

Paleo Footnotes

Newsletter of the
Paleontological Society of Austin

Austin and Central Texas



Volume 3, Number 4
April 2008

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

I'm hoping that we have a really good turnout for the auction this year. It's held at a very lovely spot – the West Cave Preserve. If you haven't been there: Go west on highway 71, just past 620 go left on Hamilton Pool Road. Stay on Hamilton Pool Road and you will go down into a canyon with the Pedernales River at the bottom. When you climb back out of the canyon, turn right into the preserve. The drive is very nice. If you want you can take a guided tour after the auction.

Every one should bring a vegetable or desert dish. We would also like a fossil or related item for the auction. For those of you who are new to the club and might not have something you want to bring...don't go out and buy something expensive. This is mostly a social event. Come and enjoy yourself. There will be food, a short business meeting and then the auction. Plan on being there at 11:30. And bring your check book!

--Ed

Meeting Minutes

PSA meeting 3/18/08

The meeting started at 7:00 with a talk by Lauren Green, a former UT student now with USGS. Lauren gave an interesting talk about her research on the Cayman Islands trying to understand climate change with the help of fossils found in stalactites.

Ed Elliot began the business meeting at 8:00.

Old Business

- The club had agreed previously to buy a laptop to be used by our speakers. Mike Smith has arranged to acquire a leased Dell computer for approximately \$400.

- Ed announces we had a good turnout for our booth at the Georgetown Gem and Mineral show.

New Business

- Kathleen Howard a \$10 donation that will be used to buy get well cards for club members and to send thank you notes to our speakers.

- Linda McCall reminded us of two outreach activities

- The field trip to the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences on March 22nd also includes an exhibit by PSA. The club will have a table from 11 to 2.

- she announced that we had been invited and accepted to have a presentation prior to the

April 4th Hot Science - Cool Talks" event at UT. The lecture is titled: "God, Darwin and Design: Lessons from the Dover Monkey Trial" and will be given by Dr Kenneth Miller f from Brown University.

- Linda McCall announced the dealer invitations for Fossil Fest had gone out and 2 large booths had already been sold

- Ed discussed field trips and future meetings

- The trip to the Lucy exhibit at the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences will be on March 22nd

- The regularly scheduled March field trip is to the Jasper area to look for petrified wood

- On May 17th PSA has been invited to join the Waco and Tri-Cities Gem and Minerals clubs for a trip to the quarry near Clifton. The club voted to accept the invitation

- The regularly scheduled May 2nd field trip location has yet to be decided.

- In April the combined meeting and field trip will be the annual picnic and auction at Westlake Preserve on Saturday, April 19 at 11:00. Members should bring a fossil or fossil related item for the auction and a side dish for lunch. APS will provide the meat.

Ron Root
PSA Secretary

Next Meeting – April 19th

Annual Auction and Picnic At West Cave Preserve

Note: This is a Saturday not a Tuesday.

11:30 AM

To get to the preserve take highway 71 west through Bee Cave. Not far after passing the junctions with Bee Cave Road (FM 2244) and then FM 620 look for Hamilton Pool Road on the left, it will be a traffic light. Follow Hamilton Pool Road all the way until you pass Hamilton Pool. Shortly after, the road will drop down into the canyon of the Pedernales River and back up the far side. Just at the top of the far side, the road will bear right and the Preserve entrance will be there on the right. We will be meeting at the far end of the main building.

The Society will provide the meat dishes and beverages. Bring a vegetable or desert dish to share and beer or wine if you like. Please bring serving utensils for your dish.

For the Auction bring a fossil or paleo-related item (books, maps, jewelry, etc) The item does not have to be very valuable but keep in mind that we are raising money for the society and it should be something nice.

We will eat, quickly take care of the business part of the meeting and move right into the auction. Bring your checkbook (preferred) or cash.

The preserve offers guided tours that are well worth the few dollars they charge. So make a day of it and plan on staying awhile.

