reconstruction of the cervical vertebrae of *Massospondylus*" implications for neck movement and feeding envelope of the Prosauropoda.
- Battail, B.** *Dicynodon* from South Africa, '*Dicynodon*' from Russia and *Dicynodon* (?) from south-east Asia.
- Blackbeard, M.** Taphonomy and taxonomy of the rare Triassic dinosaur *Eucnemesaurus* based on an articulated skeleton from the Eastern Cape.
- Botha-Brink, J.** Variation in anomodont growth patterns across the Permo-Triassic Boundary in South Africa.
- Brain, C.K.**, Prave, A.R., Hoffmann, K.-H., Fallick, A.E., Botha, A.J., Condon, D., Herd, D., Young, I. & Sturrock, C.J. Progress in the evaluation of sponge-like fossils from Neoproterozoic limestones of Namibia.
- Brink, J.S.** & Stynder, D.D. Morphological and trophic distinction in the dentitions of two early alcelaphine bovids from Langebaanweg (genus *Damalacra*).
- Browning, C.** Some factors leading to the good preservation of trilobite fossils within nodules of the lower Bokkeveld, Steytlerville district, Eastern Cape.
- Chinsamy-Turan, A.** Bone microstructure studies of Southern African dinosaurs.
- Clack, J.** What's new in the world of Devonian tetrapods?
- Cole, D.** Stratigraphic correlation between the Karoo Supergroup and the Gondwana sequence of India.
- Curnoe, D.** Modern human origins and the Cave of Hearths Bed 3 mandible.
- de Klerk, B.** & Burger, L.R. A study of small-bodied hominins from Palau, Micronesia.
- de Klerk, W.J.** A review of the occurrence of disarticulated Early Cretaceous sauropod dinosaur fossils from the Kirkwood Formation of the Oudtshoorn and Algoa Basins, South Africa.
- Durand, J.F.** & Claassen, M. Re-evaluating the Jurassic structures identified as termite nests in the Clarens Formation in the Tuli Basin, Limpopo province, South Africa.
- Forster, C.A.** & **de Klerk, W.J.** Preliminary report on a new basal iguanodontian dinosaur from the Early Cretaceous Kirkwood Formation, South Africa.
- Gastaldo, R.A.**, **Neveling, J.** and Pace, D. Evidence for aggradational and degradational landscapes in the Karoo Basin during the Early Triassic.
- Gess, R.** The vertebrate fauna of the Late Devonian, Famennian, Witpoort Formation, Waterloo Farm locality, near Grahamstown.
- Harley, E.** The impact of molecular systematics on palaeontology.

