

Paleo Footnotes

Newsletter of the
Paleontological Society of Austin

Austin and Central Texas



Volume 2, Number 3 – March 2007

President's Note

Here we go again. Wild spring weather keeps our collecting interesting. I hope you got to satisfy your urge to wander down a creek bed, but be careful you don't get swept away!

Wow! That was such a well done presentation by member Mike Bobbitt on the Austin Chalk and his ammonite collecting. His passion for research at the UT Geology Library should earn him at least a couple of classes teaching.

This month, the PSA will be at UT's *Discover Nature* event Saturday, April 24th, from 10am- 4pm. Please donate an hour or two to help discuss the importance of our hobby to the public. There will be a regular field trip on the following day, Sunday. I hope you can plan on doing one or both of these fun excursions.

See you at the meeting. --- John

Next Meeting

Our next speaker will be Dr. Ernie Lundelius, researcher in Vertebrate Paleontology at The University of Texas, who will speak on "**Life in Isolation - the Case of Australia**".

Dr. Lundelius worked in Australia (and North America, primarily Texas) on Plio-Pleistocene mammal faunas for more than 50 years. He received a BS in Geology from UT in 1950, PhD in Paleobiology from the University of Chicago in 1954. Spent a year in Western Australia 1954-55. Was a post-doctoral fellow at Cal Tech 1956-57. UT faculty (Geology) 1957-1998.

Tuesday March 20th, 7:00PM
Austin Gem & Mineral Society Building
6719 Burnet Lane, Austin, TX

Minutes of the February Meeting

Snacks were available and a sign up sheet was passed around for volunteers to provide them at future meetings.

Meeting began with a fine talk on the Austin Chalk by Michael Bobbitt. He gave a great summary with lots of good field pictures to illustrate the geologic sections.

A new bill is moving through the US congress regarding fossil collecting. It seeks to limit fossil collecting for profit while maintaining casual collecting on Federal lands. See the text of the senate bill at the link below.

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c110:1:./temp/~c110JkIW>
MB::

A plea for a second set of eyes to review the 503c was relayed from Mike Smith.

The field trip to Brownwood was discussed.

March 24th is Discover Nature Day at UT and there was a call for volunteers to represent the society.

The club needs a new logo. Some interesting designs were shown. We will vote on designs at the next meeting.

Bring your proposals.

Discussed the need for a banner.

Plea from Erich Rose for volunteers to help fulfill our commitment for Science Sundays at the Children's Museum. Club has not been filling the slots.

It was decided that Sat. May 5th, will be the auction of Ed Bowden fossils. This is a separate auction than that of the next club meeting and picnic at West Cave Preserve.

David Lindberg is collecting interested parties to order reprints of "The Collector's Guide to Fossil Sharks and Rays from the Cretaceous of Texas" it was unclear if the information has been updated since its original 1993 publication. There is a group discount if we order enough books. It is also in the PSA library to borrow.

There was discussion on upcoming UT talks

There was a request for a Treasury report. A complete one was not available and discussion ensued as to which bank to consolidate the previous clubs' bank accounts.

AGMS Swap Meet

The Austin Gem and Mineral Society would like to invite you to this year's AGMS Swap Meet to be held on April 14, 2007 in the AGMS Clubhouse parking lot. Setup starts at 9:00 AM and booths open at 10:00 AM and close around 5:00 PM. We invite you to bring your treasures to identify, trade, or sell.

Austin Gem and Mineral Society
6719 Burnet Lane.
Austin TX, 78757

March Field Trip
Near Mother Neff State Park and Stillhouse Hollow Lake

When:

Sunday, March 25th,

We will meet at 8:00 am in Moody, Texas.

Don't be late as we will be caravanning from there on.

Directions:

From Austin, take I-35 north past Temple to exit 315 for FM-107 toward Moody.

Go west on FM-107 about 7 miles to Moody.

We will meet at the intersection of FM-107 and 317.

Look for the railroad tracks. Park along FM-107.

From downtown Austin it is approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes to Moody.

If you arrive late don't worry, the first location is easy to find. Just continue another 12 miles (total 19 from I-35) on FM-107. Look for the group along a road cut.

We will be caravanning on to the second site near Stillhouse Hollow Lake later that day so you will need to meet us at this first site before the morning is over.

What to expect:

The first site is northwest of Mother Neff State park. It is a road cut exposing the Walnut, Comanche Peak and a bit of Edwards Formations. All are Lower Cretaceous. You can find a variety of marine fossils including various types of sea urchins, clams, oysters, gastropods, corals, etc. Ammonites have been found as well as shark teeth on occasion.

