Fossil Hunting Expedition to Antarctica

From Nov. 22 to Dec. 20, 2003, Jeffrey Osborn, associate professor and convener of biology, ventured to Antarctica to collect fossil plants from the Permian and Triassic ages (280 million years ago and 235 million years ago, respectively). This was Osborn's second field excavation expedition with the United States Antarctic Program, first participating in 1992, funded by grants from the National Science Foundation.

In total, Osborn spent 38 hours each way in the air to travel from Kirksville, Mo., to the field sites in Antarctica. The first stop outside of the United States was the south island of New Zealand, Christchurch. In Christchurch, the research teams were outfitted with standard issue extreme cold weather (ECW) clothing, some of which had to be worn at all times, including during flights to, from, and while in Antarctica. From New Zealand, the teams flew to McMurdo Station, on the northwest edge of Antarctica. McMurdo is the main American base, run by the National Science Foundation. At this staging site, teams attended snow survival school, a two-day program (or a refresher course after five years) giving instruction in areas such as pitching and securing tents in snow, building snow walls or igloos, and knot-tying. With strong winds and between 40 to 50 feet of snow (during the summers), they built "Quinzy" structures, which the team constructed by burying their bagged gear, covering it with packed snow, then removing the gear and digging out the inside to use as a shelter in case of an emergency.

Participants then flew to a base field camp near the Beardmore Glacier, the largest glacier on the earth, via LC-130 Hercules turboprop flights, which the participant guide described as "not designed primarily for passenger convenience." "Let's just say there was no in-flight movie," said Osborn, who endured the hours of flight sitting on cargo straps.

At the Beardmore camp, each science team slept and ate in tents, and flew by helicopter to the various field sites, the farthest of which was about an hour away, and all of which had landing strips of solid ice. During the summer, the "frozen desert" of Antarctica experiences 24 hours of daylight, but still averages a temperature of 80 degrees below zero with winds often anywhere from 30 to 50 miles per hour.

From these collection sites, Osborn and his team gathered more than 8,000 pounds of fossils, which were identified and will be transported by way of ships to the United States, once the sea ice surrounding the continent has melted. These organisms will be housed at the University of Kansas, which boasts the "best and most complete collection of Antarctic fossils in the world." Osborn, along with his student researchers and colleagues from the University of Kansas, Dartmouth College, and Museo Paleontologico Egiio in Argentina will work to reconstruct the plant assemblages which is possible because the organisms are preserved as petrifactions, being fossilized in a fully intact, three-dimensional fashion.

Osborn has found that these excavations and research provide valuable information to pass along to students and enable paleobotanists to study and record information about certain plant systems, many of which are completely extinct. "We better understand the evolution of major groups of plants," said Osborn.

Registration in the Tunnel a Thing of the Past

Via a new online registration process implemented by the Registrar's Office in March, the registration lines formerly found in the tunnel in McClain Hall are now history. The Registrar's Office celebrated a major milestone when the tunnel that had been used for registration at Truman since Fall 1983 was used for that purpose for the last time on Jan. 16.

"The new web registration is more convenient for students, and it gives them more control in the registration process," says Kay Anderson ('94)('01), interim registrar. "Once their registration time begins, students can register and make schedule changes virtually anytime, from anywhere." In addition, Anderson says students now have extensive access to real-time information about courses to help them make wise registration decisions.

In the short time that the new registration system has been in use, it has already saved time for both students and staff. "On our first night of web registration for Summer 2004, we processed the same number of registrations in a half hour via the web that we did in eight hours in the tunnel at the same time last year," says Anderson. "This change allows us to provide the type of service and the level of technology that students expect from an institution like Truman."

During the last hour of registration in the tunnel, Truman faculty, staff, and students gathered for a "Light at the End of the Tunnel" celebration.

Mark Your Calendars

Family Day **2004** is October **2nd**