



Hugh's News

Magazine of
The Friends of Hugh Miller

Issue No 57
September 2024

Editor:
Lara Reid

Production Editor:
Piers Hemy

FOHM AGM 2024: An afternoon of poetic beauty at the Library of Mistakes, Edinburgh

By Lara Reid, Chair and Editor at The Friends of Hugh Miller

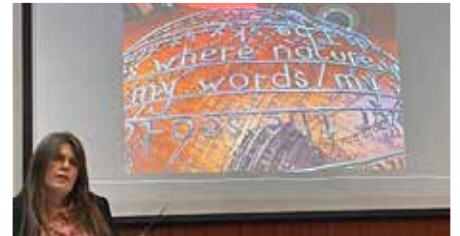
Another year, another AGM – but this one was truly special. For our 2024 meeting and public lecture on Sunday 26th May, we set ourselves up in the Library of Mistakes in Edinburgh. Despite the pouring rain outside, the meeting was well-attended by around 40 keen listeners. This hidden gem of a library was a wonderful backdrop to our speaker's talk from Professor Ralph O'Connor (University of Aberdeen) and the sharing of new writing by Highland poets Gill Shaw and Cáit O'Neill McCullagh.

As chair of The Friends of Hugh Miller, I would like to pass on our heartfelt thanks to Ralph, Gill and Cáit for making this year's meeting a genuine delight. Ralph spoke eloquently and with characteristic enthusiasm on 'Hugh Miller, folklore and the recovery of the geological past', revealing the depth of interest Miller held in folklore and storytelling throughout his life, and the ways in which he conveyed his passion to others. We will continue with this theme of Miller as storyteller into 2025 – more on those plans in the next issue!

We were touched to discover that both Gill Shaw and Cáit O'Neill McCullagh had written new poems especially for this event inspired by Miller, Lydia's Garden and our much-missed friend and former Miller Museum manager, Alix Powers-Jones. As editor, I am delighted to present these new poems in this issue for all our readers to enjoy.

The 'business end' of our AGM notes are held within the pages of this issue, and the minutes can also be found on our website for those wishing to know more detail.

A warm thank you to all who attended this year's AGM event, and we look forward to meeting you all again next year!



Above: Gill Shaw reading
(photo: Sidney Johnston)



Below: Ralph O'Connor speaking
(photo: Stephanie Kulesza)

STOP PRESS
Distinction awarded to Sidney Johnston
See Page 2

WHAT'S INSIDE:	
AGM Summary	ps 2-3
Fake News in Geology?	ps 4-5
Poetry section	ps 6-9
What's on for kids	p 10
Fossils unearthed	ps 11-14

Find us on 



@friendsofmiller

Sidney Johnston awarded Honorary Research Fellow

By Bob Davidson

It gives me great pleasure to announce that committee member Sidney Johnston has been awarded the distinction of Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Geosciences at the University of Aberdeen. This is in recognition of his contributions to Aberdeen Geological Society over the past two decades and his contributions and donations to the School of Geosciences. Many congratulations, Sidney!



A brief summary of the FOHM AGM 2024

Committee seats:

Chair:	Lara Reid
Treasurer:	Sue Rider-Busby
Secretary / Membership Secretary:	Stephanie Kulesza
Ordinary committee members:	Bob Davidson, Sidney Johnston, Jim Mackintosh, John Armstrong, Joyce Gilbert.

All continue in existing positions, with the exception of Gavin Berkenhager to be replaced by Joyce Gilbert.

Welcome to Joyce!

Apologies for Absence: Angus Tulloch, Giles Gostwick, Frieda Gostwick, Myra Lawson, Louisa Heard, Jim Mackintosh

Chair and Editor's report: Lara Reid

Death of Museum manager, Alix Powers-Jones:

All of us were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Dr Alix Powers-Jones, long-term property manager of the Miller Museum in Cromarty, on 10th July 2023. She died peacefully following a long-standing illness at Raigmore Hospital, Inverness, with her family by her side.

Alix's enthusiasm and passion for Miller has been the driving force behind the Museum since 2011, and we all enjoyed working and liaising with her on multiple projects over the years. Many of you will remember meeting and talking with Alix, particularly at many of our AGMs – we feel her absence here today.

