

Collecting fossils

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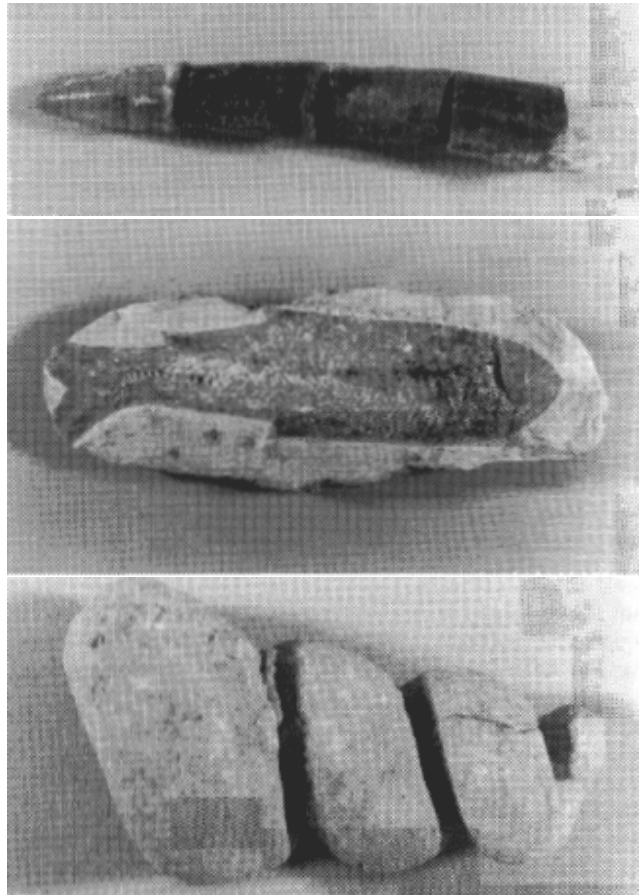
Paleontology is the science studying the life and evolution of past plants and animals, being fossils the main object of study. To make fossils prospecting, studying and classifying them can be an enjoyable hobby, inexhaustible and very enriching needing a minimum contact with nature, a great dosage of patience and the ability of systematization.

Interest on fossils has happened since prehistoric men. In some graveyards they have been found as gifts or as symbols of magic objects that would follow the dead in their trip to the afterlife.

Paros Island in the Aegean Sea, noticing that animal fossils were different from those of his times (6th century BC), Aristotle (6th century BC) considered fossils as living forms born in the rocks by the action of an inner force. The end of the 17th century has marked the beginning of scientific Paleontology with William Smith and George Curvier.

Fossils are the remains of a living being or traces of its activity preserved in rocks which were formed at the same time. Fossilization consists in a set of a different processes leading to the preservation of remains or traces of leaving beings. From the very many beings populating the Earth only a tiny part has been fossilized. The vast majority was totally destroyed, decomposed and the organic matter disintegrated after death. It is necessary special conditions on the ground where the living being was deposited so that fossilization can occur. Each fossil is a unique record of life and the environments in ancient geologic eras and the way life has evolved. It is a non-reproducible record and, if destroyed, its message dies with it. It is the same as destroying an ancient book, from which only one copy had remained.

Portugal is a country rich in fossils. They are abundant alongside the coastline, in Algarve, Mondego Cape and Sado estuary. In our countryside we cannot ignore trilobites in Valongo Mountain Range, known all over the world and the vegetal fossils of some mines as S. Pedro da Cova. In all catalogues Mondego Cape ammonites are referred to, not only by the abundance



but also by the size and quality of fossilization.

Not much is done in Portugal for disclosing and preserving such areas, and some are transformed in exploitations without any control on surveillance. Not even the authorities or the universities care for such marks of the past.

We have the possibility of seeing wonderful samples in University museums and mineral fairs occurring yearly in Lisbon and Porto.

For around 15 years I have been collecting fossils. I have crossed almost all the country, namely alongside the coastline. I have gathered samples throughout the time, I have handled them thorough and carefully and with bibliography help which is scarce I have tried to classify and describe and group them. I have succeeded to have almost all the groups of living beings represented and a wide variety of fossil marks. Every time I travel abroad, I try to get, although expensive, a pretty sample that does not exist in our country. This activity of mine is a way of relaxing and at the same time of studying. I will have to carry on and if possible gathering more enthusiasts to my “club”. ■

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