



New Web Site

The West Coast Fossil Park is proud to announce the launch of a brand new web site on September 21st 2009. It is packed with information on the Fossil Park in general and in particular describes the fauna and flora of our area from some 5–5.2 million years ago, up to the present time. Please visit www.fossilpark.org.za and enjoy a journey back in time.

Merry Christmas



A Great Find

As mentioned on the web site, 1958 saw the first publication of a fossil discovery at Beard's Quarry, fifteen years after the start of phosphate mining at Langebaanweg.

Sadly an estimated 80% of the fossil deposits were destroyed during this time. However there is an up-side to this, without the mining operation this treasure trove might never have been discovered.

Mr. Izak S. Brown (photo) an employee of the mine first noticed the presence of fossilised bones, namely an ankle bone of a sivathere and a tooth of an elephant.

He brought this to the attention of the mine management and the rest is history as they say.

Dedicated workers were employed to collect and bag all fossils excavated during subsequent mining operations.

Up to the closure of the mine in 1993, in excess of a million



Photo: courtesy Douglas Brown

fossils were taken to the South African Museum in Cape Town in order to study them. Mr. Brown unfortunately died many years ago, but we managed to contact his son Douglas who very kindly supplied us with a photo of his father.

The West Coast and indeed the Nation owes Mr. Izak Brown a great debt, he could so easily have admired the fossils for a bit, shrugged, and left them where he found them.

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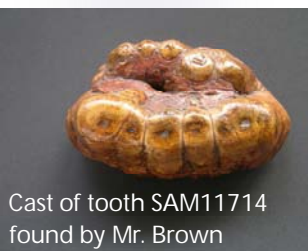
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Cast of tooth SAM11714 found by Mr. Brown

Photo: Dr Roger Smith

Palaeontology at Langebaanweg

Once the news was out that fossils were indeed present at the phosphate mine in Langebaanweg, Palaeontologists from South Africa and also from overseas set to work. Professor Ronald Singer of UCT who made a considerable contribution to archaeological and palaeontological research in South Africa, was instrumental in identification and classification of fossils, not only at the phosphate mine, but also at nearby Elandsfontein.

Professor R. Singer moved to Chicago but even there he continued with research on fossils from Langebaanweg. He sadly passed away in 2005.

Dr. Brett Hendey who had been working with Professor Singer dedicated many years to unveiling the secrets of the quarries and the fossils enshrined in them. One of the stars of the fossil beds, the *Sivatherium hendeyi* is named after him. In 1982 his book LANGEBAANWEG A RECORD OF PASSED LIFE was published by the South African Museum, a most wonderful account and description of the creatures which dwelled here millions of years ago. Alas this book is no longer in print, so people who are interested should look out for it in second hand book shops, car boot sales etc. This book, so far is the only one written on the West Coast Fossil Park and well worth the search. HD

Ongoing Research at West Coast Fossil Park

Dr. Hendey published many papers on the Langebaanweg fossil deposits, before leaving the museum in 1986.

Due to economic constraints it was decided to close down all mining operations in 1993 where after scientific research slowed down somewhat. It is due to the efforts by museum personnel and the help of the National Monuments Council that a 14 ha fossil rich area was declared a National Monument Site in 1998. In 2005 the entire mining area was declared a National Heritage Site.

Since then research and education programmes have increased, not least due to a financial shot in the arm by the AOP (African Origins Platform) in the form of a three year grant. The aim is to enhance Education, Research and Tourism on the West Coast.

In recent years Dr. Roger Smith and Dr. Deano Stynder have been responsible for the digging at the West Coast Fossil Park, this takes place usually once a year. At present the smaller of the two tunnels is

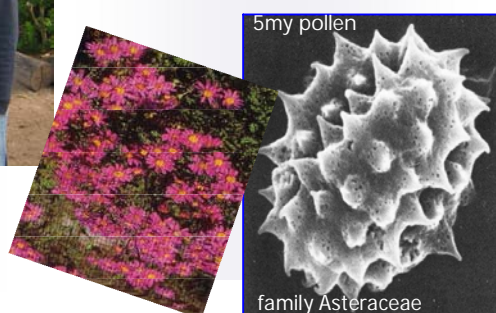


Dr. Deano Stynder (left) and students

being prepared for visitors.