Alix is greatly missed by all of us at the Friends of Hugh Miller. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Deborah Reid, who has taken the reins at the Miller Museum with great warmth and enthusiasm. We look forward to working closely with Debbie and all the Museum staff going forward.

The Martin Gostwick Writer in Residence 2025:

You may recall that at last year's AGM, we were joined by the first ever Martin Gostwick Writer in Residence, Anna Fleming. Anna spent a week in Cromarty at the end of May 2023, and thoroughly enjoyed her time in the town. She has been in regular contact with me since then, and would like to extend her thanks to the Friends for their hospitality and for the chance to take up the inaugural residency. You can read her beautiful essay, written during her Cromarty stay, in issue 54 of *Hugh's News* on our website. While Anna was our first writer in residence, she most certainly will not be our last. We are planning to run the residency every two years in memory of our founder, Martin. The next residency will open for applications towards the end of this year – keep your eyes peeled for further details in the next issue of *Hugh's News*.

Final Nigel Trewin lecture:

Autumn 2023 was an incredibly busy time for the Friends – we hosted the fifth and final Nigel Trewin lecture at the University of Aberdeen on 5th October. Dr Clive Rice gave a fascinating account of the world's largest silver deposits in Bolivia. The event was well-attended, both in person and on Zoom. This marks the conclusion of the Nigel Trewin lecture series, and we extend our sincere thanks to the Trewin family for the bequest which enabled these memorial lectures to take place. Of course, we will continue to hold our connection with the Trewin family close to our hearts going forward.

The Old Red Sandstone:

Autumn 2023 also saw the much anticipated and heralded publication of the new edition of Miller's *Old Red Sandstone*, edited by Michael Taylor and Ralph O' Connor. We were over the moon to hear that this beautiful publication went on to win the Saltire Prize for the Scottish Research Book of the Year – congratulations to Ralph and Mike!

Death of Dr Charles Waterston:

In March 2024, we were saddened to hear of the death of long-term Friends member and Miller enthusiast, Dr Charles Waterston, at the rather grand age of 99. Charles was heavily involved in the curation and research into Miller's extensive fossil collection at the National Museum of Scotland. He also wrote a short guide booklet, *Hugh Miller – The Cromarty Stonemason*, published in 1961. The Friends extend their deep sympathies to the Waterston family.

AOB:

Hugh Miller Mourning Ring update: Stephanie Kulesza

The ring is in South Africa in order to gain the appropriate Export Permit. The ring will then be donated to Birthplace Museum in Cromarty.

New, fascinating research into Miller's Cromarty maps: Bob Davidson and Sidney Johnston

Miller's work on the Cromarty fishbeds has long been regarded as a benchmark for Cromarty Old Red Sandstone geology, but misconceptions have crept in over the years. His son, Hugh the Younger, developed his father's work into a British Geological Survey (BGS) format through his work as a BGS surveyor which introduced some doubt as to the provenance of the section (fig. 5) in *The Old Red Sandstone* 1st Edition of 1841 (Miller 2023, vol. 1 fig. 2). Our new study seeks to clarify the origin of the stratigraphy assisted by the action of Storm Babet and her kin in Autumn/Winter 2023, which created fresh exposures of Miller the Elder's fish beds. Field work was scheduled late June 2024. At the time of writing, this fieldwork has now been completed and has yielded some surprises. This will now be collated into the first of two papers, the first being the detailed history of geological work on the South and North Sutor Foreshores which will be submitted for peer review and publication in the next couple of months. The second is a detailed stratigraphical analysis of the fish beds on both foreshores with a widened team from Aberdeen University using drone photography and photogrammetry and traditional stratigraphical analysis on the ground.

Note from the editor: This piece should have appeared in issue 56; with apologies to Bob for the editorial oversight.

Fake News in Geology?

