



# Fossil Footnotes

Central Texas Paleontological Society  
January 2006

## President's Message

By Danny Harlow

I hope all of you had a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year. Our family moved back into our completed house 4 days before Christmas. It sure is great to be back home. We are still gathering data on the possible merger of the two clubs, but nothing is in stone yet. We had a very good Fossil Fest 2005. And I want to thank everyone who volunteered time to help out. If you were not able to help, that is OK too. We want everyone to participate and enjoy the club on whatever level you choose. Our Christmas party was a first time event between the two Austin clubs. We had a large turnout at the AGMS building and traded a number of excellent fossils.

It is time for a new Slate of Officers. It has been an honor to once again be your President but it is time to turn the reigns over to someone else.

2005 was a good year and we acquired a number of new members, which is always exciting. Fellowship of fossil enthusiasts among members new and old and on all levels of knowledge is what makes this club special. We all learn from and enjoy the company of all the members.

Make plans to attend our first meeting of 2006. We will conduct a business meeting and vote on a new slate of Officers.

Danny

## 2006 Proposed Slate of Officers

President: Ron Root  
Vice President / Show Chair: Danny Harlow  
Secretary / Webmaster: Mike Smith  
Treasurer: David Lindberg  
Newsletter Editor: Hollis Thompson  
Field Trip Chair: Ed Elliott

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## January Meeting

The January meeting will be at the LCRA Building on Tuesday night, January 10<sup>th</sup> starting at 7:00 PM

January 10	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
February 13 (Monday)	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
March 14	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
April 11	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
May 9	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
June 14 (Wed)	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
July 11	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
August 8	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
September 12	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
October 10	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
November 3-5	<a href="#">Fossil Fest</a> , CTPS Fossil Show Old Settlers Heritage Association, Round Rock, TX
November 16 (Thursday)	<a href="#">CTPS meeting</a>
December	<b>Christmas Party (no meeting)</b>

## **Membership Information**

- \$18 per Family
- \$15 per Individual. Individual and Family memberships include a newsletter subscription, membership in the South Central Federation, and liability insurance coverage for club activities.
- Associate membership is \$10 per year and includes a newsletter subscription.

## **From Your Editor**

**Hollis Thompson**

I want to apologize to everyone for not getting the newsletters out for November and December. I should do better now. Greg and I sold our house and had to be OUT in less than 3 weeks. Right in the middle of it was Fossil Fest, so we got behind before we even got started.

Guys, we have a lot of stuff. Four storage units later, a trailer packed to the top, the pickup bed full and clothes in the car, we were finally out. Three nights at the La Quinta and we were finally able to look at a box to move.

We are semi settled into a duplex for a total of six months. With Christmas, we got a little more behind because all of our decorations were at the BACK of the storage unit. We survived and had a great Christmas. Hope all of you did too!!

## **Some articles from Danny Harlow**

### **Study:**

### **Poison Gas Caused 'Great Dying'**

Poisonous volcanic gas bubbling out from what is now Siberia may have caused the worst mass extinction in the Earth's history some 250 million years ago, according to a new study.

The so-called Great Dying killed off more than two-thirds of reptiles and amphibians at the end of the Permian era, long before dinosaurs lived and died.

Scientists have long wondered what caused this massive extinction; proposing various possibilities such as an asteroid colliding with earth, deep-sea methane release or an ancient greenhouse effect.

Mark Sephton of Imperial College London and colleagues from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States, contend in the current issue of *Geology* that the global catastrophe was caused by volcanic gases, caused by an eruption, in Siberia. The eruption was the earth's biggest outpouring as the crust split and torrents of lava were released. They covered vast swaths of land in present-day Siberia and created the Siberian Traps, a large area of igneous rocks around the city of Tura. New evidence for the volcanic gas hypothesis comes from a unique set of molecules preserved in rocks from the Dolomite Mountains in Italy. Dating from the time of the extinction, the molecules are the remains of polysaccharides, large sugar-based structures common in plants and soil. The chemistry of the rocks revealed that although the polysaccharides are remains of marine sediments, they derived from land; supporting the theory that "massive soil erosion resulting from destruction of land vegetation" caused them to end up in the sea, according to the study. The researchers believe that the volcanic gases from the eruption would have depleted earth's protective ozone layer, made the land and sea more acidic and killed plants. Soil, no longer kept in place by the plants, eroded into the surrounding oceans. "The excessive supply of soil materials to the oceans provides a direct link between terrestrial and marine ecological crises, suggesting that ecosystem collapse on land could have contributed to the end-Permian marine extinctions," the researchers wrote. Soil materials swept into the oceans would have blocked out light and soaked up oxygen, a deadly condition for marine life. Ocean life faltered, completing the global catastrophe.