- Jasinoski, S.**, Rayfield, E. & Chinsamy, A. Comparative feeding biomechanics of *Lystrosaurus* and the generalised dicynodont *Oudenodon*.
- Kemp, T.** Phylogenetic interrelationships and the pattern of evolution of the therapsids: a functional systems alternative to a cladistic approach.
- Klinger, H.** Speculations on buoyancy control and ecology in some heteromorph ammonites. 2. The ammonite family Nostoceratidae Hyatt, 1894.
- Leenen, A.** & Backwell, L. Large mammal butchering experiments using stone tools.
- Manegold, A.** The early fossil record of perching birds (Passeriformes) and the songbirds from Langebaanweg (Western Cape, South Africa).
- Mannion, P.D.** African sauropodomorph diversity.
- Matthews, T.** Palaeoenvironmental evidence from micromammals (~80 000-167 000 ka) Cave 13B, Pinnacle Point, southern South African coast.
- Mostovski, M.** Brachyceran assemblages (Insecta: Diptera) as indicators of terrestrial palaeoenvironments in the Late Mesozoic.
- Mutter, R.** The Saurichthyidae (Actinopterygii): origin, distribution and interrelationships.
- Nicolas, M., **Kemp, C.** & Rubidge, B.S. Beaufort Group GIS initiative: creating and maintaining an interactive fossil database for palaeontological research.
- Norton, L.**, Rubidge, B.S. & Abdala, F. Shape variability in the skull of *Aelurognathus* (Therapsida: Gorgonopsia).
- Pereira, L.M.** Expanding the modern reference collection of phytoliths from an *Acacia-Commiphora* grassland in northern Kenya.
- Pickering, T.R, Brain, C.K. & **Sutton, M.** The Swartkrans palaeoanthropological research project: progress report for 2005-2008.
- Prevec, R.** & Bordy, E. A preliminary assessment of the *Glossopteris*-dominated fossil plant assemblages of the Emakwezini Formation (lower Beaufort, Karoo Supergroup, South Africa) and their palaeoenvironmental setting.
- Raath, M.A.** In pursuit of Paradise Lost: a call to rekindle palaeontology in Zimbabwe.
- Roberts, D.** Last interglacial fossil trackways in coastal aeolianites at Still Bay.
- Rubidge, B.S.**, Angielczyk, K. Stratigraphic ranges of *Tapinophalus* Assemblage Zone dicynodonts: implications for Middle Permian continental biostratigraphy.
- Rutherford, A.** Biostratigraphic evidence from the central Free State enables a new perspective on Beaufort basin development.
- Senut, B.** Macroscelidea from the Miocene of the Sperrgebiet, Namibia.
- Smith, R.M.H.**, Sidor, C.A., Tabor, N.J., Steyer, J.S. & Chaney, D.S. Vertebrate taphonomy and ichnology of a Permian 'wet desert' in central Pangea.
- Steininger, C.M.**, Ungar, P.S., van der Merwe, N. & Berger, L.R. Are bovid dietary preferences integral in understanding past ecosystems?
- Stynder, D.D.** RoA mesowear perspective on the diets of ungulate from the middle Pleistocene levels of Elandsfontein, Western Cape, South Africa.
- Stynder, D.D.** A study of tooth crown form to elucidate niche partitioning in late Miocene/early Pliocene hyenas from 'E' Quarry, Langebaanweg, South Africa.
- Tawane, M.G.** & Berger, L.R. Dental size and frequency of pathologies in the teeth of a small-bodied population of mid-late Holocene Micronesians, Palau Micronesia.
- Tyler Faith, J.** Large mammals and palaeoenvironmental reconstruction: lessons from a modern bone assemblage in southern Kenya.

- van Dijk, D.E.** Continental displacement and boreal blindness.
- Vilikazi, N.** & Berger, L.R. The identification of fossil herpetological remains from selected Plio-Pleistocene aged fossil bearing sites in South Africa.
- Welman, J.** & Klembara, J. An evolutionary explanation why the facial nerve in birds pass lateral to the polar cartilage while in crocodiles it passes medial to the homologous structure.
- Zipfel, B.**, de Silva, J.M. and Kidd, R.S. Evolution of the lateral column of the hominin foot - evidence from the StW 114/115 fifth metatarsal (Sterkfontein).

POSTERS

- Bordy, E.**, Sztanó, O., Nádor, A., Nagy, A., Bumby, A. & Rubidge, B.S. Vertebrate (Therapsida?) burrows in the Lower Katberg Formation (Beaufort Group) in the southwestern Main Karoo Basin (South Africa).
- Butler, E.** & Botha-Brink, J. The postcranial skeleton of *Galesaurus planiceps*: implications for biology and lifestyle.
- Kgasi, L.** Bolt's Farm in the cradle of humankind.
- Matthews, T.**, Haarhof, P., Roberts, D. & Smith, R. An African Origins Platform/West Coast Fossil Park Project.
- Mc Crae, C.** A comparative study of Late Holocene- and Plio-Pleistocene aged micromammalian owl accumulations from South Africa.
- Ngcamphala, M.** A palynological investigation of the mid-Cretaceous Orapa kimberlite pipe in Botswana.
- Ovechkina, M.N.**, Watkeys, M. & Kretzinger, W. Nannoplankton in the manganese deposits of the Mozambique Ridge and Mozambique Basin, SW Indian Ocean.
- Ovechkina, M.N.**, Watkeys, M. & Mostovski, M. Calcareous nannofossils from the stratotype section of the Santonian-Campanian Mzamba Formation, Eastern Cape, South Africa.
- Potze, S.** Further details on the cranium of Mrs Ples in the light of newly exposed bone prepared in dilute acetic acid.