By Bob Davidson

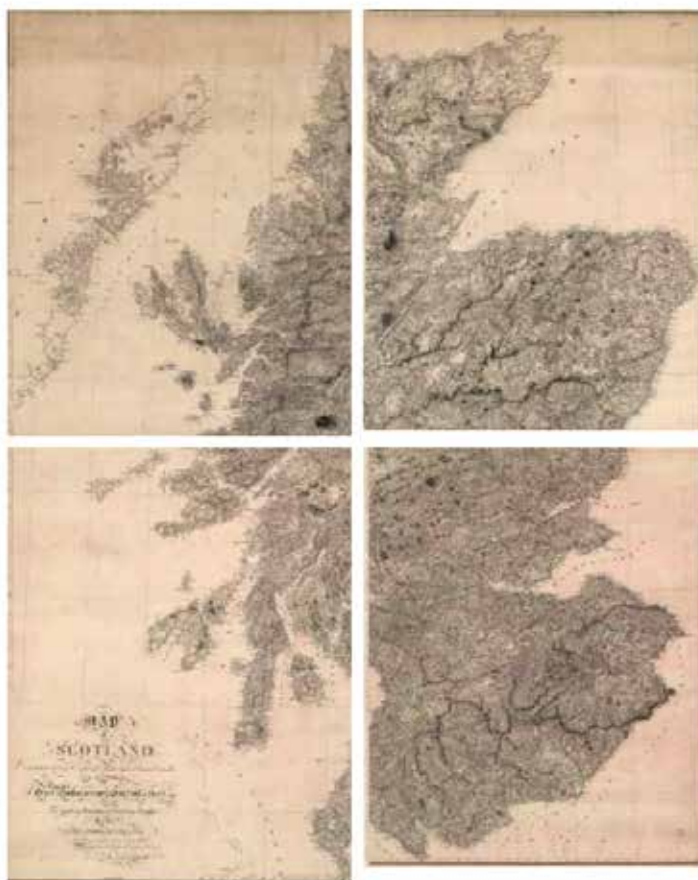
The Moray and Nairn areas host internationally renowned fossil fish beds from the Devonian period over 380 million years ago. Lethen Bar near Nairn is particularly celebrated for the great beauty and scientific importance of its fossil fishes, which are coveted by researchers and collectors alike. However, its broader provenance is fraught with published misinformation dating back over 200 years. This highlights the potential pitfalls of accepting historic information, especially from the dawn of a discipline, without due diligence.

The story can be traced as far back as 1807, when Aaron Arrowsmith, head of the London cartography dynasty that bore his name, produced a topographic map of Scotland. At the time, this map was regarded as state of the map maker's art and was adopted by the government as a template for the first geological map, which was commissioned in 1826 from the celebrated geologist, Dr John MacCulloch. MacCulloch surveyed Scotland adding geological data to the map. However, he noted errors on the map and complained about these to his client, but the government was adamant that Arrowsmith's map was the benchmark and stated that MacCulloch was obliged to use it. MacCulloch's map was published posthumously in 1836 but few realised that some areas exhibited displaced geology.

The error central to this story is that in the Lethen area SE of Nairn (the hill named Lethen Bar) was illustrated one kilometre north of its true position. Despite this, MacCulloch was forced to insert the hill's true, but displaced, bedrock geology.

In 1839, Dr John Grant Malcolmsen, renowned geologist and palaeontologist set out to produce a detailed account of the Old Red Sandstone and its fish fossils of Nairn and Moray. It appears he used MacCulloch's map as the geological base-line and produced a set of (inaccurate) geological cross sections that centred on the erroneous hill with its displaced geology and misrepresented the position of the fossil bed. In addition, Malcolmsen bewilderingly compounded the situation by renaming Lethen Bar, 'Cairn Bar'. Malcolmsen submitted his manuscript to the Geological Society in 1839 and left for India where he died in 1844. In the meantime, his manuscript was mishandled and 'lost' for twenty years before being decimated and published in a considerably depleted form in 1859, following the publication of a heavily paraphrased version by Rev. George Gordon earlier that year.

Enter the British Geological Survey and Dr John Horne, their Lead Surveyor, in 1878; Horne praised Malcolmsen's work overall but nevertheless corrected Malcolmsen's, MacCulloch's and Arrowsmith's errors in his accurate 1923 geological map of the Nairn area, and pinpointed six isolated fossil localities. This should have brought the matter to a close.