Please note that the cut is relatively steep. Wear shoes you can climb the talus slope in. This may also not be the best place for younger children to collect.

My cell is 512 657-7581

Ed Elliot, Field Trip Leader

New Dinosaur Trackway

By Terry Cirrindone

Paleontologists are calling the new discovery in St. George, Utah, one of the best trackways of dinosaurs ever found. About 200 million years ago an area around the present St. George, Utah, was part of a shallow lake, with shoreline where dinosaurs walked, ate and drank in their daily life routine. The shoreline was also part of a walkway trail leading across Utah. Many trackways have been found in Utah, but this recent discovery is one of the finest.

The dinosaur trackway discovery was made by a retired ophthalmologist as he was using a backhoe to lift blocks of stone to fill in holes on his property. When the rocks fell in place, they split open to reveal the footprints of several dinosaur species. Scientists and paleontologists have seen about 150 prints, most of which are exceptionally detailed; you can see what appears to be scales between the dinosaurs' claws. Dinosaur prints so far identified are those of Eubrontes and Dilophosaurus. Dilophosaurus was known as one of the first large carnivores during the Jurassic Period. It is the dinosaur with the massive crest on its head.

The discoverer of these prints, Dr. Sheldon Johnson, owns 130 acres of land. He and the paleontologists who were called in believe there is a probability that there are dinosaur footprints all over Dr. Johnson's property. Since the discovery, sometime in February, 2000, and the announcement of the discovery

throughout the world, the Johnsons have not had much sleep, staying up nightly to guard their precious find. Dinosaur enthusiasts have made visits to the property to see the astounding trackway. Mrs. Laverna Johnson welcomes each visitor and gives out loose-leaf notebooks with descriptions and names of the dinosaurs that roamed the land long ago. Mrs. Johnson greets as many as 1,200 visitors per day. They have not been charging a fee for visitors to see the prints. They are very excited, and happy for everyone to see and learn.

Jim Kirkland, Utah's State Paleontologist, and Martin Lockley of Dinosaur Trackers Research Group of Colorado, who is also world-famous for his many, many dinosaur trackway discoveries, are working together to continue the excavation of the prints, and to decide if some of the prints belong to any unknown species of dinosaur.

The Johnsons plan to build a dinosaur museum there in St. George, and have promised to donate 20 acres for this purpose. The museum is to be a heritage for their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and all the Johnsons in the future, as well as a learning institution for all people.

The Glacial Drifter Feb 2007 via FOSSIL FINDER 7/00 based on an article in The Dail Journal 4/00 via THE ROCKFINDER 12/01, via Stoney Statements 3/07

Be Safe – Be Well

by Dan Monroe, AFMS Safety Chair

**FEET HURT?
CHECK FOOTWEAR AND FOOT CARE!**

I remember some of my older relatives saying that when your feet hurt, you hurt all over. I never really gave it much thought until I approached significant maturity. Then, my feet began to cause a bit more trouble and I had to make changes in footwear and foot care. I well remember the lectures they gave us in the Army before we went on marches, hikes or field exercises. Always we had to have an extra pair of clean, dry socks and we had to inspect our feet carefully each morning and

each evening and keep our boots and feet as dry as possible. It was darned good advice.

All of us must become more sensitive to our footwear. We should select sturdy shoes. I know ladies, they may not be stylish. We must have shoes that fit properly. We may have gotten in the habit of buying one particular size and they may no longer fit. Two factors can figure into this. First, I have been told that a few years ago manufacturers changed the standards for shoe sizes and shoes became ever so slightly smaller. A second factor is that as we become older, our feet may tend to change

in size, width or length. We may need to consult a knowledgeable supplier of footwear so that we purchase the correct size so that we do not cramp our toes and also get the proper support. Much comfort can often be derived from either good quality arch supports or custom made orthotics. This may cost you a little money but can be a good investment in the long run.

The second part of the basic equation of foot comfort is foot care. Let's start with the toe nails. An ingrown toe nail can really be a source of pain and infection – they can actually be dangerous. Nails should be trimmed straight across and trimmed often. They do not have to be cut extra short just don't let them touch the inside of the toe of the shoe. Be alert to strange tendencies for the toe nails to “cup” or “curl” and watch out for discoloration. There are fungus growths that enjoy attacking your toe nails and they can cause big trouble.

