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NSCG Newsletter

Title: Toronto '95, the tenth annual SPNHC meeting and herbarium workshop. (Royal Ontario Museum, 2-6 June)

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Source: Moore, S. (1995). Toronto '95, the tenth annual SPNHC meeting and herbarium workshop. (Royal Ontario Museum, 2-6 June). *NSCG Newsletter, Issue 1*, 5 - 6.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/773>

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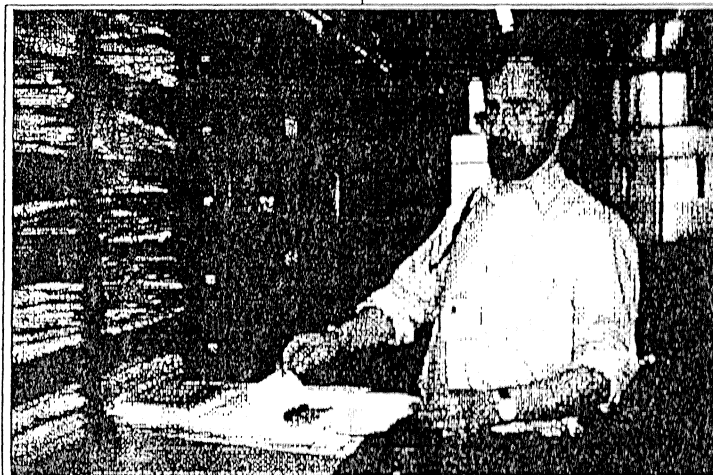
ARTICLES

Toronto '95, the tenth annual SPNHC meeting and herbarium workshop. (Royal Ontario Museum, 2-6 June)

Keeping the pulse on modern museum trends in natural sciences, SPNHC's theme for the 1995 conference was more botanically orientated. Four days of largely interesting talks relevant to modern conservation problems and discoveries. The first day centred around the role of natural history museums and a general updating of museum curatorial duties, especially collections management and associated problems. Stephen Jay Gould (MCZ) spoke of the glory of natural history museums and how he deplored the present day trend of putting real and scientifically relevant specimens aside for electronic and hi-tech theme park displays, of little scientific value, just to bring in the public. Some

more specific topics were also presented including biochemical reactions in bone and keratin to show how they deteriorate under certain conditions; Victoria Purewal (NM Wales) showed examples from a 'herbarium' of wax flower models, how these had deteriorated and how the NMW were finding ways to cure this problem, the use of original illustrations to act as a control against colour leaching in fluid preserved

fish specimens was presented. Julian Carter (NMW) provided a useful buffer for formalin preservation. Chris Collins gave the meeting the 'low-down' on the proposed Cambridge Conference next year - 'Madrid 2' as it has been nicknamed! The second day's presentations were centred around problems and disasters with



Rob Huxley (NHM) with fungal specimens on 'moose balls' (moose dung)

collections. Storage of specimens in tropical climates, problems with air conditioning, off-gassing insecticides affecting certain plastics, preparing for and acting on disasters, to the ultimate

problem of running a museum in an active war zone!

The third and fourth days made up the Herbarium Workshop. The ROM director, John McNeill, welcomed participants to the two day workshop and commented that herbaria had not changed that much since the times of Linnaeus. He also expressed concern at the non-standard approach of modern taxonomists using variation as opposed to sub-species in the lowest taxon. Preventative conservation measures were discussed during the first of these workshop days and included such subjects as collection risk evaluation, air conditioning for a herbarium, insect problems and coping with freezing so as not to destroy seed viability; the suitability of herbarium papers, inks and adhesives and recent developments relating to these materials. The evening was taken up with a most useful 'bazaar' - an exchange of latest developments, ideas and technology relating to herbaria.

Subjects for the second day of the workshop revolved, initially, around bar-coding - the pro's and con's, suitability for large collections and ease of accessioning and updating. The remainder of the day discussed techniques, ideas, loan policies and techniques surrounding destructive sampling of both plant and animal tissues for DNA extraction¹.

Simon's poster was centred on problems encountered with RH when trying to store entire (freeze-dried) fungal sporocarps. It also outlined the arguments for starting a more scientific mycota herbarium in such a fungal rich county as Hampshire. Although not intended to be an in-depth scientific review about conserving collected fungi it was aimed at just the correct level to provide the contacts and feedback essential to the setting up of such a herbarium. Over the next few years the information gathered at this conference should manifest itself as a county mycology herbarium.

¹If you require a longer report, please write to:

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Tenth Annual Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections meeting and herbarium workshop 2-6 June 1995

The conference, as expected, was of a high standard and addressed many interesting and relevant topics covering several aspects of conservation. However, although the topics covered were of considerable interest, it was difficult to relate them to my own discipline, that of botanical conservation. Nevertheless, I was pleased that on this occasion a two day herbarium workshop was held towards the end of the conference. The workshop involved presentations and slide shows, question and answer time with a small parcel of specialists and finally a poster session. The talks were interesting and addressed practical issues, the question time was informative but brief, and the poster sessions of a high standard.

Topics covered included studies on the stability of materials used in botanical conservation, the conservation of herbarium specimens with a view to DNA sampling and the advantage of heat ventilating air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Particularly relevant were presentations assessing materials frequently used in botanical conservation. Jane Down (CCI) reviewed a range of adhesives used for mounting specimens on herbarium sheets. Whether it is better to strap or glue has always been a conjectural point. She concluded that regardless of the adhesive used, it would eventually become acidic and discoloured and that the best and most stable material available was gelatin-backed linen tape, which is the method currently used at the National Museum of Wales. The following debate failed to resolve the matter but it appears that the majority of institutions continue to use glue, though a few actually glue and strap.

Although methylcellulose has been used for sometime as an adhesive in paper conservation, and has many other uses including the softening of old adhesives to aid removal, it has only recently been employed in botanical conservation. It appears to remain flexible for some time once dry. Sodium carboxyl methyl cellulose is also used in some institutions but this has generally been abandoned by paper