Arrowsmith's 1807 Map of Scotland constructed from original materials. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

Subsequently the respected palaeontologist, Dr Mahala Andrews of the National Museum of Scotland reinvestigated the fossil localities of the area in 1974-1983, while curating an important collection of Lethen fish fossils, and published her findings in 1983. Inexplicably, Andrews largely circumvented Horne's authoritative work and his map, and focussed on a loosely provenanced, handwritten but anonymous copy of Malcolmson's 1839 manuscript and decimated 1859 memoir, along with Gordon's version. Andrews appears to have believed Malcolmson's work despite its inconsistencies and incongruous statements and, crucially, embraced his displaced hill. From this, Andrews developed the hypotheses that, despite Horne's report of six fixed localities, only one existed at any one time and that this moved continuously around the area stripping out the fossil fish bed.

Andrews' hypotheses persisted for the next 40 years and threw subsequent investigators off the scent of the true nature of the old fossil localities. This was until 2005, when a team led by the late Professor Nigel Trewin, FOHM's founding chairman, reopened a remote locality where fish fossils were known to occur and found the fish bed intact. In 2020-2023 we completed detailed surveys of the area along with an overhaul of the historical literature and in 2024, we published a new and definitive account of the fish bed of the area.

Conclusion

John Horne's version of events is singularly correct and, in 1844, Hugh Miller contributed to the true nature of the old localities in *'The Cruise of the Betsey'*. There was no moving quarry enterprise that stripped out the fossil bed as Andrews hypothesised based on Malcolmson's work. Up to eight old quarries existed and can be traced, although most are now backfilled.

Further Reading.

Davidson *et al.* 2024. Dr John Grant Malcolmson and a reconciliation of the Middle Devonian Lethen Bar and Lethen House fish bearing nodule localities. With notes on the Middle Devonian nodule beds of the Moray Firth area. *Scottish Journal of Geology*. **60**,

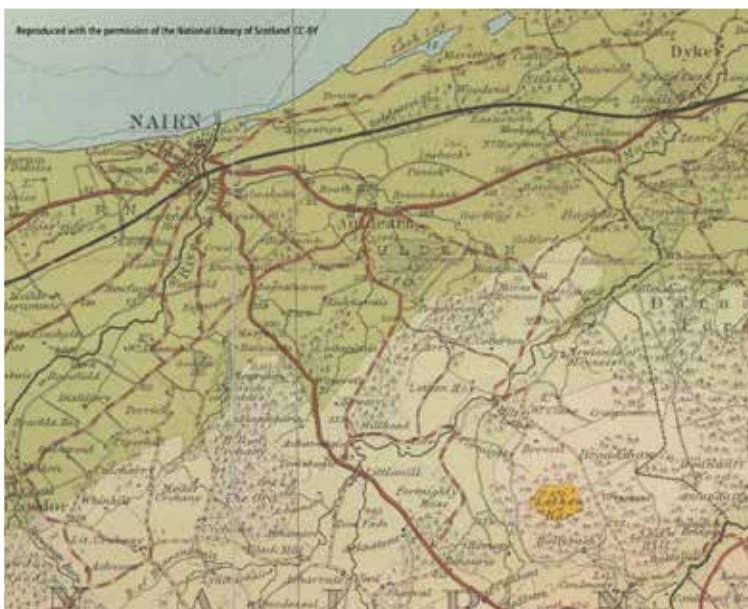
<https://doi.org/sjg2023-011>



© The Society of Writers to His Majesty's Signet CC-BY-NC-SA



Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland CC-BY



Top: Extract from Arrowsmith's 1807 map

Middle: Extract from MacCulloch's 1836 map

Both maps above show Lethen Bar in lower right quadrant, NE of Fornightly

Bottom: Extract from Bartholomew's 1903 map with Lethen Bar in lower right quadrant, E of Fornightly

ABOVE BALCONIE

In memory of Alix Powers Jones

They are the dappled ones of the set-aside,
of the breacais backlands & relict
paths; speckled both in shade and glisk—
yarrow, scatters—girls lost to forest

tales of divining & devils. We hear them,
their laughter at the path's return, the outrun
of us, always. Ahead. Behind. Soft as the rabbit's
paw set to dust a peach; their breath upon our necks.

Yarrow. Constellations. They spill the strath, more
present than the cream-clotted fingers that fled
the milk-middened meadows of Rob Donn.
Absent palms spanned to empty udders.