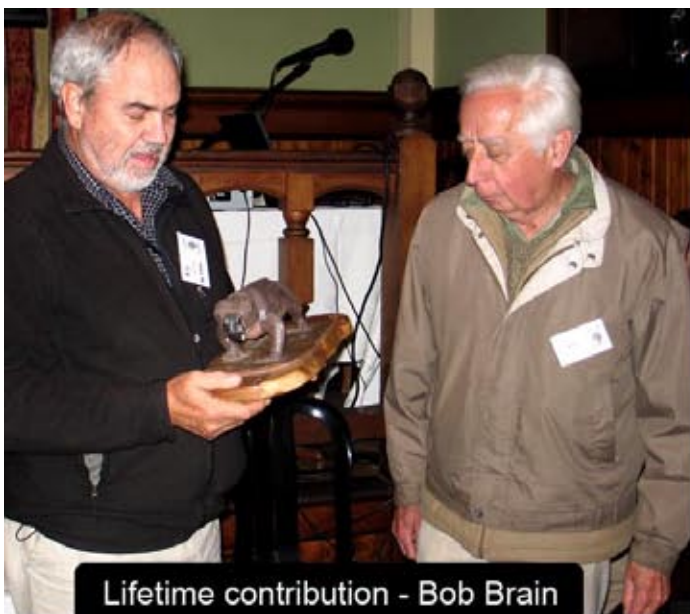
- Senegas, F.** & **Thackeray, J.F.** Temperature indices based on relative abundances of rodent taxa represented in South African Plio-Pleistocene assemblages from the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site: a preliminary study.
- Thackeray, F.** A statistical definition of a species in palaeontological and modern contexts, based on morphometric analyses, using hominid (Australopithecine) and therapsid (Diconodont) examples.
- van Dijk, D.E.** Langebaanweg Salientia.

AWARDS PSSA'08

- Lifetime contribution to palaeontology: **Bob Brain**
James Kitching award (Harrismith Mug) for best overall presentation: **Roger Smith**
Lystrosaurus shield for best student presentation: **Philip Mannion**
Lystrosaurus award for best poster: **Maria Ovechkina, Mike Watkeys & Warren Kretzinger**
Bob and Laura Brain 'Fun with Fossils' award: **Christine Steininger**
Order of the boot (for the most unbelievable presentation, even though it may be the brilliant truth): **Francis Thackeray**
Friends of the PSSA: **Brigitte Senut, Bernard Battail, Tom and Malgosia Kemp, Jenny Clack**

PAST awards

- Outstanding young researcher: **Robert Gess**
Outstanding senior researcher: **Marion Bamford**



Lifetime contribution - Bob Brain



Best presentation - Roger Smith



Best student presentation - Philip Mannion



Best poster - Maria Ovechkina & Mike Watkeys



Order of the Boot - Francis Thackeray



Fun with Fossils - Christine Steininger



FRIENDS OF THE PSSA: Jenny Clack, Bernard Battail and Malgosia and Tom Kemp

Brian Warner regaling the delegates with scatological verse



PAST AND PRESENT PRESIDENTS:
Billy de Klerk handing over the reins to Johann Neveling



Mike Watkeys - a geologist in a tux?
But wait a minute...





Christine Steininger making use of the local transport



THE ORGANISERS: Madelon & John Almond, Thalassa Matthews and Roger Smith



All aboard, for your 1 minute tour of Matjiesfontein!



Francis Thackeray expounding on a piece of genuine Gondwana from the Himalayas



Francis reflecting on his award

PSSA'08 LIMERICKS

Offerings produced during the PSSA field excursion...
(gathered by Francis Thackeray, Tom & Malgosia Kemp)

Warner in Poet's Corner **by Francis Thackeray**

There was a good fellow named Warner
Whose bust should be placed in a Corner
Of Westminster Abbey
Looking fine, not too shabby.
All thanks to our talented Warner.

