



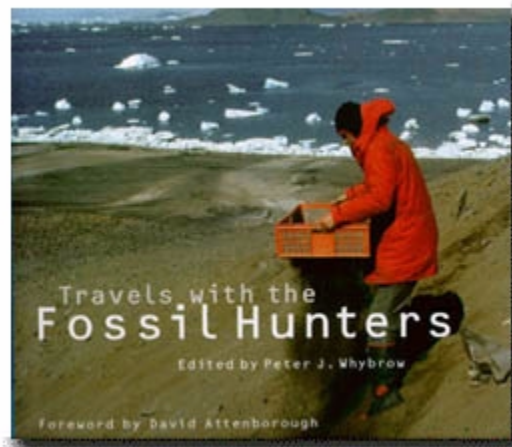
## TRAVELS WITH THE FOSSIL HUNTERS

Reviewed by Rochelle Caviness

Edited by Peter J. Whybrow  
Cambridge University Press, 2000, 212 pp.  
ISBN: 0-521-66301-6 \$39.95

Coffee table books are often nothing more than oversized picture books for adults. They are crammed with wonderful pictures, but little in the way of substantive text. *Travels with the Fossil Hunters*, which is edited by Peter J. Whybrow, is one coffee table book that does not fall into this category, although it is overflowing with fantastic photos. The book's main attractions are the twelve essays that chronicle the adventures of ten intrepid British paleontologists as they pursued their quest for fossilized prey, ranging from dinosaurs to bryozoans. The essays were written by the paleontologist involved in the expeditions, most of whom are currently on staff at the Natural History Museum in London.

Through the essays, in *Travels with the Fossil Hunters*, the authors enable the reader to travel to many exotic, and often dangerous locales, including Tibet, India, Abu Dhabi, China, Antarctica, West Africa, Latvia, and Pakistan. Besides describing the countries in which the digs occurred, the authors also go into detail about what they were looking for, and why they felt this research was important. Beyond describing the physical hardships inherent in working in remote locations, the authors are also up-front about the physical dangers, such as bullets, bandits, and rabid



dogs, that they often encountered. Throughout, these authors are unabashedly candid, sharing the most intimate details of expedition life, even to the point of providing details about their bathroom facilities, or more often, their absence.

While *Travels with the Fossil Hunters* is about paleontology, at its heart it is a standard travel book. It is filled with striking descriptions of the landscapes through which the paleontologist traveled, and it provides a fleeting glimpse at the cultures they encountered, all from a decidedly British perspective. They reminisce about their adventures, their joys and disappointments, and their blunders, such as when

one scientist mistakenly chowed down on a sheep brain sandwich!

This book is geared toward the non-specialist and all technical terms are defined within the scope of the text. Incorporated into the text is also a large amount of basic information about geology, plate tectonics, fossils, climatic change, evolution, and paleontology. This information is sufficient to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the science of paleontology. For those readers that have had some exposure to paleontology, the text serves to reinforce their knowledge base and to open vistas for further exploration.

Overall this is an excellent book - until you come to the end. Unfortunately, this book lacks both a bibliography and an index. Personally, I consider an index to be an indispensable reference tool, and therefore I feel that one should have been

included as a service to the reader. But by far, the biggest lapse is the lack of a bibliography or a simple "For further reading..." list. Many readers of this book are likely to be individuals who do not have a firm grounding in paleontology. An up-to-date, simple reading list, would have been invaluable in helping to direct them to suitable material for further study in this field. Although this book is written, scientifically, on a fairly basic level, it will nonetheless be of interest to professionals. The essays are well written, entertaining, and they give the reader the chance to vicariously join the expeditions. As well, if you've ever been on a dig, of any kind, you will find yourself nodding your head and saying to yourself, "Been there, done that." In short, this is a fun book to read, and will be of interest to professionals and amateurs alike.