Malformations of the toes and feet can occur and are bad news. Hammer toes, bunions and corns often result from poorly fitted shoes and may require medical assistance. There are

other foot problems that I do not even know about and I am not sure that I want to.

Paying close attention to our toes and feet in general is most important. With age comes the onset of non-insulin dependent or type 2 diabetes. Diabetes has a nasty habit of causing sores or infections on the feet and this must be avoided. Untreated sores on the feet can even result in amputation or some other form of surgery.

In closing, let me remind you that our feet are fragile and we must not run down to our work area or studio for even a minute without proper footwear. It is really easy to break toes and often very little can be done to repair the damage. Having your toes taped together is less than comfortable and is, often, the only thing that can be done to achieve healing.

I must declare to you that I am not a physician and have no other contact with the medical profession other than sleeping with a nurse (my wife), but I do know that as long as we persist in walking upright, we must take care of our feet.

~~ AFMS Newsletter Feb 2007

Places to Be...Things to Do

Saturday, March 24, PSA will participate in *Discover Nature!* at the Texas Natural Science Center, AKA Texas Memorial Museum

March 30-April 1, Mid-America Paleontological Society (MAPS) Expo XXIX, Macomb, Illinois

April 28 – 29, Waco Gem & Mineral Society Show, Heart of Texas Fair Complex, 4601 Bosque Blvd., Waco

May 26-27, Ft Worth G&MC Show, Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3401 W Lancaster

June 5 – 10, AFMS/RMFMS Convention & Show, hosted by Chaparral Rockhounds, Roswell Civic Center, Roswell, NM

Sept .1 & 2, SCFMS Annual Meeting & Show, Arlington

A Big Step Backward

By J. W. Downs

All of us who are involved directly or indirectly with science are probably aware of the anti-science element in our society but may be unaware of its extent and power. While this element constitutes a small minority, the influence reaches from local school boards to the highest levels of our government. The anti-science movement is well funded, persistent and growing in influence. The volume of anti-science literature available on the internet and in books must be viewed with alarm.

The Texas Freedom Network reported: *“The [Texas] State Board of Education remains one of the biggest challenges in 2007. Last year’s election gave the religious right a majority on the board for the first time. This alarming development comes as the board begins revising the state’s curriculum standards - including science standards dealing with evolution. Far-right board members failed in their efforts to water down the discussion of evolution and place material on creationism in biology textbooks in 2003. Now they will control the process for revising the standards on which those textbooks are based.”*

Texas State Representative Warren Chisum from Pampa, Texas, has recently circulated a letter launching his attack on evolution. Included in this letter were references to a Web site (www.fixedearth.com) promoting the idea that, while the earth is round, it is the fixed center of a comparatively small universe which revolves around it. Anything contrary to this belief is based on a “Talmud/Kabbala-based Judaism” which controls physics and mathematics. It is worthwhile to spend some time perusing this Web site and the others to which it refers, to see how far off the rails things have gone and how little we know about this anti-science movement in our society. Generally it blasts science as a *cabal* of Jewish physicists who for centuries have manipulated science with evolution, “Big Bangism” and fraudulent mathematical formulae (like $e=mc^2$?) to mislead people from the true faith.

Looking at this approach, we must observe that Copernicus was a monk, Kepler was a Lutheran, Newton was in Holy Orders, Gregor Mendel was a monk and Charles Darwin nearly became an Anglican priest. It seems unlikely that any of these would have been invited to join an ancient Jewish secret organization. Jewish scientists

have contributed enormously to all branches of science culminating with Albert Einstein, but no one group has control of human accomplishment.

Evolution appears to be the main target of fundamentalists, who persist in going to court in an effort to require creationism (a.k.a. Intelligent Design) to be taught in science classes in many states. The school board of Dover, Pennsylvania, thought it had a “slam-dunk” in their lawsuit, since the judge in the case had been appointed by the current Administration, known to favor piety over judicial experience. To his credit the judge ruled against the school board with a blistering 139 page decision. He stated that “... *the District’s purpose was to advance creationism, an inherently religious view, both by introducing it directly under the label of Intelligent Design and by disparaging the theory of evolution, so that creationism would gain credence by default as the only apparent alternative to evolution...*” Members of the Dover school board claimed that the conservative vote had re-elected Bush, who in turn had appointed the judge, and that the judge owed them a favorable decision. At the same time that they touted their religious convictions in public, they lied to disguise the real purpose behind their promotion of creationism.