*(Brian Warner, Palaeo poet laureate of the
PSSA, September 2008)*

Shakespearean Francis **by Robert Gess**

There is young fellow named Francis
Who assumes Shakespearean stances.
And after some wine
He's inspired to rhyme
Thus the PSSA he enhances.

For Rob Gess *(after his attempt at a new limerick)* **by Eric Harley**

A palaeostudent called Gess
Attempted a rhyme to profess
But hagfishes sans jaws,
And lampreys galores
Are his only true claims to prowess

Claire **by Francis Thackeray**

There was a young lady named Claire
Who said, "ask my age" if you dare
Five and twenty today
She won't give it away
In the suit of her birthday laid bare.

To tease the students **by Eric Harley**

Now, Almond, Clack, Kemp and Battail
Are paleothinkers most high
But those students there huddled
Have minds quite befuddled
But that's 'cos they're from BPI

John and Madelon **by Francis Thackeray**

There was a young fellow named John
Who married a lass, Madelon
We thank them profusely
For excursions karoosly
Merci beaucoup, good Madelon, John.

For Bruce Rubidge **by Eric Harley**

There was a fine fellow called Bruce
Who sought fossils when out and footloose
He dug in the ground
And look what he found
Old mammal-like reptiles obtuse

In defence of Thackeray (for his third Order of the Boot) **by Eric Harley**

A wonderful bard is our Thackeray
Above and beyond all our flattery
But three orders of boot
Must be really quite moot
Who could ever accuse him of quackery?

In thanks to Eric Harley for his kind limerick (above):

In praise of Eric (Harley rhymes with parley and jarley) **by Francis Thackeray**

There is a geneticist, Harley
Who is a good fellow, so *jolly* (pronounced jarley)
He plays with the means
Of statistical genes
And enjoys old fine wine with our parley

EDIACARAN FOSSILS OF NAMIBIA

by Helge Denker

[Text accompanying Nampost stamps featured on the cover; reproduced with permission]

Fossils are pieces in the puzzle of Earth's history. They open small windows onto the past. Fossils have probably been known by people since the dawn of our time on Earth. Yet the understanding of what fossils actually are, and the subsequent focused study of them, only began a little over 200 years ago. Since then, scientists have been seeking to reconstruct prehistoric life on Earth through the painstaking examination and reconstruction of fossils and through accompanying geological research and dating of strata.

A timeline of the existence of Earth itself has been mapped out on what is called the stratigraphic time table. The divisions of time on this table are complex. The table is firstly divided into three Eons - starting with the Archean that begins with the creation of Earth itself, followed by the Proterozoic and finally the Phanerozoic Eon, which leads to the present day. Each Eon is divided into a number of Eras, which may again be subdivided into different Periods, Epochs and Ages.

The Ediacaran Age is a division of time within the Neoproterozoic Era, which itself is a subdivision within the Proterozoic Eon. The Ediacaran Age came just before the Cambrian Period, which already falls into the next Eon, the Phanerozoic. The Cambrian is well known because it was a time of incredible diversification of life that has become known as the Cambrian Explosion. The ancestors of most life forms existing today first evolved during this Period.

The Ediacaran began around 630 million years ago and ended 88 million years later. For humans, who seldom live to be older than one hundred years, a million years is a time span that is very difficult to grasp. But we know today that Earth is about four thousand five hundred million years old. Life on

Earth may date back as far as four thousand million years, when the first micro-organisms might already have developed. The oldest known fossils, simple cells with a nucleus, are about three thousand five hundred million years old.

The Ediacaran fossils are particularly interesting because they represent the next step after the small, single-celled organisms that lived alone on Earth for several thousand million years. Ediacaran life forms are the earliest large and complex, multi-cellular organisms that have been discovered. To study Ediacaran fossils is to be amongst the earliest creatures known. The Age is named after Ediacara, a place in the South Australian outback, where many of the fossils were discovered in the late 1940s. But the first fossils from this Age were already found in 1908 on a farm in southern Namibia. The Namibian fossils are considered to be amongst the best Late Proterozoic/Early Cambrian specimens known. Fossils from the same time period were later found in Russia, Newfoundland, Canada and the United States.

