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The morning of the second day also saw an amusing 'interlude' billed as 'Video presentation: A different kind of science and conservation at the Academy'. In the first clip the video shows the catching of a new species in Yellowstone National Park - a "Barney". The next clip showed Earle Spamer and Ned Gilmore of the Academy looking very serious and sitting in immaculate lab coats being interviewed on the Canadian 'Discovery' Channel about the discovery of this new species, "Barney" (-a cuddly purple dinosaur) and how they tracked its movement to a shopping mall by following press reports! How a straight face was kept whilst being interviewed.....

Overall a good conference which was worth attending, even if it meant having to check numerous American bars and late night diners!

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Second World Congress on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections. 20th to 24th August 1996, University of Cambridge

This meeting was well attended by the Museum community from around the world and promised to be exciting for that reason alone. It was a wonderful opportunity to see how things are done elsewhere and to make useful contacts. However, the common theme uniting the delegates soon became clear. Lack of funds, lack of understanding of their role by the public and government alike and subsequent lack of confidence in the future. Despite this, the work on show in the excellent range of posters and workshops was heartening and the individual's commitment to their collections undeniable. I was not alone in feeling that there was too much emphasis in the oral presentations on senior management strategies for maintaining their institutions, important though this obviously is. More presentations of hands-on work by innovative curators and conservators would have been welcome. It was hard to find everyone you wanted to talk to AND find time to view the contents of the many poster rooms during the breaks. However, the general impression was of a high standard of organisation, presentation and entertainment set in splendid venue; the organisers and sponsors are to be congratulated on their efforts to give everybody a good time. However, one small niggle about the University catering as related to cost must be mentioned. The meals were imaginative but quite expensive, on one occasion I was given the smallest main course I

had ever been seriously offered anywhere (and anyone who knows me will realise how unfortunate that was!).

Jenny Moore, October 1996.

Cambridge 1996 - The International Congress - an overview

En garde Chris Collins! I recall his talk at Toronto (SPNHC 1995) where he glibly told the assembly that the Cambridge Congress would comprise less talking and more doing, less 'suits' and more solving of conservation problems. In reality there were many suits from as many different nations who mostly had the same basic message 'If only there was more money/positive political attitude towards the excellent work being achieved by museums that were currently so undervalued....' Apart from preaching to the converted (alas!) many of the speakers were repeating this theme from their own point of view, some with accents that were hard to follow. Despite this the talks were, generally, of a high standard and showed the progress of taxonomy and the achievements of using hi-tech equipment to reveal all sorts of hitherto-undiscovered data about museum specimens.

More specifically, Sir Robert May mentioned the problem of too many students bettering themselves with post grad. qualifications but which were unsuitable for the more essential posts of collections managers. This statement on its own was significant since there are still those who unfortunately maintain that museum collections are an expensive luxury and that all data from them could be logged into databases and then the specimens disposed of. Bearing in mind what modern day computer viruses can do and have done to any institutions I can scarcely start to understand this attitude; more of this later.

The second day's talks centred around using collections as a resource, particularly for raising money from industry using geological material; the question of who, in reality,



Richard Leakey in full flow

owned a museum's collections. Tom Strang, with Sally Shelton as co-writer, wittily stimulated the intelligence of the audience with his black hole theory (or was it an exploding universe?) and the necessity of stabilising the exterior morphology of 45M year old pine cones. The final full day concentrated on collection development in poorer more far-flung countries and financing natural history museums. Neil Chalmers, latterly, exhorted the importance of culturing the Press and using them to bring museums into the finance raising limelight. This was followed by talks about fund-raising in which William Vartorella organised courses specifically to upgrade museum collections.

Posters were so numerous that one hardly had time to look at them all let alone discuss their content. These were, in the main, more relevant to museum work and problems encountered with collections and were of a high standard. Particularly memorable were those of Paul Hillyard - computer generated labels forming 'alphabet soup' which attracted much discussion, also the Smithsonian Institution team's effect of fluid-preserving tissue elements, one of Madrid's CSIC posters about the existence of insect



Simon's freeze drying fat under discussion by Mary Spencer-Jones and Shirley Stone
pests in fossil invertebrate collections and Andries van Dam whose poster related to fluid-preserved collections and interactions between jars, fluids and sealants.

The workshops too were of a high standard but unfortunately were not organised in parallel so that all the computer/internet workshops took place on the one afternoon as did those for conservation the next day. This was disappointing since it limited attendance at only one workshop per afternoon and those from the NSCG who attended, were stuck answering questions about our own projects and were unable to attend other relevant workshops; it also removed two thirds of our intended audience. Nonetheless about 30-40 delegates came and discussed conservation problems in the petrology lab. where we had set up our displays.



Paul in a 'brown study' (sorry) and Donna humidifying plant specimens to relax them



Caroline Cotgrove showing Ann Pinzl herbarium specimens

This was followed by a most enjoyable soiree of watching Elizabethan dancing, set in the Tudor dining hall of St Johns College where we could see and hear the rhythms and steps of different dances, some with hops and much twirling of the leading leg and foot. Eventually everyone (?) was drawn into a farandole that wove its way in and out. The Congress Dinner, in the same venue was a most worthy occasion and was enjoyed by those who attended.

Despite the disappointments the conference, as a whole, was enjoyable and went very smoothly, thanks to Chris and Margaret Johnson and helped by the wonderful architecture and atmosphere of the old buildings of St John's College. Chris had obviously worked hard to get as many world-wide speakers as he did and this was reflected by the high attendance.

Simon Moore.