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The Biology Curator

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displays. The storage system is based mainly on the specifications established by the staff of the Natural History Museum, London. They developed a good relationship with suppliers of cupboards and drawers to their designs and generously allowed other museums to independently order for themselves using these criteria. This is an ideal situation within which collective purchasing power has the potential to significantly reduce unit costs. This applies also to strip or tray inserts for the drawers — card trays, especially, dramatically decrease in unit price as volume increases. The relative ease with which an entire storage system to modern conservation standards has been created is due to the valuable contributions of various collection managers at NHM, particularly Nigel Ferguson, and to Mike Wilson of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, to whom our grateful thanks are due. The number of drawers purchased is 1000 and new units have been bought with the capacity to house 1120 drawers. It is the case that the existing 780 suitable 'Hills' drawers described above could be re-housed in these new units. Their dimensions are compatible, and should it be desired the entire collections would then be in the one system if funding was to be raised for that purpose.

The Public Face

To ensure the greatest possible user value from the project there are a number of interactive elements. New displays will draw on the collections to illustrate the phenomenal diversity and abundance, if not dominance, of the insects. These will demonstrate several aspects of Thomas Eisner's comment that 'Bugs are not going to inherit the earth — they own it now. So we might as well make peace with the landlord'. Incorporated in this will be on-line access to the database that will be created during the project and other computer interactivities. A particular feature within the public displays will be the incorporation of a study collection dealing with various aspects of insect biology for those who wish to delve further. It is also the intention to maintain some live insect displays within the museum.

It is also intended to develop WWW pages to promote the existence of the resource and highlight its strengths to the world community. Thus the specific content of the collection will be made known and then be available for consultation by visitors to Glasgow or through loans.

For any study involving insects, be it ecological, behavioural or systematic, a collection is a tool of immense value. Although in functioning as a university museum it provides a home for the products of research, at whatever level, it is not a graveyard for projects. Examination of a collection, probably put together for an entirely different purpose, reveals many strange morphological phenomena whose function can only be revealed by studying the living animal. So ZIP will provide a starting point for ideas and be integral to the development of teaching and research, not only within Glasgow University's Division of Environment & Evolutionary Biology but also to the community at large. It is the aim of ZIP to create an asset which will be managed for the future comprehension of the insect world — one that has a profound impact on the ecology of terrestrial life on earth including the human species.

ZIP is managed by Maggie Reilly, curator of zoology, Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery, Geoff Hancock has been appointed Entomology Collections Manager. Patricia Andrew, Scottish Museums Council Assistant Director (Curatorial), is the official Heritage Lottery Monitor. Supporting funding of £17,000 has been received from the University of Glasgow Trust.

Contact address for further information is Zoology Museum, Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ (Tel: 0141 330 4772; Fax: 0141 330 5971) or email ghancock@museum.gla.ac.uk.

From The Observer

The text of a letter here reproduced, is a tale of such exquisite pathos that it simply demands a wider sharing. Sent from the Antiquities curator of the Smithsonian in Washington to one of the institution's more regular correspondents. It is, we are told, absolutely kosher. Read it, enjoy and reflect on that fine, fine line between tears and laughter.

Dear Sir,

Thank-you for your latest submission to the institution labelled '93211-D, layer seven, next to the clothesline post . . . Hominid skull.' We have given this specimen a careful and detailed examination, and regret to inform you that we disagree with your theory that it represents conclusive proof of the presence of early man in Charleston County two million years ago.

Rather, it appears that what you have found is the head of a Barbie doll, of the variety one of our staff, who has small children, believes to be 'Malibu Barbie.' It is evident that you have given a great deal of thought to the analysis of this specimen, and you may be quite certain that those of us who are familiar with your prior work in the field were loath to come to contradiction with your findings. However, we do feel that there are a number of physical attributes of the specimen which might have tipped you off to its modern origin:

- 1) The material is moulded plastic. Ancient hominid remains are typically fossilised bone.
- 2) The cranial capacity of the specimen is approximately 9 cubic centimetres, well below the threshold of even the earliest identified proto-hominids.
- 3) The dentition pattern evident on the skull is more consistent with the common domesticated dog than it is with the ravenous man-eating Pliocene clams you speculate roamed the wetlands during that time. This latter finding is certainly one of the most intriguing hypotheses you have submitted in your history with this institution, but the evidence seems to weigh rather heavily against it.

Without going into too much detail, let us say that:

- A. The specimen looks like the head of a Barbie doll that a dog has chewed on.
- B. Clams do not have teeth

It is with feelings tinged with melancholy that we must deny your request to have the specimen carbon-dated. This is

partially due to the heavy load on our lab must bear in its normal operation, and partly due to carbon-dating's notorious inaccuracy with recent fossils. To the best of our knowledge, no Barbie dolls were produced prior to 1956 AD, and carbon-dating is likely to produce wildly inaccurate results.

Sadly, we must also deny your request that we approach the National Science Foundation Phylogeny Department with the concept of assigning you specimen the scientific name *Australopithecus spiff-arino*. Speaking personally I for one, fought tenaciously for the acceptance of your proposed taxonomy, but was ultimately voted down because the species name you selected was hyphenated, and did not really sound like it might be Latin.

However, we gladly accept your generous donation of this fascinating specimen to the museum. Whilst it is undoubtedly not a Hominid fossil, it is nonetheless, yet

another riveting example of the great body of work you seem to accumulate here so effortlessly. You should know that our Director has reserved a special shelf in his own office for the display of the specimens you have previously submitted to the Institution, and the entire staff speculates daily on what you will happen upon next in your digs at the site you have discovered in your back-yard.

We eagerly anticipate your trip to our nation's capital that you proposed in your last letter, and several of us are pressing the Director to pay for it. We are particularly interested in hearing you expand on your theories surrounding the trans-positating fillifitation of ferrous ions in a structural matrix that makes the excellent juvenile *Tyrannosaurus Rex* femur you recently discovered take on the deceptive appearance of a rusty 9-mm Sears Craftsman autom otive crescent wrench.

Yours in Science, Harvey Rowe, Curator, Antiquities



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