The Ediacaran creatures are the oldest known organisms recognizable to the naked eye and the first large, multi-celled creatures known to have lived on Earth. They appear to be the starting point in the diversification of life on our planet. They existed in a wide range of forms and sizes. Many had a quilted structure, with their forms being divided into a number of chambers like a quilt. They lived at a time when few predators existed to threaten them. This allowed the big, mostly immobile species to thrive. As life forms suddenly diversified during the Early Cambrian, most of the Ediacaran organisms quickly disappeared. The creatures that now dominated had developed hard shell and skeletons that fossilise relatively easily, thus leaving an extensive fossil record. The soft Ediacaran organisms rarely fossilised and left little evidence to help scientists to understand and easily classify them.

There is still not complete consensus amongst scientists about many of the Ediacaran life forms. Some experts

consider at least some of them to have been giant single-celled organisms, where the quilt-like subdivisions allowed the cells to grow to such enormous sizes. They are so Bizarre that they do not fit into the six previously defined kingdoms of Animalia, Plantae, Fungi, Protista (single-celled or simple multi-celled organisms such as algae and some moulds), Archaeobacteria and Eubacteria (unicellular organisms divided into two kingdoms on the basis of biochemical differences). Most Ediacaran organisms have been placed in their own kingdom, the Vendozoans. It is an extinct kingdom, that has left no modern equivalents.

Many of the Ediacaran creatures that we know lived in shallow seas with sandy sea floors covered by a mat of slime produced by bacteria. Under ideal circumstances, this combination aided the fossilisation of the soft-bodied creatures, allowing scientists to identify numerous forms. *Swartpuntia* was a large, leaf-shaped organism divided into four horizontally symmetrical parts. It had a distinct stem which is likely to have anchored it to the sea floor. *Pteridinium* was an elongated, frond-like organism. Specimens longer than 30 cm are known, but none have been found with both ends intact, making it impossible to say whether it floated through the water or was anchored to the ground. *Ernietta* had a strange, sack-like form and occurred in clusters on the sea floor. *Rangia* was a compact, symmetrically divided, leaf-shaped organism, again with a stem-like structure with which it seems to have been attached to the sea floor.

While it is possible to identify and classify many of the Ediacaran fossils, scientists can only guess at the life cycles and living conditions of these enigmatic creatures. We know the past only from what has been found. And what has been found still leaves many gaps, which can only be bridged with theories until evidence may be found to give foundations to them. Much of the past we will never know, but can only imagine and wonder about.



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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

PSSA 16th Biennial Congress

2010, Durban

Organisers: Mike Watkeys - Watkeys@ukzn.ac.za
& Mike Mostovski - mmostovski@nmsa.org.za

Evolution 2009

June 12-16, 2009

University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, USA

Joint annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Evolution (SSE), the Society of Systematic Biologists (SSB), and the American Society of Naturalists (ASN).

<http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/evolution09/>

Third International Palaeontological Congress

June 28 - July 03, 2010

Imperial College and Natural History Museum, London, UK

<http://www.ipc3.org>

Walcott 2009: International Conference on the Cambrian Explosion

August 3 - 8, 2009

Banff, Alberta, Canada

<http://basalt.geology.utoronto.ca/facultycaron/Walcott2009.htm>

International Symposium on the Cretaceous System

September 12-19, 2009

Plymouth, UK

For more information contact Prof Malcolm Hart, School of Earth, Ocean & Environmental Sciences, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA

e-mail: mhart@plymouth.ac.uk

Society of Vertebrate Palaeontology (SVP) 69th Annual Meeting

September 23 -26, 2009

University of Bristol

Bristol, UK

Abstract deadline 20 April 2009

<http://www.vertpaleo.org/meetings/>

AASP (The Palynological Society) 42nd Annual Meeting

September 27-30, 2009

Meadowview Convention Center, Tennessee

Organizer: Michael Zavada

Convention Center webpage: <http://www.marriott.com>

Gaffney Turtle Symposium

October 17-18, 2009

Royal Tyrrell Museum, Drumheller, Alberta, Canada

<http://www.tyrrellmuseum.com/events/turtlesymp09.php>

Geological Society of America (GSA) Annual Meeting

October 18-21, 2009

Portland, Oregon, USA

(Abstracts submission period begins April 2009)

e-mail: meetings@geosociety.org

<http://www.geosociety.org/meetings/2009/index.htm>

LINKS

BBC News: Largest snake 'as long as a bus'; 60 million year-old snake from Colombia 13 m long and weighed a ton...

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7868588.stm>

ScienceDaily (Feb. 2, 2009): Mammals that hibernate or burrow less likely to go extinct — the best way to survive the ill-effects of climate change and pollution may be to simply sleep through it.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/01/090128160935.htm>

Science News (Feb. 26, 2009): Modern feet step back 1.5 million years - footprints preserved at an African site suggest that the feet of a 1.5 million-year-old human ancestor looked much like those of people today

http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/41265/title/Modern_feet_step_back_1.5_million_years

Science News (Feb. 25, 2009): New stegosaur (Portugal) is quite a stretch - fossil find's long neck reveals unexpected anatomical diversity

http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/41184/title/New_stegosaur_is_quite_a_stretch

National Geographic News (Feb. 3, 2009): Early whales gave birth on land; 47 million years ago primitive whales gave birth on land, according to a study analyzes the fossil of a pregnant whale found in the Pakistani desert.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/02/090203-pregnant-whale-fossil.html>

JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Post-graduate research opportunities at the West Coast Fossil Park

Applications are invited from suitably qualified students to do postgraduate (Honours, MSc and Post-doctoral) research projects focusing on the world-renowned vertebrate fossil occurrences at Langebaanweg, now the site of the West Coast Fossil Park. The studentships, which are supported by the African Origins Platform, are as follows;

Honours	R40 000 per annum for 1 year
MSc	R60 000 per annum for 2 years
Post Doctorate	R120 000 per annum for 2 years

Requirements:

For the **Postdoctoral** position, applicants are expected to hold a PhD in a relevant discipline, and to have preferably specialised in the Miocene/Pliocene of Africa.

At Honours or Masters level:

Earth Sciences graduates with an interest in the sedimentology, stratigraphy and geochemistry of the west coast coastal plain deposits.

Suggested project titles:

- *Sedimentology and palaeoenvironments of the Plio-Pleistocene Anyskop Member (Langebaan Fm) at Langebaanweg*
- *Palaeogeography of the Early Pliocene Varswater Formation in the vicinity of Langebaanweg interpreted from outcrops, borehole cores and bulk samples*
- *Mio-Pliocene phosphate rock occurrences on the Cape West Coast South Africa: geochemistry and depositional history of exposures in the West Coast Fossil Park, Langebaanweg*

Life Sciences graduates who have an interest in one or more of the following fields; palaeoecology, African fossil mammalian communities, mammalian osteology and taxonomy, ancient diets, palynology.

Suggested project titles:

- *Analysis of the distribution of microfaunal remains in an Early Pliocene channel-hosted bonebed, Varswater Fm., Langebaanweg, South Africa.*
- *Reconstructing the palaeodiet of some Langebaanweg murid species using dental microwear studies*
- *Palaeopathology of the Langebaanweg carnivorans*
- *Taxonomy and systematics of the Langebaanweg small carnivorans*
- *Palaeoecology of the latest Miocene-earliest Pliocene carnivorans of Africa*

Please Note: Honours and Masters applicants must be South African citizens or permanent residents. The post doctoral grant is open to all nationalities.

Please send a letter of motivation outlining your suitability for one of these bursaries, along with your CV to: Dr Thalassa Matthews, Research Director, AOP Initiative, Langebaanweg.