"The terrestrial ecosystem was the first to suffer. The continent-wide nature of the event implies

that it was caused by something in the atmosphere," Sephton said.

According to Henk Visscher of Utrecht University in the Netherlands, the soil crisis could have caused a worldwide expanse of uninhabitable low-oxygen conditions in shallow marine waters, a condition similar to the oxygen-depleted waters found today in the Gulf of Mexico's dead zone. "What began on land ended in the sea. It seems there was no place to hide at this time of great dying," Visscher said.

## **Giant Water Scorpion Walked on Land**

Tracks found in Scotland look to be from an ancient water scorpion as big as a kitchen table. If the analysis is right, it is the first evidence of the creature coming ashore. The scorpion, a six-legged thing called Hibbertopterus, was about 5 feet long and 3 feet wide. It is long since extinct.

Researchers already knew Hibbertopterus existed from fossils, but they've debated whether it ever came on land. The tracks, found by Martin Whyte of the University of Sheffield, cover nearly 20 feet of ground. They reveal a lumbering, jerky motion, Whyte explains in the Dec. 1 issue of the journal *Nature*. Slow and jerky, crescent-shaped scarpers were left by the outer limbs; inner markings were made by a double-keeled belly; and a central groove was carved by its tail. "The slow, stilted progression, together with the dragging of the posterior, indicates that the animal was not buoyant and that it was probably moving out of water," Whyte says.

No other known arthropod could have left the marks, the geologist concludes. The tracks indicate Hibbertopterus could survive out of water at least briefly, he said. "Their gills would probably have functioned in air as long as they remained wet," Whyte told *live Science*. "However I doubt if they would ever have been able to become fully adapted to life on land."

Scary but benign Hibbertopterus would have looked frightening could we go back in time and confront one, but it was not equipped to attack large animals. "I think the animal would certainly have been fearsome in aspect whether you met it in or out of the water," Whyte said. "However the evidence of its feeding apparatus suggests that it had two anterior limbs specialized for sweeping through water and capturing small organisms." Hibbertopterus and its relatives were the last surviving water scorpions, all having died out about 250 million years ago.

Very distant cousins have survived to modern times, however. The closest living relatives are land scorpions, king crabs and horseshoe crabs, Whyte said. "The latter are marine animals but do penetrate far up rivers and do at times come out of water onto sandy beaches."



## **Paleontologist Barbie - On the Scene**

Hi! I'm Paleontologist Barbie reporting on the Annual Christmas Party and Gift-Abduction celebrated each year by the Central

Texas Paleontological Society and the Austin Paleontological Society. This year's fab party was held at the Austin Gem and Mineral Clubhouse and was attended by at least 35 people from both the Upper and Lower Cretaceous area. A potluck dinner was first on the agenda for the evening. Some of these dishes were prepared at home by amateur collectors with simple, readily available tools but other preparation techniques were more complicated. Studies of the desserts revealed details of structure and composition with high concentrations of certain sugars. While certainly not dietological, it is this reporter's impression that club members found the dinner to be so satisfactory that there really wasn't much food left at the end- no desserts at all- it was, what we would call in club parlance, "picked-over".

Club members enjoyed a few sedimentary moments after dinner. However, this general feeling gradually metamorphosed into a kind of giddy anticipation, followed by the announcement that the Gift Exchange was about to begin. Seasoned Gift-Snatch veteran, Mike Smith, opened the festivities with a giftological survey intended to dispel any distress accumulating over the possibility that someone might get mad if his or her gift were stolen. Since nobody in the room was inclined to admit that it would bother them to have their gift filched during the course of the evening, numbers were drawn from a hat and everybody eyed the site where the presents awaited natural selection.

Everyone held his or her breath as the first gift was unwrapped; it was uncertain whether accompanied by a cry of joy or dismay, when the first gift was revealed to be a very nice sample of polished dinosaur dung. If the first gift did not generate all that much enthusiasm, at least the dinological poopus was identifiable- there were one or two gifts at the end of the evening classified as "unrecognizable lumps of something", suspected of having been selected at random from the driveway outside the clubhouse.

