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## **NSCG Newsletter**

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Title: BCG Trip to the Paris Natural History Museum (November)

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Source: Moore, S. (1997). BCG Trip to the Paris Natural History Museum (November). *NSCG Newsletter, Issue 5*, 5 - 7.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/751>

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# The Conservation Forum

## UK Organisation in Partnership with The Conservation Unit of the Museums & Galleries Commission

Grant bid and proposal to the Conservation Advisory Committee of the Conservation Unit from the Conservation Forum for administration of UK conference grants.

The forum is very grateful for the opportunity to manage the grants funds which the Conservation Unit of the Museums and Galleries Commission propose to make available to the Forum to administer. These individuals will be members of one or more of the conservation professional bodies comprising the Conservation Forum.

The Conservation Forum proposes that for this first financial year of the transfer of the administration of these funds from the Conservation Unit to the Conservation Forum, that the grant is divided among the membership currently making up the forum, as follows: Each body is to be allocated a sum equal to five percent (one twentieth) of the overall amount, with the remaining fifty percent available to all the bodies according to pressure of need. This would afford the flexibility to meet greater need in particular areas where there might for example be a conference, symposium, or workshop of special importance. In this way we would hope to provide the maximum possible support without the risk of having moneys unspent in areas where the need has not been great during the year.

The forum will undertake to submit a retrospective account at the year end, and it is proposed that the beneficiaries of grants produce a report to be disseminated appropriately. For the bridging period of 1997/8 it is proposed that each Forum body will have 5% of the overall amount to disperse to members of the Forum organisations to attend conferences which it has organised. Where a body is not hosting any conferences, this money will be used to sponsor its own members to attend conferences run by other Forum organisations.

The remaining 50% of the overall amount will be allocated as seems most appropriate to all Forum members as soon as the CAC approval for this post is granted.

The Forum membership has seen and approved the Guidance notes for the administration of UK Conference Grants drawn up by Val King, Training Development Officer for the Conservation Unit.

A calendar of UK conferences already arranged for the financial year of 1997/98 is attached. It is likely that there will be additions to this programme before the beginning of the financial year.

The Conservation Forum Requests a total sum of £5000 to disperse as grants to individuals via the professional bodies for the financial year of 1997/8 plus £500 administration fee.

Tom Caley/Carol Procter 19/11/1996 and approved by all Forum representatives.

## Conservation Forum - Insurance Seminar 29th September 1997

One day conference to be held in London, organised by The Conservation Forum with the support of the Museums and Galleries Commission. It will be of interest to conservators and freelancers in other fields. Speakers will include representatives from the main client bodies: National Trust, English Heritage etc. There will also be presentations from experts in the insurance field on loss adjustment, litigation and professional indemnity and from conservators with practical experience in this area. For further details contact: Valerie W. Munday, Conservation Forum Co-ordinator, 16, Queen Anne's Gate London SW1H 9AA  
Tel: 0171-233 4200 Fax: 0171-233 3686

## BCG Trip to the Paris Natural History Museum (November)

Well done Kathie Way for a well-organised trip to the Paris Natural History Museum! Le Eurostar whisked our group of curators, conservators, collection managers and hangers-on neatly under the Channel without kipping us (that occurred the week after our return!), although we did not enjoy being herded altogether onto the train through a very crowded waiting area! The Metro in the Gard du nord treated us to a 'suspect package' incident so that many of our group showed true British grit and initiative by walking the 700 metres to the Hotel Orange in the Rue de Trevisé (just off Lafayette).

I noticed that there was an evening of short ballets by 20<sup>th</sup> century choreographers at the Paris Opera just down the road from the hotel. Despite having to pay 'extra' from the ticket touts (which raised the cost to London prices) it proved to be a most enjoyable evening set in the splendid baroque/rococo decor of the building. A stentorian-voiced programme seller whose cry echoed round the building during the interval combined to create an atmosphere worthy of the famous 'phantom'.

Next day was an early start (for some) to the Natural History Museum to view the newly opened Grande Galerie: an imposing early 19<sup>th</sup> century building whose vertices have been put to good use to display arboreal and flying species of animals. The basement area follows the current trend for museum lighting - quite atmospheric for the oceanic exhibits that it houses but hard on the visitor who has to squint at the (back-lit and unobtrusive) labels and avoid treading on children. A large plastic, walk round model of sand grains could amuse visitors, making them aware of the ways that meiofauna might intercommunicate with imagined squeaks and scrapes. Film loops showed life at bathyscape levels, shores and tides. Dried marine algae were mounted between sheets of perspex and fluid preserved specimens were suspended in their jars on saucers that clipped onto perspex mounts. The public were obviously tempted to touch the real specimens, as shown by the occasionally ruffled fur or feather, but were politely asked not to do so by the *gardiens*.

Upstairs the African gallery was better lit but the standard of taxidermy was only average; areas of shrinkage seen on birds were less noticeable on the mammal specimens which were arranged as if to process through the gallery to some imaginary ark. The see-thru lifts treated visitors to birds in flight and arboreal primates. The café served excellent drinking chocolate.

While a group of us was waiting to see the *Zoothèque*, or underground store, we were asked to visit the meteor gallery, showing fascinating clips of video/film footage of heavenly bodies coming to earth and the subsequent damage they caused.

The *Zoothèque* itself is a recently built (1994) labyrinth of dry and spirit storerooms utilising manual compactor systems. The maze of doors, corridors and staircases even disoriented our guides, adding a surreal touch - one wondered whether specimens might be beamed from one store to another! The spirit store, as its name implied, held largely spirit-preserved material, only a little was preserved in formalin. Many specimens were suspended in jars using glass balloon floats. Despite its great size many units were overcrowded and there was much conservation work needed to bring the specimens back to a stable and presentable state. The store holds about 1 million fish, 10K mammals, 4.5k birds, several million invertebrates and about 1,000 types. RH was a problem, the store

being on the same level as the Seine (about ½ mile away); nonetheless the store was maintained at 55% RH and 15°C, guarded by a halon extinguisher system.

Keenies (or those who were officially funded for the trip) then visited the micro-zoo but your correspondent's stomach sought sustenance from a nearby couscous restaurant - the only good value meal of the whole trip. Prices in Paris have risen substantially and with the rate of exchange of 8F to the £, a hot chocolate in the Café Kleber cost £3. I noticed that at surrounding tables several students were sharing one (small) bottle of mineral water! Even a light meal in a brasserie included a 0.4 litre of ordinary beer at 45 francs (£5.50) and a plate of chips at 28 (£3.50)! The Eurostar is a quick ride to the heart of Paris but fails to tell you to find the scruffiest bars which still offer a *café-calva* at a reasonable price. At least such beverages can still warm the heart even if shared with some specimens of *Blatella germanica*!

The return journey came all too soon; the Eurostar was again quick but having to wait 40 minutes in a short queue for sandwiches (all that they had despite the tasty menu) reminded me of previous encounters on British Railways back in the 1960's.

Simon Moore

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## Are we relying too heavily on computers - a reply.

Enquiry: fish spears from the Yukon

Answer: 22

Time taken: 1 minute 30 seconds to answer enquiry, 10 minute to retrieve objects and 8 minutes to print out full records

Enquiry: documents relating to John Player

Answer: 12

Time taken: 4 1/2 hours to search indexes and record cards and to retrieve objects.

One of these enquiries was answered using a computer the other using manual indexes and card systems. No prizes for guessing which one is which.

Museum collections are made up of anything from 100 to 100's of thousands of unique objects. The larger and more varied the collections the greater the amount of paperwork, record cards, manual indexes needed to make sense of it. Handling