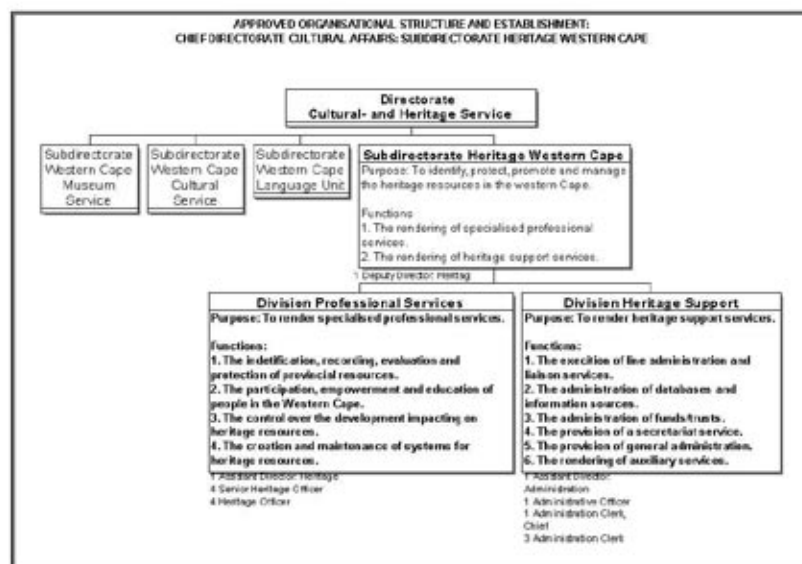
Email: tmatthews@absamail.co.za, Phone 021 4813877.

JOB DESCRIPTION:
Senior Heritage Conservation Officer

A. JOB INFORMATION SUMMARY

Post Holder : Vacant
Post Title : Snr Heritage Conservation Officer Archaeologist
Location : Cape Town
Component : HERITAGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SERVICE

ORGANIGRAM



B. JOB PURPOSE

To administer the permit system for archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites for Heritage Western Cape (HWC).

C.1 KEY RESULT AREAS & OBJECTIVES FOR KEY RESULT AREAS

1. Participate in the formulation, review and implementation of provincial policy and guidelines in lines with the **National Heritage Resources Act** (Act 25 of 1999).

2. Drive heritage resources conservation and preservation processes (identification, documenting, evaluation, protection and promotion of heritage resources). In Western Cape
 - ❖ Conduct inspections on sites and structures
 - ❖ Recommend on appropriate actions in relation to the Act, policies and guidelines.
 - ❖ Review and evaluate applications, archaeological impact assessments, formulate recommendations and present these to the Archaeology, Palaeontology and Meteorites Permit Committee.
 - ❖ Implementation and execution of decisions of Council and its Committees.
 - ❖ Provide input to database of professional archaeologists and paleontologist available and suitable for contract work in the province
3. Policy-making
 - Assist in development and maintenance of policy and guidelines for the management of archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites in the Western Cape
 - Implement and monitor policy implementation
4. Co-ordinate nominations for archaeological and paleontological heritage sites
 - Prepare nominations and advise the Council of Heritage Western Cape of proposed provincial heritage sites
 - Prepare the nomination and advise SAHRA of proposed national heritage sites in the Western Cape
 - Assess the significance of all formerly declared archaeological and paleontological "National Monuments" and make recommendations to HWC and SAHRA
5. Advise concerned bodies/individuals on the implementation of the Act, related provincial and local government legislations and policies.
 - ❖ Negotiate and liaise with owners, heritage bodies, local communities, consultants and planning local authorities and other affected parties.
6. Investigate, research and formulate recommendations relating to norms, standards, guidelines, policies to Council and its committees.
7. Financial Management
 - Assist in preparing and managing the budget for the sub-directorate
 - Ensure compliance with PFMA, NTR's and PTI's.
8. Personnel Management
 - Responsible for the Implementation of the Staff Performance Management System in terms of review and appraisal, individual training and development needs of staff

- Keep subordinates informed of new policies and procedures pertaining to their work environment
- Develop and implement effective communication practices within the section.

