



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Swimming in Stone: The Amazing Gogo Fossils of the Kimberley* by John Long. [Fremantle Press](#), Fremantle, 2006, 320 pages, illustrated, ISBN 9781921064333, soft cover. RRP \$29.95.**

This book, which is endorsed by Sir David Attenborough and Professor Tim Flannery, will soon be out of print. It is well worth buying. The author was a founding member of the Kimberley Society and, in March 1996, he spoke to us about '[Fossil vertebrate treasures from the Kimberley](#)'.

When Gogo featured in David Attenborough's television series *Life on Earth*, it was described as 'one of the world's most significant fossil sites because it shows 375 million-year-old fishes preserved in stunning three-dimensional preservation'. In the book, a map positioned before the preface outlines the Devonian reef site. It is situated south-east of Fitzroy Crossing, taking in Prices Hill, Emanuel Range, Laidlaw Range, Bugle Gap, Lawford Range, Mt Pierre Gorge, and Teichert Hills.

John Long recalls Curt Teichert 'as the man who collected the very first Gogo fish fossil'. He mentions Teichert's appointment to a research position in the University of Western Australia's fledgling geology department in the 1930s, and his subsequent discovery of 'coccostean remains in concretions'. Lacking the chemical means to prepare the fossils, Teichert left them unstudied in one of the university's collections.

Two decades passed before those fossils caught the eye of Harry Toombs, who had just started using diluted acetic acid to prepare fish fossils encased in limestone. He led an expedition to Gogo in 1963, jointly backed by the British Museum of Natural History and the Western Australian Museum. More than half a tonne of fossiliferous Gogo shale nodules went to London with Toombs, leading to contention over the WA Museum missing out on its expected share of those rare samples.

Next on the scene was George Kendrick, a technical officer in the palaeontology section of the WA Museum. He and Ken Buller (another technical officer) joined Harry Toombs and others for a 73-day expedition in 1967. Long was able to draw on Kendrick's meticulous notes to describe that expedition. He tells of Mrs Laidlaw, whose husband managed Christmas Creek Station, giving Toombs a fossil fish that had been collected in the Bugle Gap area. That fish became the holotype of the new placoderm known as *Camuropiscis laidlawi*. At the conclusion of the expedition, two tonnes of fossils were shipped to Britain to be prepared and described. Individual placoderms named *Kendrickichthys*, *Bullerichthys*, *Bruntonichthys*, and *Rolfosteous* recognised the work done by key members of the 1967 expedition.

John Long entered the picture in 1986, through another UWA research program. He worked the Gogo fossil sites at intervals over the next 20 years, as well as making expeditions to other sites that included the Ningbing Range out of Kununurra.

Part 2 of *Swimming in Stone* deals with the scientific significance of the Gogo fishes. It discusses their evolution, the development of new anatomical features, and how some of those features relate to the origin of land animals. Part 3 provides a global perspective, concluding with a chapter titled 'We are all but highly advanced fishes'.

Discussion of controversy that has arisen in the collection, analysis, description, and naming of the Gogo fossils is integrated into relevant chapters. It clarifies various aspects of the science without diminishing the author's enthusiastic engagement with his readers.

Cathie Clement