Wisdom made witchery, somehow &
perhaps, the fault of our own minding,
that to remember we must also forget,
& this: that it was the amnion of a yarrowed

pool into which Thetis plunged
her love, her dove, her beautiful one—
Achilles, only his fleece-soft heel unbathed,
too fresh-flitted; left then for ravenflesh.

We stop to cup the keep-water; a hind hastens the moss.
Above Balconie, the loch makes herself a watcher-
glass, readies the silence to hallow an antler's fall &
the yarrows of Ross lean to us. All their familiar healing.

© Cáit O'Neill McCullagh, 2024

Rob Donn (assumed to be Robert MacAoidh), was a Gaelic poet in the oral tradition, born in Sutherland in 1714. He celebrated the ecologies of Northern Scotland, nature always peopled with the voices, able hands, and minds that filled the pre-Clearance straths of Sutherland, Caithness and Ross.

AT THE BROKEN ALTAR OF MORNING

In memory of Hugh Miller

All the gentian of Ross-shire sky, ratchets morning above the merk. Glaucous haar. The sea sending her vapours still: dulse, the tenacity of limpets, selkie spume. This Arctic fragrance — North, makes halflings of us, who dare to toe the wave-wept strand. Believing in this transience of shapes, of tissues' shift (more fully substance than glau-red greed; rogue parcelling of land) I am with Hugh, brine-scented, here on Eathie's shore.

The great ram-headed russet of him doffs to rock as he flenses time from the Firthlands, lifts lignite skin, plucks lammer from shale, from Horne blend schist & pyritic granites; gneiss. The sea, a shell's echoing of pulsed shingle, lets us her leave to gather; pulls tide from a Mesozoic bouquet of coned conifer, furlit-fern croziers, ammonites (whorled). All the beat-down curls of this earth's grief.

Above, white-bellied, sparrows flash lime-lucent; winged spirits of his lithic fish (now immortal-ravaged of once-plumped flesh). This speugie surfeit turns our thoughts to the milkless-bellied bairns at Croick, garlands strippit from the fatted loams of strath & folk; a fossiled genealogy. Skraik of names etched to the pitiless.

Hugh, himself (deep-founded; amber of aeons) dreams more possible futures — that he might be knapped, loosed, splintered from spancels of sheep and clearance. A disruption, set-fair. Deiseal, turning sunwise; strewing his people with posies of bread, better to them than any lilies:

one hand upturned
the other rock-fast; blessings,
countless sparrows.

© Cáit O'Neill McCullagh, 2024

Speugie: (Scots, used in Cromarty, Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness) sparrow.

Deiseal: (Gaelic) to turn with the sun, east to west, including for setting off in a boat.

Cáit's debut pamphlet 'The songs I sing are sisters' - a collaboration with Sinéad McClure - won Dreich's Classic Chapbook, 2022 and a Saboteur Award (2023). Her first full-length collection 'The Bone Folder' was published by Drunk Muse Press in July 2024. She writes at home, on the Cromarty Firth.

See <https://linktr.ee/caitjomac>

THE GAIRDEN O WONDERS, MILLER'S YARD, CROMARTY

Ahm sat in the Gairden o Wonders
wi ma feet planted oan cobbles
when the courthoose bell tolls thrice
singin intae the aifternoon licht.

Risin, then dippin ma heid
oan the wiy in tae oor cottage –
rubble-built, clay-walled, lime-harled.
Ah ken yer waitin in the attic,

nested under thatch -
under reed, straw, heather.
The stairs cairry me tae find ye
laid doon wi only a whisper

o a sheet tae keep ye hid.
Yer pins and bodkins clutter
the washstand. Yer claes
drapped oan the cloodie rug.

Let us forget the wag oan the wa
by the hangin lum. Fur noo
there is jist you an me
an the open windae

the first kiss o blossom hingin
oan the trees in the gairden
the teeming trill o the birdies
the stretch o the sun's warm fingers

an doonstairs
oor names
carved intae the lintel
like a promise.