There is a hidden agenda with the more extreme fundamentalists trying to keep school districts in endless expensive litigation that goes beyond simply teaching creationism in schools. Robert Thoburne, an educator at Fairfax Christian School in Virginia, and a Christian Right advocate, states in his book **The Children Trap**; “*Our goal is not to make the schools better...the goal is to hamper them so they cannot grow...Our goal as God-fearing, uncompromised Christians is to shut down the public schools step by step, school by school, district by district...we need to remove humanism from the public schools. There is only one way to accomplish this: to abolish the public schools...*”

There is no evidence that acceptance of evolution will have a negative impact on human behavior any more than posting of the Ten Commandments will have a positive effect. The paranoia connected with the subject of evolution can, at times, become ridiculous. The editor working with me on my book **Practical Conic Sections** (a geometry book) told me that there was a problem. In the chapter on unusual properties of cones and conic sections I had mentioned that some sea birds that nest on cliffs had *evolved* the ability to lay highly conical eggs. If an egg rolls out of the nest on to a flat surface, it rolls in a circle and returns to the nest. I was told that I had brought up a controversial subject and

that the publisher wanted to be able to sell the book in Texas. *Evolved* was changed to *developed*, and the problem was solved.

An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* titled **Faith-Based Geology** reported: “*Grand Canyon National Park employees charged that the Bush Administration has pressured them to keep from stating the canyon’s age, while a book saying the Grand Canyon was created 4,450 years ago by Noah’s flood remains on sale at the park’s bookstore.*” During a lecture at Berkeley, the noted physics professor Richard Dawkins said, “*We have crazies in England, too, but we don’t let them to run the country.*”

It would be unfair to single out religion as the only area of human thought that should be subjected to the cold light of reason. Astrology, numerology, pyramid power, crystal power, good vibrations, UFOs, Scientology, prophecy, tarot cards, lucky charms, ESP, psychokinesis and spiritualism would not survive the kind of tests required to establish scientific credibility. The only thing that they have in common is a strong desire to be believed since there is no shred of physical evidence to support them. While many of us consider these beliefs to be weird, their proponents do not generally bring pressure for their beliefs to be taught in our public schools or to forcibly impose them on others. If we were to make parallel listings of the accomplishments of science and those of fundamentalists, we would find that virtually all of the amenities and necessities of civilization would appear in the science column. All but the most pious are eager drive their automobiles over well-engineered bridges, to fly in airplanes, watch TV transmitted from geosynchronous satellites and take full advantage of modern medical science with its antibiotics and organ transplants. They will also be eager to reap the benefits of stem cell research which they are now obstructing.

Those who believe that the Universe is only six thousand years old and that there were dinosaurs on board Noah’s ark, that the Grand Canyon was eroded within a period of forty days and forty nights (and wish to suppress scientific evidence to the contrary) also claim the moral high ground over those who have systematically examined and revealed the grandeur of nature as created. Ignorance may appear to be bliss, but it has not contributed much to the well being of humanity.

We all tend to associate with people who share our interests and goals not fully grasping that there is a wide spectrum of interests, beliefs and motivation about which we have only a vague knowledge. We would do well to examine some of the more extreme aspects of our society since their numbers are legion and they can exert a disproportionately large influence on us. The extremists have placed themselves beyond the reach of logic and have closed their minds to reason. They cannot be enlightened, but they can be contained. If you believe that this assessment is unnecessarily harsh, I encourage you to review some of the Web sites and books listed below. There is a whole other world out there.

References:

www.fixedearth.com (The non-moving Earth & anti-evolution web page.)

Google: **International Flat Earth Society**

Americans for the Separation of Church and State. (Periodicals)

The Fundamentals of Extremism by *Kimberly Blaker* ISBN 0-9725496-1-7

Why People Believe Weird Things by *Michael Schermer*

The purpose of the **Paleontological Society of Austin** is the scientific education of the public, the study and preservation of fossils and the fossils record and assistance to individual, groups and institutions interested in various aspects of paleontology.

Meetings of the **Paleontological Society of Austin** are held the third Tuesday of each month, 7:00 p.m. at the Austin Gem and Mineral Society building, 6719 Burnet lane, Austin, TX. The public is cordially invited to attend.

Annual Dues: \$15/individual, \$20/family and \$10/associate (non-voting, receiving newsletter)

PSA web page: <http://www.texaspaleo.com/psa/index.html> Web master: Michael Smith: msmith17@austin.rr.com

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PALEONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

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DATED MATERIAL – MEETING NOTICE

FIRST CLASS MAIL