Number One, whose rights and privileges had been hotly debated prior to her gift selection, appeared to be trying to attract a thief throughout the course of the evening, while her husband, Ron

Root, sitting just across the table, suffered the most losses of the evening, gaining possession of and parting with one Trilobitus Escapus, a set of Moroccan Shark's Toothus Emigratus and finally ending up with a hand lens, which other club members borrowed all evening.

Other gifts which were stolen repeatedly were: a slab with a school of Smallish Fishucis from Jurassic Park, a very nice Barnacles Scallopus, a day-glo Plasticus Dinosaurus, and a Kindof Amberus necklace. One highly coveted display case was stolen three times, much to the chagrin of our field trip director, whose number was 33 and who intended to steal it before Hollis, whose number was 32, stole it for the third time. This reporter's personal favorite gift was the Build-Your-Own-T-Rex from Chicken Bones Set received by someone at my table. And of course the fabulous doll made in the likeness of Yours Truly, Paleontologist Barbie.

Next month Paleontologist Barbie reports on

**"Birds Really are Dincosaurs".**

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For information about CTPS and our meetings and Fossil Fest: **Visit our Web Site**

<http://www.texaspaleo.com/ctps/index.html>

**2006 Field Trips**

Tentative Schedule for field trips

January 14

February 18

March 18

April 15	Picnic and Auction @ West Cave Preserve	North on 12 from Dripping Springs. At T intersection with Hamilton Pool Road (3238) go left. West Cave Preserve is about 7 miles, just after the hairpin curve and one lane bridge over the Pedernales.	Noon
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May 13

June 17th-18th Ada, Oklahoma? Meet at the Callixylon Tree on the campus of East Central University in Ada. Entering town from the west side on Main you just head east until Main ends at Francis. The tree is on the south side. 8:00 am

July 15 Brazos Canoe Trip? Bring your canoe or kayak. Subject to river height.

August 12

September 16

October 14-15 Lake Texoma?

November 18

December

## News of the Week from Mike Smith

### **ANCIENT DNA:** New Methods Yield Mammoth Samples

Science 23 December 2005: Vol. 310. no. 5756, p. 1889 Ann Gibbons\* With reporting by Michael Balter.

Ancient DNA has always held the promise of a visit to a long-vanished world of extinct animals, plants, and even humans. But although researchers have sequenced short bits of ancient DNA from organisms including potatoes, cave bears, and even Neandertals, most samples have been too damaged or contaminated for meaningful results.

Now in a paper published online by Science this week\*, an international team reports using new technology to sequence a staggering 13 million basepairs of both nuclear and mitochondrial DNA from a 27,000-year-old Siberian mammoth. Also this week, a Nature paper reports using a souped-up version of more conventional methods to sequence a mammoth's entire mitochondrial genome. Besides helping reveal the origins of

mammoths, the new nuclear data serve as a dramatic demonstration of the power of the new technique to reliably sequence large amounts of ancient DNA, other researchers say. "The 'next generation' sequencer that was used [in the Science paper] will revolutionize the field of ancient DNA," predicts evolutionary biologist

Blair Hedges of Pennsylvania State University in University Park. Ancient DNA pioneer Svante Pääbo of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, who co-led the independent mitochondrial study, calls the nuclear DNA work "really great--the way forward in ancient DNA is to go for the nuclear genome with technologies like this."

To get mammoth samples for the new method, molecular evolutionary geneticist Hendrik Poinar of McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada, took bone cores from woolly mammoths found in permafrost and stored in a frigid Siberian ice cave. When Poinar returned the samples to his lab, he was surprised by the amount of DNA that emerged, particularly from one mammoth jawbone. This specimen had been recovered from the shore of Lake Taimyr, where very cold winters and short, cool, and dry summers turned out to be ideal conditions for preserving DNA.

Poinar sent the DNA-rich sample to genomicist Stephan C. Schuster at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, who is working with a new genome sequencer developed by a team at Stanford University and 454 Life Sciences Corp. of Branford, Connecticut (Nature, 15 September, p. 376).

This rapid, large-scale sequencing technology sidesteps the need to insert DNA into bacteria before amplifying and sequencing it. Instead, scientists break DNA into small fragments, each attached to a tiny bead and encapsulated by a lipid bubble where the DNA is multiplied into many copies for sequencing.

Because each fragment is isolated before copying, the method avoids bias from copying large

amounts of contaminant DNA from bacteria or humans.