Research is however not restricted to

“them bones” only. The entire terrain of the Fossil Park site is richly endowed with palaeontological remains from millions of years ago, up to the present time. Studies on fossilised birds, plant pollen, marine life as well as climate and geological studies are ongoing. A study on alien vegetation is also carried out at present. Post graduate and post-doctoral researchers from this country and also from overseas advance their knowledge at the WCFP.



Drilling down into the Miocene

As part of the AOP/WCFP (African Origins Platform/West Coast Fossil Park) initiative Masters student Lara Sciscio, who is attached to the project, has been supervising drilling in Noordhoek, Cape Town, into deposits which range from the Miocene (25 million years ago) to the Plio-Pleistocene (~2 million years ago). A core of 50m was drilled and although artesian water was reached at around 35m, a good return was made in levels below and above this depth. The aim of the drilling is to retrieve pollen, organic material, and to take samples for dating with the aim of building up a tight chronology. A core was drilled close by in the 1970's and Joey Coetzee and John Rogers (UCT) retrieved some good pollen samples. Since then a number of new



Lara Sciscio and her supervisor Dr Dave Roberts take a sample from a rich peat core

This article and photograph kindly provided by Dr. Thalassa Matthews

dating and analytical techniques have become available and will be applied to this new core. The results of these various studies will provide information on the ambient land surface temperature during the time the sediments were laid down, a pollen analysis will provide intriguing information as to the plants growing in the peninsula, and dating will serve to place changes in climate, temperature and environment in a temporal context. Pollen samples are also being taken from cores drilled at the site of the West Coast Fossil Park (Langebaanweg) and Lara will be studying and comparing these as well. The cores from these two areas should greatly contribute to our understanding of the palaeoenvironment and palaeoclimate during these periods.

Message from the Manager

We are constantly confronted with the need to market the Park more widely. This new website and Newsletter will go a long way to addressing this need. Thanks to all who have made this possible and in particular to the AOP team headed up by Roger Smith, coordinated by Thalassa Matthews and funded by the DST. Special thanks to Heidi Duncan for compiling this Newsletter. However, if we want to attract more than the 1200 (on average) visitors per month to the

Park we need more staff, more facilities and more funding. We have submitted a major application to the Lotto, thanks largely to the efforts of our Chairman Dave Mitchell. A positive response would help establish the Fossil Park as an iconic heritage, education and tourism entity on the West Coast. This would further justify the considerable funding and support that has been provided by Bhpbilliton and Iziko Museum over the past 11 years. The majority of our visitors find the fossils totally fascinating and this is motivation enough to persevere.

Thanks to the Fossil Park staff and Trustees, Iziko Museum, volunteers and funders for your commitment to get the Park to where it is today. We are all hoping for great new discoveries and new developments in 2010 and future years to come and may whatever unfolds be appropriate, positive and sustainable.

Pippa Haarhoff

People in the Park



Photo: Heidi Duncan

For three weeks during Nov-Dec2009 the WCFP was home to Jan Krebs, a student at the University of Applied Sciences in Eberswalde, outside Berlin in Germany. Jan is studying for a BA-degree in Landscape Management and Nature Conservation. At present he is doing an Internship under the auspices of the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve Company in Darling.

This position brought him to the Fossil Park where he assisted with the compilation of a conservation management plan.

Jan seems a very dedicated young man, in the past he spent a semester in "solitary confinement" on Scharhoern, a tiny island in the Elbe Estuary. His task was to monitor jetsam and flotsam washed up on the beaches in order to determine the impact this kind of pollution has on birds and the environment as a whole. We wish Jan all the very best for the future and hope to welcome him on these shores again soon.

A BIG THANK YOU

Our outside entertainment area had not been looking too good after the heavy winter rains. Brenda Walker a temporary employee at the WCFP thought she could do something about it, and indeed, she was as good as her word



Photo: Pippa Haarhoff

Brenda contacted Lafarge, a local company, who supplied us with a ton and a half of stone chips including free delivery. Members of staff together with some extra men spread the gravel, making the area look very smart. Our sincere gratitude to Lafarge and to Mr. Patrick Ndlwana their area manager, for authorizing this very generous donation to the WCFP. We salute Brenda Walker for her initiative and drive.

Photo above: Mr. Patrick Ndlwana and Irma van Zyl his secretary.

