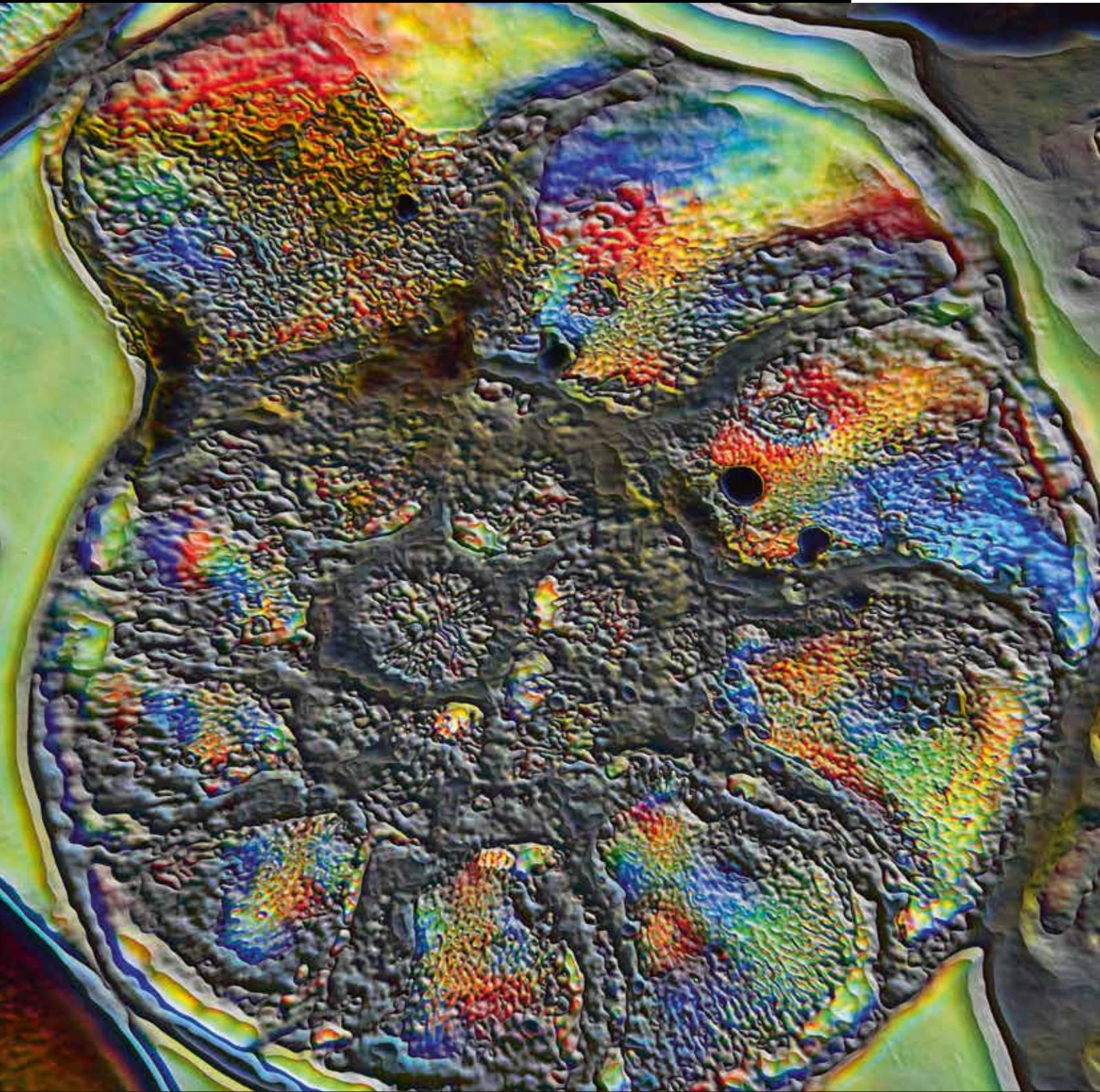


Magazine **Deposits**

Issue 36

**R O C K S
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G E O L O G Y**

depositsmag.com



Also in this issue:

- Interpreting ammonite fossils • Location profile: Wrabness
- The graptolites of Aberiddy Bay • Thrihnukagigur
- Going green: chloritized tuffs from Antigua • Events diary
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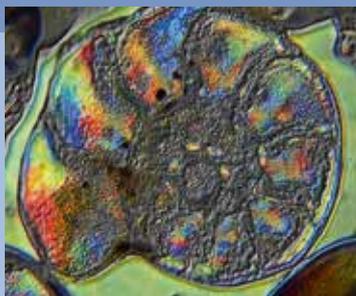
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In the last issue of Deposits, the 'Editor's comments' page featured a short article entitled, "Turning microfossils into words of art". In it, we promised to list the species to match the photographs in this issue. All the specimens are from the Pliocene and in order of appearance are as follows: Ellipsoidira ellipson, Polymorphira gibba, Polystomiella vuispa, Frondicularia isoiequalis and Adelosina sp. Our readers favourite image was the foraminifera "Polystomiella vuispa", which we have used as this issues cover image.

The word "amateur" has been stripped of much of its honour by successive generations in pursuit of a pay packet for everything they do. Amateur cricketers were still playing at the highest levels when I was a boy and I can claim to have attended the penultimate 'Amateur Cup Final' at Wembley (Slough Town were robbed). But amateur sportsmen are now extinct, except in the park and local cricket club, and who pays them more than slight attention?

This should not be true in the natural sciences and especially not in palaeontology. The ranks of the professional palaeontologist continue to shrink. For example, a colleague at the Natural History Museum in London recently lamented to me that, when he joined the museum, there were three researchers on fossil brachiopods alone; now there are only three salaried researchers working on fossil invertebrates.

However, the financial constraints on university geology departments and museums do not limit the size of the pool of productive amateurs.

The ways for an amateur palaeontologist and/or geologist to make a scientific contribution are many, but there is wisdom in limiting their field of interest to a particular group of fossils, a limited geographic area or a specific stratigraphic sequence. Be practical – you may have a true interest in the Neogene gastropods of southeast Asia, but if you live in Telford, it will be (at best) unrealistic to make regular excursions into the field to develop your collection. Better to focus nearer home. To the best of my knowledge, the fossil gastropods of the English Wenlock are not being studied at present and, even though they may be rare, Wenlock Edge and the Wren's Nest are in easy reach. And fieldwork will lead to familiarity. You will develop an eye for the material; that is, your mental 'search pattern' for Silurian snails will improve and you will soon know which species turn up in any given site or bed.

Collect and identify. That old stand-by, 'British Palaeozoic Fossils', has been on my bookshelf for almost 40 years and is a fine first step to developing an expertise in a new area of palaeontology. But search out the original references. Many old papers and monographs are now available free on the Internet and others can be photocopied in libraries or found in second-hand bookshops or websites like www.abebooks.com. The accumulation of essential literature has never been easier.

Your expertise will grow as you get closer to your subject. You will want to know the names of all the species that you see. Some will be difficult to identify, being either rarities or maybe even new species. Are there interesting preservational differences, such as casts at one site and moulds at another, and why? Are shells encrusted by corals or bryozoans? Have they been bored? Such questions relating to taphonomy and palaeoecology are always fascinating. I won't go on and on, but I'm sure you get the message. Find your niche and develop your expertise. Become the authority. The final phase of the process should be towards publication, which I don't have time to discuss here ... but maybe in a later editorial?

Stephen K Donovan
Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden, the Netherlands

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Late Deposits

We would like to apologise to readers for the later than normal release date of this issue. The delay has been caused by the launch of our new UKGE website, www.ukge.com, which has been a mammoth eight-month project during 2013. We will resume normal scheduling for 2014.

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