C.2 DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITIES

Execute written delegated responsibilities and duties in terms of the Act and relevant regulations as resolved by the Council of Heritage Western Cape.

C.3 DIMENSIONS OF POST

Human resources:	Direct	currently unknown
Financial resources:	Income	- currently unknown
	Expenditure	- currently unknown

Equipment

D. OUTPUTS PROFILE

CUSTOMERS:

1. Council and Committees of Heritage Western Cape
2. Public
3. Management
4. SAHRA

CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS:

1. Prompt responses
2. Good organization
3. Professionalism
4. Confidentiality

E COMPETENCY PROFILE

QUALIFICATION

1. Appropriate four (4) year tertiary qualification
Masters degree in archaeology/palaeontology preferable

EXPERIENCE

1. 2 to 5 years appropriate experience
5-10 years experience in the field

KNOWLEDGE

1. Professional knowledge of related fields, i.e history, architecture, cultural history
2. HR matters
3. Finance
4. Knowledge of applicable regulatory legislation
5. Planning & organising
6. Training
7. Computer literacy

SKILLS

1. Planning skills
2. Training skills
3. Research
4. Ability to evaluate scientific reports
5. Ability to interpret objects of material culture/natural history specimens/living history
6. Investigation
7. Policy administering
8. Conflict resolution
9. Interpersonal relations
10. Drivers license

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Interpersonal skills
2. Tact
3. Perseverance
4. Patience
5. Punctuality

LEARNING FIELD

1. Heritage related professional training
2. New theories and practices relating to the heritage sector

F. CAREER PATHING

Promotion to the next higher post:- Assistant Director: Heritage

Promotion to the next higher salary level / rank is subjected to satisfactory work performance and promotion to a higher post is subjected to the availability and satisfactory performance as well as conforming to the applicable recruitment and selection procedures.

PSSA MEMBERS AND FRIENDS - EMAIL

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 Loots, Marius
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 Mason, Tom
 Matthews, Thalassa
 McCrae, Ceri
 McKay, Ian
 McKee, Jeff
 McLachlan, Ian
 Meyer, Lynn c/o
 Mocke, Helke
 Modesto, Sean
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 Neveling, Johann
 Nicolas, Merrill
 Oelofsen, Burger
 Ovechkina, Maria
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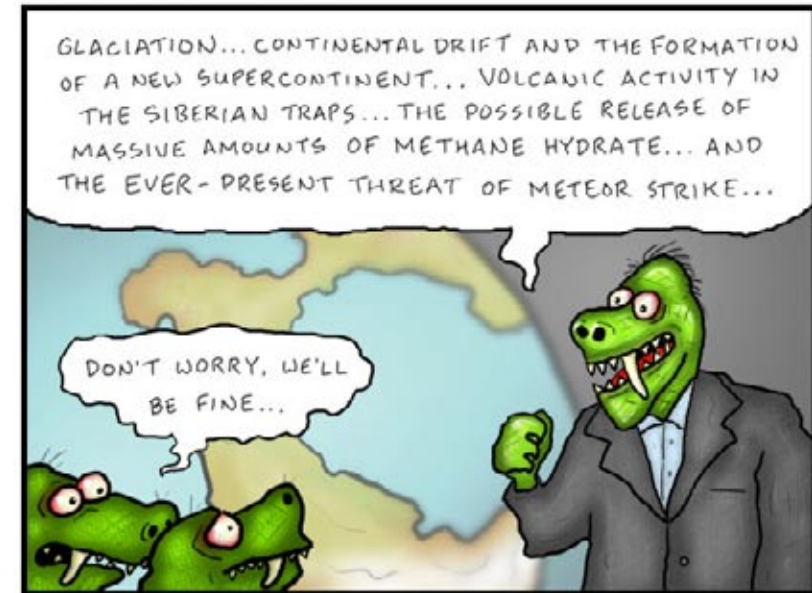
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DOCTOR FUN

29 May 2006



Late-Permian Eco-activist Al Gorgonopsian sounds an unwelcome alarm.

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NEXT DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

MONDAY 15 JUNE 2009