



Trilobites of New York: An Illustrated Guide

by Nigel Hughes

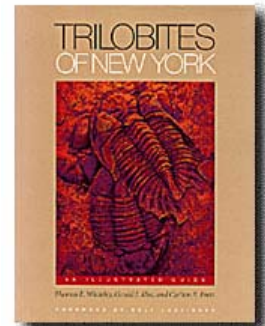
by Thomas E. Whiteley, Gerald J. Kloc, and Carlton E. Brett
Cornell University Press, 2002, 203 pp, 175 pl.
ISBN 0-8014-3969-9. \$55.00

I had something of a shock upon opening the package that contained this book, for although I hadn't previously seen the published version, I had made a rather cursory attempt to review the text for the authors during the production stage. The mock-up had arrived in a white plastic folder, and I recall feeling that the text was sufficiently authoritative to justify (to myself at least) the rather skimpy read I gave it, not having ever seen a trilobite in the field in New York and feeling sure that I was going to be in safe hands. After all, Carl Brett must be the type antithesis of a "slouch", and Tom Whiteley, along with Dan Cooper from Cincinnati, had the triumph of relocating Beecher's trilobite bed after its whereabouts had been lost for generations. Jerry Kloc is rightly famous as an outstanding preparator. With a team like that quality was assured.

What I hadn't counted on was just how beautifully produced the final product would be. This book would surely grace the most prestigious coffee table on sheer thumb-through value alone. The combination of Jerry's prep work and Tom's career as head research chemist at Kodak has ensured that the trilobites looked at their

best when the camera was upon them, and that the camera claimed its best look. The last few years have seen something of a brood of trilobite books, of which the second edition of Ricardo Levi-Seti's

Trilobites, Harry Whittington's **Trilobites**, Milan Snajdr's **Bohemian Trilobites**, and Richard Fortey's **Trilobite! Eyewitness to Evolution** are prominent examples. Each author had a different audience in mind and their photographs were presented accordingly, but there can be no doubt that Whiteley and his friends' book is uniquely successful in capturing the visual drama of these beasts, in plates that define the highest formal standard of taxonomic illustration. This is an extraordinary feat, especially when one considers that although upstate New York is indeed almost uniquely blessed in the richness, diversity and quality of its trilobitic population (only Bohemia seems a co-contender for the title of most-favored-trilobite-status) the selection available is but a fraction of that



accessible to the authors of the more general books.

But while this book ought to be bought for its aesthetics alone, there is far more to it. Tom Whiteley is the consummate "non-professional professional" paleontologist, and this is a serious book. In this aspect, and in its regional focus, *Trilobites of New York* is something of a natural counterpart of Snajdr's book on Bohemian trilobites, with the early chapters detailing aspects of trilobite paleobiology, preservation, and occurrence illustrated by local examples. Chapter 2, on the biology of trilobites, is striking for its concise and comprehensive survey of the literature. Points are stressed in an unique manner – the use of bold type to highlight keywords is matched by the use of localized highlighting on the accompanying photographs to focus the readers attention to key features. Chapter 3 focuses on taphonomy, which is appropriate because New York is famous for the exceptional preservation of trilobite soft tissues. Again, the result is a clear, focused summary that directs the interested reader to the original references. Chapter 4 is surely largely the work of Brett, who provides a well-illustrated summary of the stratigraphic evolution of trilobite-bearing portions of New York. The fifth chapter gets down to the taxonomic details, and demonstrates the same sharpness that characterizes the entire book. All trilobites described from New York are listed with type material detailed. In most cases some discussion or descrip-

tion is presented, and in a great many cases this is accompanied by a plate placed in the final portion of the book. The book has 175 plates! Some of the descriptions are a little wordy to those used to the telegraphic style of formal taxonomy, but the authors are clearly aiming to provide a comprehensive key for non-specialists. They enhance this objective by providing useful summary charts for the key distinguishing features of comparable taxa, lists of taxa and a glossary at the back. All in all, no effort spared.

A book of this quality demands quality production – and these authors got what they needed through Cornell University Press. The paper quality is high, and the photographic reproduction and binding are immaculate. This is also a considerable achievement, for though this book deserves to be a hot item it was likely seen as something of a risk. I suspect that the hand of the indefatigable Warren Allmon was at work here.

Lastly, one cannot think of New York trilobites without their association with their most revered admirer – C.D. Walcott. The combination of Whiteley, Kloc, and Brett encapsulates the heart of Walcott's greatness – an amateur scientist who propelled himself to the greatest heights through talent, devotion, and sheer Yankee industry. This book, combining as it does the best fruits of the enthusiasms of its three authors, demonstrates the enduring vitality of Walcott's spirit. Buy this book.