

THE GATEWAY

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PHIL HEAD

FROM A LAND BEFORE PING-PONG Dr Caldwell proudly shows off a fossilized piece of an ancient marine creature. Caldwell hopes that the eight fossils will allow scientists a better understanding of the mysterious Ichthyosaurus species.

Fossils finally being analyzed

The ancient find was originally brought to U of A in the '70s, but was recently rediscovered under a ping-pong table in the department's undergrad lounge

JASKARAN SINGH
News Writer

An 8 million-year-old fossil of an ancient marine creature, lost for over 20 years, was rediscovered in 2002 at the University of Alberta underneath a ping-pong table and the results of the fossil research have only recently been released.

"[The fossils] made it under the ping-pong table in the undergraduate teaching lab, which ended up being the undergraduate teaching table that all the specimens for the paleontology classes would be laid out upon for the students to look at ... I did my undergraduate [at the University] in the '80s, and the irony is that the ping-pong table Ichthyosaurus was under my feet the whole bloody time," Dr Michael Caldwell, U of A's professor of vertebrate paleontology, explained.

The bones were originally discovered in 1971 in the Northwest Territories by a group of graduate students and a few volunteers. In fact, a technician who was on the original expedition still works at the University today. While travelling through the wilderness, the group had stumbled upon eight well-preserved skeletons of Ichthyosaurs: prehistoric marine creatures that resemble modern-day dolphins.

Caldwell explains that they're nowhere near mammals on the biological tree of life, and interestingly enough, they're almost as distant to dinosaurs.

Due to the size and weight of the artifacts, they were stored where they would be out of the way—underneath a ping-pong table in the undergraduate teaching lab.

"[There were two alumni who] both knew that ping-pong table Ichthyosaurus was under there, but people never mentions things like that if no one ever thinks to ask about them, right? Well no one thought to ask them because no one else knew what was under the table," Caldwell said.

"I did my undergraduate [at the University] in the '80s, and the irony is that the ping-pong table Ichthyosaurus was under my feet the whole bloody time."

**DR MICHAEL CALDWELL,
PROFESSOR OF VERTEBRATE
PALEONTOLOGY**

The specimens were uncovered when Caldwell began renovations on the laboratory in the summer of 2002, and since the discovery he and an undergraduate student have published three papers and given one conference on the fossils.

The associate professor who had held Caldwell's position at the time of the original unearthing specialized in mammal vertebrates rather

than species of Ichthyosaurus, so he had not expressed a great interest in the fossils. The professor had sent for a specialist from the Royal Ontario Museum; however, the specialist never showed up.

There were eight fossils found, including two embryos discovered in an adult female. The Ichthyosaurs that were found in the Northwest Territories are by no means the oldest, nor the largest. What makes them special is the information they provide about the environment. The majority of Ichthyosaurs are found in certain locations in Germany, these fossils were found in the deep north, in a location of cold water, this poses many questions about the biogeography of the species.

"It's not going to rewrite our basic understanding of Ichthyosaurus relationships, but what it does do is add a very important part of the picture; or, it finishes off that part of that picture at the twilight of the evolutionary history of this group, where they are actually about to go extinct," Caldwell said.

As for the future of the discovery, the fossils are already allocated a place in the U of A's fossil records, and in the forthcoming year there is to be more research. Caldwell was awarded Australian Council Linkage Grant, meaning next year Australian authorities will come in hope of excavating more Ichthyosaurus paraphernalia, and comparing it with similar specimens discovered the deep end of the southern hemisphere.

Norovirus strikes Lister's residents

SCOTT LILWALL
Deputy News Editor

Lister Hall has shut its doors to guests and has shutdown some services to students after over 100 people living in the residence have fallen ill to a Norovirus. But Capital Health and University of Alberta officials are saying that the outbreak of the virus seems to be under control.

"As of this morning, 80 per cent of the students who have shown symptoms have recovered. We have 24 active cases at the moment," said Carl Amrhein, Provost of the U of A, at a press conference yesterday.

He explained that Capital Health suspected the outbreak to be a Norovirus, which was later confirmed at 6pm yesterday, after samples from students were tested at Edmonton's Provincial Laboratory for Public Health.

According to Dr James Talbot, Associate Medical Officer of Health for Capital Health, Noroviruses are a class of organisms that cause gastroenteritis. They're transmitted by touching objects handled by an infected person. And, while the length of the illness is short, the virus can make people very sick.

"Most of the people who have been infected so far have some combination of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. It's very unpleasant for them for the first 4 hours, and then they are recovering very well after that," he

said in a phone interview.

Talbot said that there have been 123 students confirmed sick, among students in Lister Hall, 26 of which began to show symptoms since Friday morning. The rate of infection, he said, seems to be slowing down quickly, with just one new case reported Sunday.

Capital Health has taken over the situation to prevent the disease from spreading into the rest of the residence and beyond the halls of Lister.

But some think that the number of students ill is being underreported. A student living in Lister Hall, who spoke with the Gateway on the condition that her name not be printed, believes that more than 123 students in the building have caught the virus.

"That's an underreported number. On one tower alone in [Mackenzie Hall], I know there have been at least 150 cases. I think there are about 50 on each floor—around that number. There have been a few floors where the whole floor is sick, and that was last week, when [news stories] were coming out. There are way more cases than that. And people are still getting sick," she said.

She added that the floor coordinators in Lister Hall have instructed students not to speak with media about the outbreak, and to direct reporters to someone from the University's public affairs department.

PLEASE SEE LISTER ♦ PAGE 3

Macleans' files 22 freedom of information requests

RAMIN OSTAD
News Staff

Of the 22 universities hoping to exclude themselves from the Maclean's annual university rankings, all but two may soon be forced to participate, thanks to numerous Freedom of Information (FOI) requests filed by the magazine.

On 14 August, eleven Canadian universities opted out of answering the questionnaire required to create the magazine's university issue, objecting to the methodology used by Maclean's to analyze the information. Other postsecondary institutions soon followed suit, bringing the number to 22—nearly half of the 47 universities ranked in the survey. This action prompted Maclean's to issue FOI requests to 20 of the refusing institutions, in an attempt to gain the information necessary in time for their 2 November issue. (Two

universities located in New Brunswick didn't receive requests, as the freedom of information act in that province does not apply to universities.)

"We've been sending these [questionnaires] to these universities for 15 years, and we've been getting it back completed for 15 years, so this was certainly a surprise," said Tony Keller, managing editor of special projects at Maclean's. "There's really no other way to get information out of a public body that refuses to give it to you than to use the Freedom of Information Law."

Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) legally obligates all public institutions to disclose records in their custody. Henry Davis, the Access and Privacy Advisor for the Information and Privacy Office at the University of Alberta, explained the details of the act.

PLEASE SEE MACLEAN'S ♦ PAGE 3

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I want popcorn

The results are in for the Edmonton International Film Festival. Check out the reviews, then go eat some candy.

A&E, PAGE 8-9



Puck shopping

The Golden Bears hosted the Brick Invitational hockey tournament this weekend. No sofas were purchased.

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