



ATLAS OF THE PREHISTORIC WORLD

Reviewed by Judith A. Schiebout

Douglas Palmer

Discovery Channel Books, 1999, 224 p.

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This abundantly-illustrated book from Discovery Books is both readable by the general public and a pleasure for a university geological educator like me. The first segment, the Changing Globe, is the atlas which gives the work its name, covering the last 620 million years in earth's history in 18 double-page computer renderings which show land and sea, mountains and lowlands, and major global plate boundaries. The arrangement of the hemispheres, including modern continental positions in red and a mini-whole-world projection for each map, is helpful in getting oriented, particularly for those times when a hypothetical visitor in an orbiting time machine would not be able to recognize which modern continent or continental fragment was which. Each map has a Precambrian-to-present time line across its top to clarify exactly the time in earth history from which the glimpse of the past is taken and paragraphs covering special events for the period and their locations.

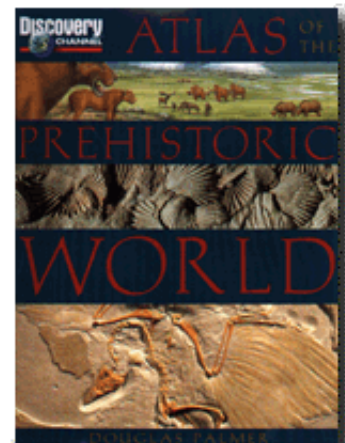
I have a basic familiarity with the continental arrangements through time, but found myself paging through and looking at the maps for fun. This is a great reference for orienting freshman students to global changes throughout earth history and for an introduction to the sequence of life history. It would also be a good choice for parents of upper elementary school and older children.

Part two, Ancient Worlds, covers the history of life from its origin through the rise of man, including pictures of fossils and reconstructions of ancient seafloors and landscapes. In each case, site locations are marked on an accompanying world map, putting the story of life history into global context better than any previous work I can recall. The pictures are spectacular. I particularly like the Cam-

brian Burgess Shale seafloor world and the Cretaceous-Tertiary asteroid impact.

Sites for reconstruction are chosen from all over the world (the author teaches at Cambridge in the UK). Some southern hemisphere sites are ones for which I had not previously seen reconstructions.

The breadth of data and amount of beautiful and colorful art work in this book are remarkable for the price, and the coverage is very good, up to the Tertiary, which gets short shrift, in keeping with the fact that it is a relatively short span of time. I would have liked to see it get a bit more emphasis, something for each epoch, as it is the time that directly shaped the modern world. Roughly 1/3 of the book is an Earth Fact File, which organizes information on basic concepts, definitions, early workers and the development of geologic thought, further reading, and other helpful background. In everything there must be a few quibbles. Mention of Charles Darwin, in the section on the geological time scale, for example, focuses on his overestimate for the age of Tertiary, and says nothing about the idea of organic evolution being at the heart of biostratigraphy. Although evolution is touched upon clearly in several areas, its prime role in life history is not as clearly emphasized as I



ing which mentions evolution, is not in Dr. Palmer's home nation, so the need to emphasize this point may seem less urgent to him. It is a small frustration that the discussion of continental positions for

the future is not well illustrated, in such a generally lavishly illustrated book. Re page 203, the Dinosaur Society is defunct.

Websites could have been profitably expanded to include:

Burgess Shale Project-

<http://www.Scienceweb.org/burgess/contents.html>

Evolution-

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/evolution.html>

Fossil Horses in Cyberspace-

<http://www.nps.gov/joda/horsetour.html>

Geological Society of America-

<http://www.geosociety.org>

List of State Fossils-

<http://www.intersurf.com/~heinrich/statefossil.html>

Museums in the USA-

<http://www.museumca.org/usa/index.html>

National Center for Science Education (keeps abreast of the evolution/creation controversy)-

<http://www4.nationalacademies.org/cfe/cfe.nsf>

Paleonet-

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/Paleonet/>

Walking with dinosaurs-

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dinosaurs/webguide/index.shtml>

Websurfers Biweekly Earth Science Review-

<http://home.rmi.net/~michaelg/>

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