A Special Visitor at West Coast Fossil Park

On Saturday the 21st of November 2009, The West Coast Fossil Park was privileged to host Shadon Jafthas, his parents Shani and Donovan as well as Lynne Eastes. Lynne is a volunteer for **Reach for a Dream**. This organisation's aim is to fulfil the dreams of children faced with life threatening illnesses. Shadon is 10 years old and suffers from Haemophilia.

It was intriguing to learn that a child so young seems to have a fascination with "things one digs up" as he explained. Not only did he want to come to the Fossil Park, but en route a visit to the Archaeology department at UCT was also slotted in. He described all the wonderful things he was shown there.



Photo: Heidi Duncan

After looking with interest at the fossil beds, he spent over 2 hours sifting through the fossil rich material which is kept specially for finding small and micro fossils. Shadon has eagle eyes and found many bones and teeth of various little creatures that inhabited this area more than 5 million years ago.

Having Shadon with us was a real pleasure and all of us at the West Coast Fossil Park wish him and his family the very best for the future and we look forward to another visit from him in the near future.



Fire on the West Coast



Photo by Jan Krebs

Of course it is necessary for some plant species to be exposed to fire for germination, but when this occurs on tinder-dry grassland in a fairly strong South Easter and blowing toward one's property, it could be cause for a pretty uneasy feeling, to say the least. In the course of the last few months this happened three times on the boundaries of the West Coast Fossil Park. The local fire brigade were always ready and on the spot within a very short time. Unfortunately there are areas inaccessible to their vehicles and because of the swiftness of the fire the flames were soon licking the land of the fossil park. It is thanks to all our neighbours, our staff, Jan Krebs and Johann Badenhorst the Manager of Vula who, together with ten of Vula's men beat out the flames and stopped a potential disaster. Our grateful thanks to them all. Part of the fossil park borders on the R45. We appeal to road users to be mindful of littering, a carelessly tossed cigarette butt or a glass bottle could spark a fire with tragic consequences.

Our Programme

Tours: Duration approximately 45 minutes

Hourly tours on weekdays:

10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 13:00, 14:00 and 15:00.

Weekend and public holidays hourly tour times are as follows:

10:00, 11:00, 12:00 and 13:00.

It is advisable to phone to confirm the tour times

Dr. Roger Smith with his team and young onlookers



www.fossilpark.org.za

Postal address

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Fax: +27 (0)22 766 1765

info@fossilpark.org.za

Where to find us

R45 between Langebaanweg
and Vredenburg, West Coast

Fees: Adults R50

Students and Seniors: R25

Children: R15

There is no entrance fee charged for registered tour guides and accredited press representatives.

Children under 5 years of age are free.

The park entrance fee does not include the fee for the guided tours or for the mountain bike and walking trails.



Photo Andy Winder

General Information

Weekdays (Monday to Friday):

08.00 -16.00

Saturday, Sunday & public holidays:

Opening times vary according to season. (You are advised to phone or email ahead of your visit).

Closed: Christmas Day, New Year's Day & Good Friday

Entrance Fees

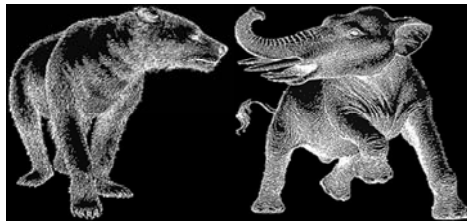
Adults: R10.00

Seniors and Students: R8.00

Children: R5.00



Our thanks to the Artist Cedric Hunter for all illustrations.



Meet the Staff

Manager: Pippa Haarhoff

Edward Adonis

Flo Els

Catharine Bester

Nicky Engelbrecht

Elli Bogershausen

Cherryllene Esau

Carol Booysen

Amanda Mentoor

Maggie Coetzee

Frans Mentoor

Sarah Coetzee

Annette Rothenberg

Whitney Coetzee

Zelda Stefanus

Volunteers:

Heidi Duncan; Patricia Gelant;

Christine Nel; Cecily Oettle; Mike Turner

The Trustees of the West Coast Fossil Park

Chairperson Adv. David Mitchell; Vice Chairperson Ernest A. Messina;

Mrs. Veliswa Baduza; Professor Henry C Bredekamp;

Dr. Hamish G Robertson; Professor Rebecca Rogers-Ackermann.

We would like to take the opportunity to wish our visitors,
friends of the WCFP and our loyal supporters a
Happy Christmas and a very prosperous 2010