Field Trip Report Houston Museum of Natural Sciences Saturday March 22nd

The trip to the Houston Museum of Natural Science was a fun experience. We had a nice turn out: Mike Smith, Melvin Noble, Linda McCall, John Hinte, Rebecca Benz, Kelly & Robert Eby, Erich and Emelia Rose, David Silver, Linda Byrum and myself.

Having a club table (the museum was having an event and asked if we would participate) was not only fun but paid off nicely. By volunteering to do this we got into both the museum and the "Lucy" exhibit for free. "Lucy" was good, the mineral exhibit was really great, all of the anthropology exhibits were interesting. The best was that the paleontological exhibit was

really good. What was really great was seeing it with the other club members. Sharing the oos and aaahs with others as we looked at all the really nice specimens, that was fun. They have a collection that we all wish we had. The only problem with this field trip was that they wouldn't allow any collecting.

I have to mention that everyone connected to the museum treated us like gold. Even though it was Houston, it was a very good trip.

--Ed

Field Trip Report East Texas – Jasper Saturday March 29th

We had a nice turnout in Jasper this year: Linda McCall, John Hinte, Tom and Marilyn Bowers, Mike Smith, David and Mark Lindberg, Marc Brewster, Diann Strout, Melvin Noble, Melody Barnett, Rich Giest, Doug Vanderford, Paul Hammerschmidt and my self.

We went at exactly the right time. Beautiful east Texas was showing off its springtime bounty. Every town we drove through was covered in azaleas of many hues, dogwoods in pinks and whites, redbuds and many other flowering plants. The piney woods were dotted with dogwood and redbud; even the creek bed we walked in had wild azaleas – with flowers like delicate orchids. Walking over literally tons of very nice petrified wood, while wading in a lovely east Texas creek – what better way to spend a Saturday morning? While several of us had sore backs from carrying off our booty – I believe everyone had a good time. Our thanks to Ron and Donna Decote once again. Also, while several people spent time helping each other bring wood up the hill – I wanted to say thanks to Mark for helping out a lot of people, some who asked and many who didn't. Good job.

Our next stop was a glauconite quarry and road-cut that I had directions to. It wasn't there. But I talked to a retired gentleman who told us of an abandoned quarry. When we got there we found out it was back in business and we weren't welcome. One of the employees told us of yet

another quarry where we were able to hunt until they closed. Like most of this area, this was Weches Formation, Eocene Age. Gastropods, bivalves and echinoids were found, mostly in blocks. Finding the sand dollar *Protoscutella mississippiensis mississippiensis* was something we were all hoping to do. Cleaning them is another story.

Our next stop was a road cut in Chireno. Scallops, oysters, gastropods, *Belosepia*, corals and echinoids were found. I was lucky enough to pick up a couple of *Fibularia texana* – “BB” echinoids from the gravel at the bottom of the ditch.

For those of us who stayed Sunday – we started at the University Drive site in Nacogdoches. There are a variety of fossils available in these cliffs but the main goal was the *Protoscutella* sand dollars.

Our next stop was Lake Nacogdoches. We weren't there long enough for me – the buckets of rain and intense lightning drove us off. I found a variety of corals, gastropods, and a few bivalves.

A handful of us stopped at highway 21 on the Brazos for few more hours of Stone City marine Eocene hunting. A great way to end a wonderful weekend!

-- Ed

Creeping Creationism

By J. W. Downs

Until recently fundamentalists had been regarded as an irrelevant lunatic fringe attempting to replace science with faith. They were the ones selling crude “fossils” in Glen Rose, Texas, showing human footprints beside dinosaur footprints as well as instigating costly lawsuits to force creationism to be taught in public schools. Unfortunately, a growing number of young-earth creationists with strong academic credentials have opted to ignore scientific evidence and uphold the strict biblical accounts of the age of the earth, the Great Flood, and to reject evolution. Two examples are: Kurt Wise, who got his PhD in paleontology from Harvard as a student of Stephen Jay Gould, and

Marcus Ross who received a PhD in environmental science from the University of Rhode Island. The young-earth creationists are sufficiently organized to hold an annual Conference of Creation Geology on the campus of Cedarville University in Ohio. Their mantra is, “Here's what the Bible says. Now let's go to the rocks and see if we find the evidence for it.” Kurt Wise stated, “If all the evidence in the universe turned against creationism, I would be the first to admit it, but I would still be a creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand.”

