



CITY OF WASILLA

290 E. HERNING AVE.

WASILLA, ALASKA 99654-7091

PHONE: (907) 373-9050

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**INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
NO. 93-07**

FROM: Mayor Stein

DATE: February 3, 1993

SUBJECT: Page Museum Fossil Collection Progress Report

John Cooper has pursued the idea of developing a collection of pre-historic fossils at the Museum. The fossils are proposed to come from finds near Wasilla. You may recall John displayed a unique fossil found in the Valley and recently reclaimed from UAA Fairbanks.

John's attached memorandum is self explanatory and involves cooperation between the Museum, Mat-Su Campus UAA and the John Luster Senior Family.

John C. Stein, Mayor

JCS:mdh

Attachment: JCIII 02/02/93 Memorandum



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2/2/93

Memo: Ref. Progress report, University of Alaska & Wasilla Museum joint program of fossil collection, research, Geology/Paleontology Class, & Museum exhibit program.

To: John Stein

From: JC3

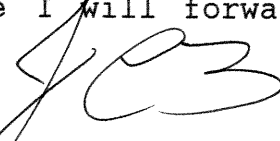
John,

Since I talked to you last I have had a positive meeting with the State of Alaska's Chief Archeologist, Bob Shaw, and have obtained a fossil collection permit application. As the State law is so heavily weighted towards almost total state control, concerning the development and placement of historical resources found or developed on state lands, I spent more than an hour making as strong a case as I could for local placement (and claim) for much of the material found and urged State respect for the substantial local initiative and effort that will make new fossil discoveries possible. While Bob largely hewed to the State line of control and vision of artifact placement with "more centrally located, larger, professionally better suited and accredited repositories for materials found with the possibility of loans to smaller museums" he did allow that local agencies were due consideration and credit when in fact they were the main motivating force behind potentially major new paleontological finds. Bob takes us seriously and before our interview ended showed clear interest, and even excitement, in our project. He was very clear in wanting a participatory role in the project as the State Archeologist and also emphasized the need for a strong research quotient in the project. (Potentially the research aspect is one of the main political battlegrounds involved with physical control of any finds.) (My feeling is that materials can well be made available for distant research, but much can easily be studied locally as long as the State Highway Department does its job and the Airlines continue to fly.) Bob warned me to anticipate substantial political "me first and me too" moves from various (unnamed) factions as this project develops. (For instance, as part of our discussion Bob openly stated he is on the Anchorage Museum Board, which as you know is nationally accredited.)

As this whole effort depends on what our "fossil guide" can show us I have met with him and laid all of the factors surrounding this project out to him. (My main question was do we go on with it or back off before we promise more than we can deliver?) His commitment still stands. I then had a joint meeting with our "guide" and staff at the College. An initial study program based

around Geology 172 was discussed as a pilot course along with the number of potential sites for investigation, aspects of the permitting process and proposal, and the methods necessary to establish a site claim. (As described the quality of known, but undeveloped, sites was exciting and I strongly believe that if we organize the project well there will be major finds.) An initial field reconnaissance was discussed and a planning meeting was set for this coming Friday.

The plan is to start this summer. I am to draft the permit request and have it reviewed and supplemented by Staff at the College. As soon as we get it in shape I will forward it to you for your review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JCB', is written over the text of the second paragraph.

P.S. The issue of fossil collecting is a highly charged political issue on both a national and local level. There is a battle royal underway between "Research Professionals" backed by Federal and State laws and agency regulations and skilled "Amateurs" (who have made some of the most major finds in Paleontology) and the general public over the right to collect, own, and even sell fossils found on public lands.

For your further info. I have attached an article from the January 11, 1993 Newsweek which deals with this issue.



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11/30/92

Glenn Massay, Director
University of Alaska
Matanuska-Susitna College
P.O. Box 2889
Palmer, Alaska 99645

Dear Glenn,

As Mayor of the City of Wasilla I am requesting your assistance concerning a proposed City of Wasilla, Museum Department, project.

Since the formation of the City of Wasilla Museum Department in June of this year City Staff and Administration have been involved in an active program of both short and long term museum program improvements. One very promising program option we have identified is that of developing a comprehensive, regionally based, natural history exhibit which would incorporate natural history from prehistoric times through today. We do possess some significant fossil materials and feel we have an excellent chance in locating and recovering more.

There are some problems to be surmounted though. In order to collect prehistoric items, such as fossils, a State of Alaska collecting permit is required. Under the newly revised State regulations status either as a State Agency or a nationally accredited museum is required for such a permit. As you may know our museum program is an offshoot of many years of local historical society effort and it does not at this time have accreditation on a national level. (I have enclosed a copy of the State of Alaska regulations concerning such permits.)

However, as we read the permit requirements the College does meet the permit criteria. Would you, your staff, and the College please consider assisting our efforts via obtaining a collecting permit for fossils and working with us on a community and college joint venture that would enable us both to provide a variety of productive educational experiences for students, residents, and visitors alike?

At your earliest convenience could you please meet with our Museum Dept. Director John Cooper to discuss the concepts and issues involved?

Thank you for your consideration.


John Stein, Mayor

Fossils Are for Everyone

BY GREG RETALLACK

One of the thrills of childhood is finding a fossil, a truly ancient relic of extinct life. There is sheer excitement in seeing the elegant outline of a seashell or the delicate tracery of veins on a leaf emerge after cracking open an ordinary-looking stone. Some of us never grow out of our childhood fascination with fossils and pursue careers in paleontology. Many others return to an interest in fossils during retirement. Now, however, fossil lovers of this country could find themselves frustrated by government regulators.