TO THE GIRL WHOSE HEART IS AN AMMONITE

Any coastal fossil hunter worth their salt will tell you *best get to work after the storm*. After the weathering. That's when the loosening comes. The falling out. There has to be some digging in. An unearthing. You have to get your fingers deep in clay, carry some away, buried in your nailbeds. If luck is on the fossil hunter's side the beach will gift its treasure. Belemnite. Sea Lily. Best! – an ammonite. It takes some skill and noticing to find a frown of rock, to tap its furrowed brow, bisect it to expose a smiling coil. Quickly palmed the brace of it's a balm; held in folded fingers finds its heat. But fleet of heat fades in shadows. A ghosting. Icy reach. Wanting chambers keen for sealing, keen for growth outside of septa walls. All I know of safety is it lies in softness made to harden. And that to harden means to live a life in half.

© Gill Shaw, 2024

Gill Shaw is a queer poet and spoken word performer based in the Highlands of Scotland, whose writing draws on landscape and the natural world. Her debut pamphlet 'Touching Air' was published by Stewed Rhubarb Press in April 2023. Weblink: <https://linktr.ee/gillshaw-writes>

What's on for kids at the Hugh Miller Museum, Cromarty

By Deborah Reid, Museum Manager

Here at Hugh Miller's, we aim to share the story of Hugh and his work with people of all ages and backgrounds. As well as running school visits to the site we also have a range of activities that kids can take part in whilst on site. Our '*Pirate Quest*' booklet guides children around the museum and cottage uncovering fun facts along the way and in the cottage, we have costumes for dressing up and games that Hugh might have played as a child to have a go at.

Throughout the year we run events to engage with the community, this year we had our annual easter egg hunt, gardening sessions, a pirate quest and are planning activities over Halloween night and into Christmas. Not to mention our fossil walks, which give everyone the chance to be their own fossil detective and discover prehistoric fish on the Cromarty foreshore.

We hope to continue to find new and exciting ways to share Hugh's legacy with as many people as possible whether this be through temporary exhibitions, coastal walks or hands-on activities.

Museum display for fossil walk finds

By Deborah Reid, Museum manager

We have completed our first few fossil walks along the beach here this summer, and they have gone really well! We've had very positive feedback and lots of fossil finds. So many finds, in fact, that we needed a new countertop display case to show off all the specimens to their full extent. We were delighted that the FOHM committee provided us with financial support to buy the case, which is now holding our prize finds!



And finally...

On the following four pages we reproduce the flyer '*Fossils unearthed*' produced by the NTS staff at the Hugh Miller Museum, and aimed at younger visitors. The flyer is about 60 x 30 cm, and thus too big to reproduce full-size in '*Hugh's News*', so you will need to stick Page 11 to the top of Page 13, and Page 12 to the top of Page 14 to see the full effect.

HUGH MILLER'S MUSEUM

FOSSILS UNEARTHED

Let's learn about the secret treasures hidden under rocks and the ground!



WHAT ARE FOSSILS?

These are remains or traces of ancient plants and animals that lived long ago.

TYPES OF FOSSILS

BODY FOSSILS

AMMONITE



squid-like marine animal
with a coiled shell

REFER TO
PLANT AND
ANIMAL
REMAINS

MEGALODON TOOTH



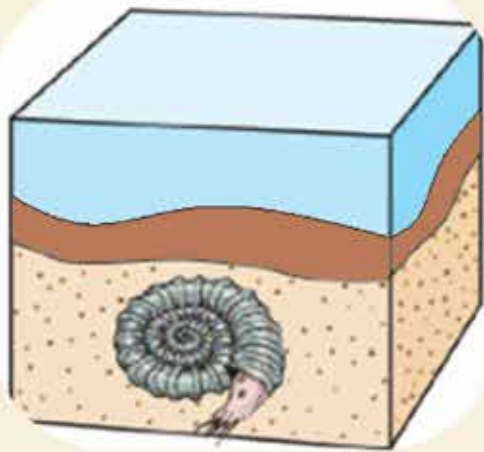
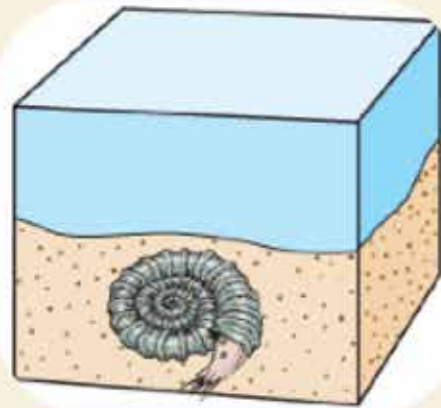
rarely seen shark with
unique saw-like teeth

HUGH MILLER'S MUSEUM

HOW DO FOSSILS FORM?