Creationist museums now in operation in Ohio, Kentucky and California present their

version of geologic history using the most sophisticated techniques of robotics and computer animation. Special effects can be quite convincing. These ventures are well attended by young people at their most impressionable age and are unbelievably well funded.

Several states have pending legal action to force the teaching of creationism (under the name of Intelligent Design, or ID) in public schools. There have been several near misses in the past in which the creationists had no credible witnesses and judges were sufficiently enlightened to rule against them. This can change. Young-Earth geologists and paleontologists with advanced degrees from Harvard, U.C.L.A., Virginia, Washington, and Rhode Island can now present their cases before judges who may have been appointed by the present administration more for their piety than judicial experience and wisdom.

Science has been more generous to the Creator of the universe than theology has, allowing vastly more time and space than can be imagined. The problems encountered in trying to fit all of creation into a six thousand year time-frame are ludicrous, as would be expected when answers are given and the evidence must be shaped to support the answer. This technique is used to explain that the Grand Canyon was formed by the receding waters of Noah's flood, that dinosaurs boarded the Ark, and that red-shifted light from distant galaxies had been altered only to appear to have originated billions of years ago. Fundamentalists would have us believe that humans are the most important creatures in a very small Earth-centered universe, making us the proverbial big frogs in a small

pond. Science shows that we are more like plankton in a vast and wonderful ocean.

Richard Dawkins offered this analogy in one of his essays on the true antiquity of the universe:

"If a history were to be written at a rate of one century per page, how thick would the book of the universe be? In the view of the Young-Earth Creationist, the whole history of the universe, on this scale, would fit comfortably into a slender paperback. And the scientific answer to the question? To accommodate all the volumes of history at the same scale, you'd need a bookshelf ten miles long. That gives the order of magnitude of the yawning gap between true science on the one hand, and the creationist teaching favored by some schools on the other. This is not some disagreement of scientific detail. It is the difference between a single paperback and a library of a million books... The Young-Earth view is not only false, but is petty, small-minded, parochial, unimaginative, unpoetic and downright boring compared to the staggering, mind-expanding truth."

Many who reject the abundant evidence of the antiquity and the extent and the grandeur of the universe are perfectly willing to accept as a divine miracle a pancake that appears to have a likeness of what they believe Jesus to have looked like.

In London's Saint Peter's Cathedral there is a plaque honoring its architect, Sir Christopher Wren (1632 - 1723). It reads: If you expect to see a monument, look around you. This can be paraphrased: If you expect to see a miracle, look around you.

References:

Richard Dawkins - A Devil's Chaplain -Houghton Mifflin Co.

Hanna Rosin - Rock of Ages, Ages of Rock - New York Times Magazine 11-25-2007
(Available on Google)

Geocentricity: www.geocentricity.com & www.fixedearth.com

International Flat Earth Research Society, P.O. Box 2533, Lancaster, CA 93539
www.talkorigins.org/faq/flaearth.html

Geologic Lottery

Geologic time is difficult to grasp. Concepts of time based on the human life-span are completely inadequate to get the true feeling of the vastness of geologic time. The best that we can do is to scale time to something that we can understand. Mark Twain observed that if height of the Eiffel Tower represented the age of the earth, the thickness of the coat of paint on the top would represent the tenure of Humans on earth. This was remarkably accurate considering the limited amount of geologic knowledge that was available to him. Various other artifacts have been pressed into service, especially the meter stick, which can be set to equal a million years, with each millimeter equaling a thousand years.

A California statistician calculated that if a person were to buy fifty dollars worth of lottery tickets a week, he could reasonably expect to win the lottery every five thousand years. This

means that for practical purposes the odds of winning within your lifetime are the same whether you buy a ticket or not. Again, we are thinking in terms of human life-span. If an enterprising trilobite had started buying lottery tickets with the same regularity during the past 500 million years, he would have won 100,000 times by now. If a smart primordial globule had started buying lottery tickets when the earth formed 4.6 billion years ago, he (or it) would have won the lottery 920,000 times.

