



## GOODNESS AND UNDERSTANDING IN PALEONTOLOGY

by Jere H. Lipps

I simply cannot write an editorial about paleontology, which, in the wake of September 11th now seems like a trivial endeavor. However, as I began to assess where my students, colleagues, friends, and correspondents in paleontology were on that Tuesday, I realized in a more poignant way than ever before just how international our field is and how world events should concern us. I worried about all of my paleo friends, wherever they were.

My students were, at that time, someplace in China, on the island of Moorea in the South Pacific, in Germany, and in Mexico. I thought about my new and old friends I just saw on the Cambrian Field Conference in China, where I had traveled from outcrop to outcrop across southwestern China with paleontologists from all over the globe, ending just three days before the attacks. What fun we had, learning about the Cambrian as a group, in spite of language problems, different foods, and different customs. We were one in paleontology. I thought about my recent coauthors, collaborators, correspondents, and friends in Russia, Germany, Israel, Mexico, South Korea, New Zealand, Canada, Sweden, the UK, Taiwan, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, China, India, Kazakhstan, as well as in many places in America, including New York City and Washington, D.C. I am not alone amongst paleontologists. Every one of us could make such a list, for we all have international friends in paleontology. Terrorism and political strife in the world affect us deeply because we are truly an international community.

Paleontology is much more than that, however. It has fostered in each of us an understanding on a profound personal level of other peoples' cultures, countries, and aspirations. The paleontologists each of us meets from other places in the world are strongly influenced by what they see and hear from us. Chiefly, in reflecting on these many friends and contacts, I realized that the calls I've heard from emotionally distraught and wrong-thinking people in the U.S. to lay waste to vast parts of the world are misplaced, that condemnations of whole groups of people are mistaken, and that nations should be able to work together. Paleontologists from all parts of the world have taught me that in every region of the globe, people, just like me, are trying to follow their interests and passions, trying (sometimes under difficulties that would stop me) to lead useful lives, to raise their own children, and to be happy. Paleontology has opened my eyes, as I am sure it has opened most paleontologists' eyes, to see that the world is made up chiefly of good people.

In the midst of pleas for blood, money and help for the victims of the attacks, I searched for some way to contribute. I could not donate blood because my work has taken me to areas where malaria, dengue fever and elephantiasis are endemic, and the blood banks simply don't want to mess with donors like me. I will donate money, but the amount will be trivial compared to what is needed, and I am too far away from the sites of attack to help directly. It then dawned on me that perhaps, in our own small way, all of us could help

by reflecting on where our friends in paleontology were at that moment on September 11, 2001, and who those paleontologists were as people.

Few citizens of the U.S. or any other country are as familiar with the ordinary lives of people across the globe as are paleontologists, for we travel, meet and eat with them, we teach them, we learn from them, and even on occasion, we live with them. Thus, we might be able to help in combating terrorism and in ameliorating over-reaction by focusing on our colleagues as human beings with much the same goals and aspirations as everyone else. We are one in paleontology, and we set a tiny but great example of international understanding and cooperation.

All over the globe, and for a long time, people will be talking about others elsewhere in the world with a sense of apprehension, fear or hatred. Take part in those conversations and tell your fellow citi-

zens and acquaintances, no matter where you are, about your paleontological friends from other parts of the world. Tell them about those paleontologists as people, not scientists. Tell them about their homes, children, food, and lives. Tell them about their passions. Introduce goodness and friendliness into those conversations based on your own experience, for that is meaningful. Maybe, in our small way, paleontologists worldwide can help make the world a little better place by introducing personal understanding of people seemingly unlike ourselves, yet so similar in hopes and dreams!

No people deserve these kinds of terrible atrocities.

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