The researchers were stunned by how well the method worked on ancient DNA, which is notoriously difficult to extract and sequence: "I would have been happy if we got 10,000 bases of mammoth DNA," said Poinar. Instead, they got 28 million basepairs, 13 million from the mammoth itself. Their preliminary analysis shows that the mammoth was a female who shared 98.55% of her DNA with modern African elephants. But mammoths were apparently closest kin to Asian elephants, as shown by Pääbo's mitochondrial study, which retrieved about 17,000 basepairs.

Poinar's team also found sequences from bacteria, fungi, viruses, soil micro-organisms, and plants, which the researchers say will help reconstruct the mammoth's ancient world. The technique was so productive that the authors predict it will be used soon to sequence entire genomes of extinct animals.

### **Tracks of Man-Sized crab Discovered**

By John Bohannon, Science NOW Daily News  
30 November 2005

A crablike creature as large as a man appears to have lumbered onto land over a quarter of a billion years ago. Researchers have recently discovered the fossilized tracks of the beast, which was previously thought to have lived exclusively underwater. The findings suggest the animal would have been the biggest creature on land at the time by a long shot.

Crawling out of the water was becoming a popular pastime around 300 Million years ago in the Carboniferous period. But the discovery last year of some odd tracks fossilized into a 330 million-year-old sandstone outcrop in Scotland puzzled Martin Whyte, a paleontologist at the University of Sheffield, U.K. For one thing, the markings--including a sizable central groove--indicated the track maker must have had three pairs of legs and a very long tail; no terrestrial creature like that is known from the

Carboniferous. And judging by the width of the tracks, Whyte thinks the animal towered over its compatriots: It was about 1 meter wide and 1.6 meters long, while land creatures at that time were smaller than today's house cats. Whatever the creature was, it wasn't speedy: its leg pairs were of different lengths and its strides were relatively short, indicating a very slow crawl.

All these details pointed to Hibberopterus, a gigantic member of an extinct species commonly known as the "water scorpions." But Whyte, who was working alone, knew that water scorpions were considered strictly aquatic, scrounging through the muddy waters with a pair of raking appendages.

The paleontologist, who reports his findings 1 December in *Nature*, thinks the creature's gills, like those of today's crabs, "would probably have operated in air as long as they remained wet." Higher oxygen levels in the atmosphere during the Carboniferous may have enabled it to stay out longer, he says.

Hibberopterus's large size may have also helped prevent it from drying out during land visits. It's "a surprise that an aquatic animal of this size came out onto land," says Mike Romano, a paleontologist at the University of Sheffield, U.K., considering how difficult it must have been to support its full weight out of the water. But the bigger question, he says, is why it bothered.

Perhaps it was trying to escape from overcrowded pools or looking for a mate, says Romano. "Sadly, we can only geo-fantasize."

*Did you notice? Same subject, two articles from different sources.*



See you at the meetin', pardner.

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### Club Information

The Central Texas Paleontological Society is a scientific, non-profit, community-based organization devoted to the study of fossils, advancing the state of the science, educating the public, and collecting fossil specimens. Most of us are amateurs, fascinated by fossils, who love to collect.

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at the LCRA building, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd. (between Redbud Trail and Enfield Ave.) at 7:00 PM in the LCRA Offices Board Room of the Hancock Bldg. **The public is cordially invited** to attend these meetings as well as our field trips held throughout the year.

Annual dues are: \$15 per person or \$18 per family, which includes a subscription to this newsletter, membership in the South Central Federation of Mineral Societies, and liability insurance coverage for club activities. Associate membership is \$10 per year and includes a subscription to this newsletter.

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**Web page:** <http://texaspaleo.com/ctps>

## **About the Newsletter**

Fossil Footnotes is distributed once a month prior to each meeting. Contact the Membership Chair to subscribe or obtain a sample-issue. If your mailing-label has a date marked with a colored pen, it means your membership has or is about to expire. Please send your check to the club Membership officer or bring it to a meeting.

We accept material from club members (and non-members at our discretion) including, but not limited to, information relevant to club activities, fossil collecting, paleontology & geology, and science education. Feel free to reproduce original material contained in this newsletter for educational purposes (including other club newsletters), so long as you credit the newsletter issue and author, if applicable. Send submissions by e-mail or hardcopies to the Editor (see above) at least two weeks before the meeting. Expect some publication delays for exotic formats.

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