A bill (S3107) introduced last year by Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, aims to restrict access to fossils from federal lands to selected university and museum scientists. If you cannot claim such affiliation to obtain the necessary permits many months in advance, you or your child could face felony criminal and civil charges for merely picking up a fossil. Penalties could amount to \$10,000 and one year in prison for each violation. Even owning fossils from public lands would be a violation of this draft bill. Any development that involves digging would pay to assess fossil resources in areas to be excavated.

The costs to support such a program of permits and enforcement would be considerable. Federal agencies now issue few fossil-collecting permits at taxpayer expense. In New Mexico, a policy of preventing fossil hunting on federal lands is enforced by two officers with two four-wheel trucks and 10 guns. Taxpayers also paid for the recent seizure and transportation of a partly prepared skeleton of the dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus rex* by Acting U.S. Attorney for South Dakota Kevin Schieffer, in company with nine FBI agents, four national park rangers, two agents of the Department of the Interior, an agent from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a highway patrolman, a deputy sheriff and troops of the South Dakota National Guard. This 10 tons of bone and rock was not going anywhere and was no secret to scientists or the public. It remains unclear why such a valuable specimen was subjected to damaging transportation before court determination of its ownership, after which it will now suffer an additional potentially damaging move. These are fossils, not drugs.

Baucus's bill was drafted to protect fossils of backboneed animals such as dinosaurs. But shark teeth common in many rocks would be protected as well as microscopic fossil teeth abundant in many limestones. Enforcement of the bill would thus be open to abuse. Copycat legislation outlawing collection of all kinds of fossils is currently under consideration in Oregon and several other states. All this legislation is modeled on the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979,

which was designed to stem the plunder of Native American archeological sites. There are profound differences between fossils and artifacts that make parallel legislation unwise.

Fossils are common and paleontologists are few. Some rocks such as limestone are made entirely of the calcareous skeletons of fossils. Almost all sedimentary rocks contain some kind of microfossils. While federal spending on paleontological litigation and enforcement is increasing, funding for paleontological research has dwindled. In such a political climate, amateur and commercial collectors have become increasingly important for specimens and information that advance the science of paleontology. Baucus's bill would send that valuable resource underground.

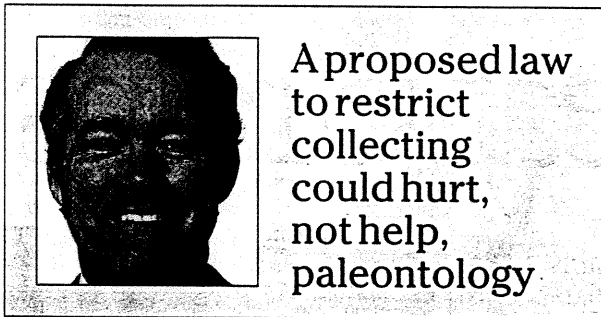
Amateurs can help: The assumption in Baucus's proposed bill that amateurs are inept or unworthy is mistaken. Many important fossils and localities were initially discovered by amateur collectors, ranchers and quarry operators. All of the six existing skeletons of the most ancient bird fossil *Archaeopteryx* were found by quarrymen in southern Germany. The site for the fossil ape *Kenyanthropus* was discovered by a Kenyan farmer. Most professional paleontologists owe at least part of their success to amateurs.

The prologue to Baucus's bill portrays commercial collectors as ruthless profiteers, but private enterprise has long been important to paleontology. Natural-history cabinets since at least the 18th century have been stocked by commercial suppliers of specimens. Dinosaur displays in North American museums owe much to commercial collectors such as the famous Sternbergs of Kansas. We may suffer sticker shock when we see a mounted skeleton of the duck-billed dinosaur *Edmontosaurus* on sale for \$330,000 or the spiny trilobite *Dicranurus* for \$10,000. But museums in Tokyo, Cardiff and elsewhere have made comparable outlays, realizing that they could spend much more than this supporting less lucky collectors or less skilled preparators. Most unusually valuable fossils end up in public collections, either by donation, by will or by initial purchase.

Rare and scientifically valuable fossils turn up when people are actively collecting a lot of fossils. Articulated trilobites are prized as rare fossils, yet there is a quarry in the desert near Delta, Utah, that has yielded at least a half million trilobites per year to commercial collectors. The supply is far from exhausted. If you know what a trilobite is, it is probably because you have seen these small gray fossils in local-school teaching collections or for sale as curios, refrigerator magnets or bolo ties. Along with these millions of *Elrathia*, retailing for some \$2 to \$6 apiece, have come a host of rarer kinds of trilobites and other kinds of fossils that would not have been available to professional paleontologists were it not for commercial interest in these quarries.

I am not the only paleontologist who feels that the proposed regulation of fossil collecting is unnecessary. In 1987 a committee of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences recommended that "the science of paleontology is best served by unimpeded access to fossils and fossil-bearing rocks in the field." Should only professional paleontologists be able to collect fossils, but not you? Is there a future for paleontology if kids cannot find fossils?

Retallack teaches paleontology at the University of Oregon.



Proposed law to restrict collecting could hurt, not help, paleontology