

Oregon reptile fossils traced

By Kirsten Bolin

Of the Emerald

Fossils found in Northeast Oregon's Wallowa Mountains have been identified as the bones of an ichthyosaur, a fish-like reptile native to the South Pacific, says William Orr, curator of the Condon fossil collection in the University Museum of Natural History.

The 200 million-year-old fossils push back the known record of vertebrate animals in the state by nearly 50 million years, Orr says.

The backbone and ribs of the ichthyosaur, an animal similar in size and shape to a modern-day porpoise, were found in a limestone deposit near Baker by a group of University students exploring the area in 1981.

Using a variety of chisels, dental instruments and acids, Orr has been removing the fossil fragments from the slabs of rock for the last four years and finished cleaning and identifying the bones only recently.

Ichthyosaurs swam in schools and fed on fish and squid far out in the open sea. The largest ichthyosaur ever found was more than 50 feet in length, he says.

The fossil's southwest Pacific origin is significant because it adds to a growing body of evidence indicating that much of eastern Oregon and northern California were transported by the process of continental drift across the Pacific Ocean to be later plastered onto North America, Orr says.

Big plates of limestone rock containing various fossil materials were carried over by the drift, and the animal remains were transported in fossil form to regions where the animal never lived, he says.

The rib bones were identified by Orr as being of Oriental origin because of their distinctive shape. Native American bones have little indentation in the center, but Oriental bones have grooves and a figure-eight shape, he says.

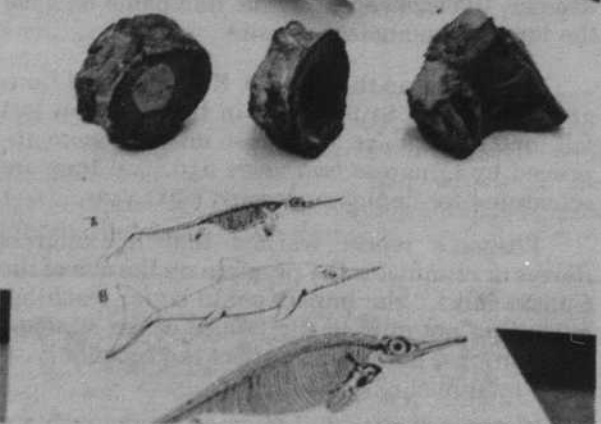
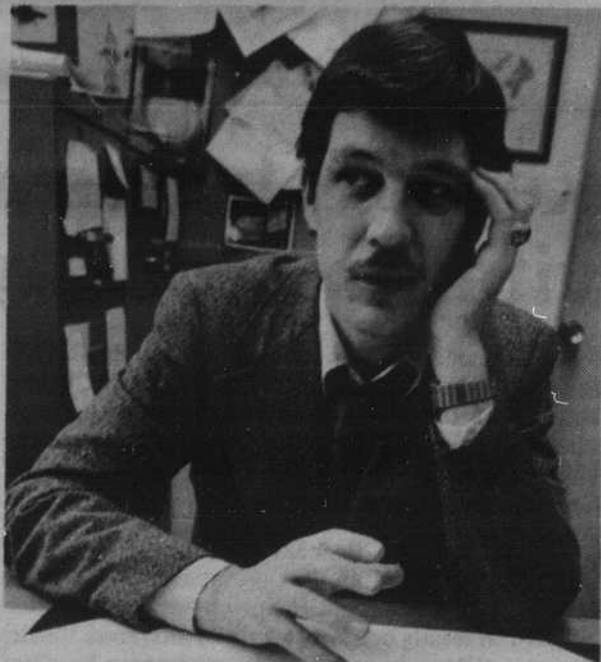


Photo by Michael Clapp

William Orr, a curator at the University Museum of Natural History, explains the significance of these 200 million-year-old fossils.

Slides of Nicaragua

ASUO President Julie Davis will hold a slide show and discussion today on her recent trip to Central America as part of the weekly Brown Bag Lunch series.

Davis visited the countries of Nicaragua and Honduras for a week in mid-February, as part of a "fact finding mission" co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon organization in Portland. Seventeen other representatives of the state's private, professional, political and other sectors also made the trip, which was designed to give citizens a close-up look at the situation in those Central American countries.

The trip to Central America was Davis' first, as she participated as a University student body representative.

Today's presentation will be held in Room 221, Law Center at 11:30 a.m. and will last an hour. Davis will hold a second show and discussion Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. in the EMU Forum Room. The public is invited to attend the free showings.

Food use explored

"From the Soil to Your Table," a forum on the safety of the food supply, will be held on campus Wednesday.

The forum begins at 9:30 a.m. with a discussion on "Nutritional Quality of the U.S. Food System" by Professors Joan Dye Gussow of Columbia University and Jean Peters of Oregon State University.

Gussow will also speak on "Women, Power and Food" today at 4 p.m. in the EMU Dad's Room.

At 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Mary O'Brien, of Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, and Jake Makenzie, of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will discuss "Pesticide Use and Food Safety."

At 3 p.m., farmers Tom Hunton and Robert Cooperrider will discuss "Agricultural Chemicals and the Food Supply." Several recent films on the food supply will be shown at 6:30 p.m.

These forum events will be held in EMU Room 167. Registration for the event, which is sponsored by the University's department of school and community health and other groups, is \$15.

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