ANIMAL DIES

An animal or plant dies and falls to the ground.

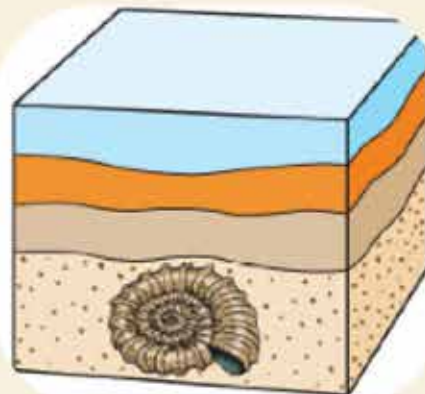


RAPID BURIAL

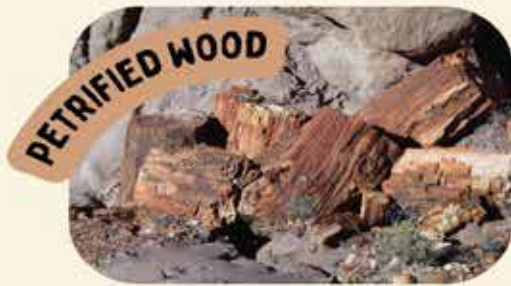
To be preserved an animal must be buried quickly after death to prevent it being damaged by scavengers.

DECAY

Soft fleshy parts of the animal decay leaving only the hard parts such as bones, teeth and shell.



BODY FOSSILS



forms when minerals replace the tissues of buried trees

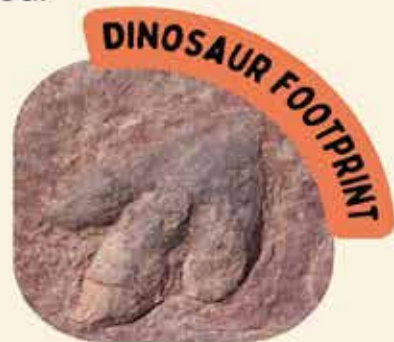


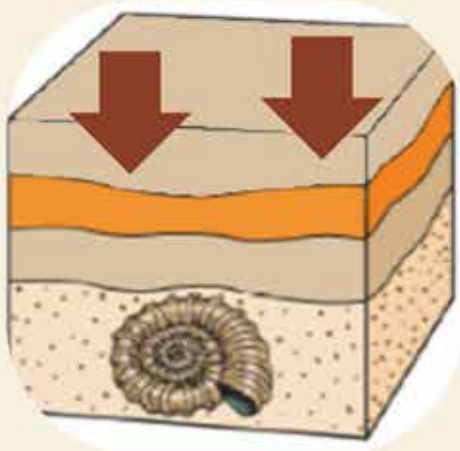
ancient reptiles that lived on Earth for over 140 million years

TRACE FOSSILS

RECORD THE ACTIVITY OF AN ANIMAL

These fossils form when an organism leaves a mark on a soft rock or mud.



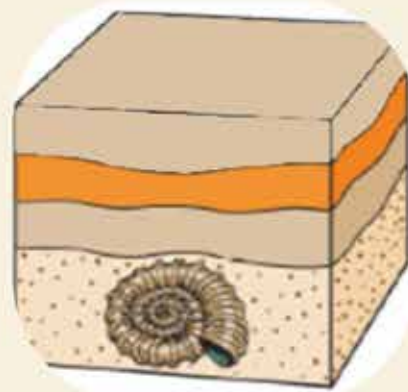


DEEP BURIAL

Over time more sediments are laid down on top of the remains putting them under intense pressure. This helps transform the sediment into stone.

MINERALS

Under pressure minerals and chemicals change the hard parts of bone and shell into stone.



EROSION

Eventually the fossil is exposed at the surface through erosion and found by palaeontologists.