We live sheltered lives and few of us think in terms of the very large, the very old, and the very small, leaving these subjects to astronomers, geologists, and particle physicists, respectively.

J. W. Downs

Places to Be... Things to Do

April 26-27--WACO, TEXAS: **48th annual show; Waco Gem & Mineral Club**; Heart of Texas Fairgrounds, Fine Arts Bldg., Bosque Ave.; Sat. 10-5:30, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3, students \$1, children under 6 free; door prizes, exhibits, demonstrations, 25 dealers, minerals, fossils, jewelry, children's wheel, silent auction, youth activities; contact Kay Coleman, 118 County Road 540, Fairfield, TX 75840, (903)389-8311; e-mail: rkcole8@peoplepc.com

May 2-4--DALLAS, TEXAS: **2nd annual show, "Dallas Fine Mineral Show"**; Dave Waisman; Embassy Suites, 14021 Noel Rd., near The Galleria; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; contact Dave Waisman, P.O. 8543, Spokane, WA 99203, (509) 458-2331; e-mail: svldave@aol.com; Web site: www.dallasfinemineralshow.com

3-4--LUBBOCK, TEXAS: **50th annual show; Lubbock Gem & Mineral Society**; Lubbock Civic Center, 1501 Mac Davis Ln.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; exhibits, dealers, gems, jewelry,

findings, rocks, minerals, fossils; contact Archie Scott, (806) 894-1584, or Ed Ries, (806) 799-2722

24-25--FORT WORTH, TEXAS: **Show, "Let's Rock"; Fort Worth Gem & Mineral Club**; Amon Carter Exhibit Bldg., Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3401 W. Lancaster; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$4, seniors \$3, children under 12 free; more than 25 dealers, kids' games, hourly door prizes, grand prize drawing, silent auction, educational exhibits; contact Steve Hilliard, P.O. Box 418, Decatur, TX 76234, (817) 925-5760; e-mail: fwgmc@embarqmail.com; Web site: www.fortworthgemandmineralclub.com

May 30-June 1--TULSA, OKLAHOMA: **Show; Gem Faire; Expo Square/Exchange** Center 1, 4145 E. 21st St.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

Next Field Trip Quarry Near Clifton Saturday May 17th

PSA has been invited to join the Waco and Tri-Cities Gem and Minerals clubs for a trip to the quarry near Clifton. This trip will occur before the May meeting and a special waiver must be provided. The waiver must be notarized. To allow everyone time to accomplish this before hand the waiver is included here. Details will be provided before the trip via e-mail or if you do not have e-mail contact Ed Elliot at 821-2124.

RELEASE AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK

Date: _____

I, _____, having been given the right to enter the premises owned by Chemical Lime, Ltd. ("CLC"), a Texas limited partnership, at Clifton, Texas, do hereby agree.

1. I assume all risks of loss, damage or injury to my person (including death) or to my property, and to the person or property of any agent, employee or representative of _____, while on the premises of CLC;

2. I do hereby fully release and discharge CLC, its officers, agents and employees of and from any and all liability for loss, damage or injury to my person (including death) or my property, or the person or property of any agent, employee or representative of _____, by reason of negligence, active or passive, or any other wrongful act or omission of CLC, its officers, agents or employees occurring, directly or indirectly, while I am upon the premises of CLC at Clifton, Texas, or arising therefrom or incident thereto, including but not limited to my activities on such Clifton property;

I acknowledge that the activities I intend to conduct on CLC's property at Clifton may be dangerous and I assume all risks.

THE STATE OF TEXAS §
COUNTY OF _____ §

This instrument was acknowledged before me on the ___ day of _____, by

_____ Personally Known
_____ Produced Identification
_____ Type and # of ID

Given under my hand and seal of office this ___ day of _____, 2008.

Notary Public, State of Texas

Notary Seal

Name of Notary Typed, Stamped, or Printed

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/> 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