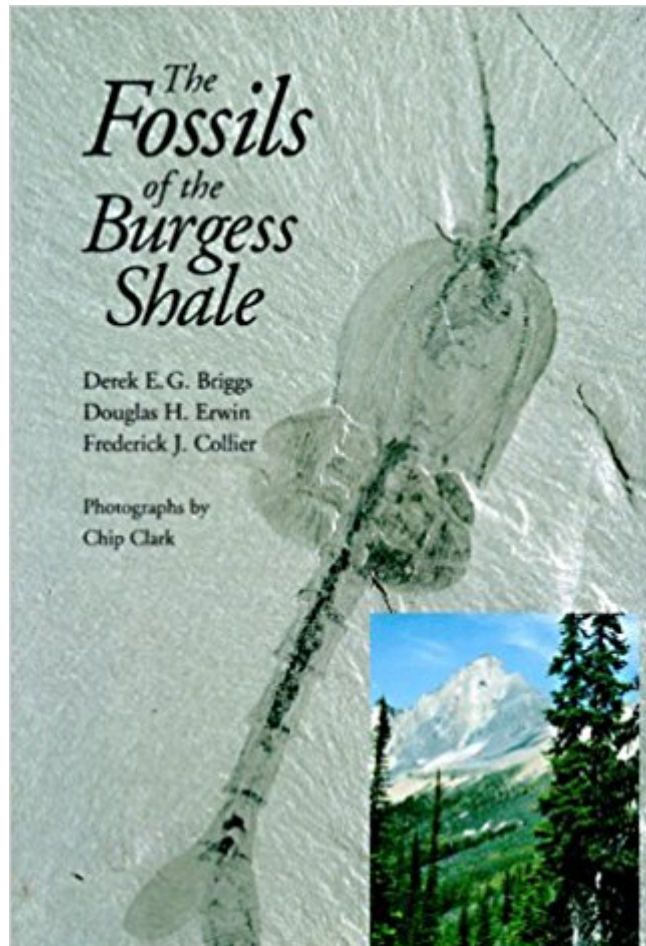




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The Fossils Of The Burgess Shale



Synopsis

Book by Derek E. G. Briggs, Douglas H. Erwin, Frederick J. Collier

Book Information

Hardcover: 238 pages

Publisher: Smithsonian Books (November 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1560983647

ISBN-13: 978-1560983644

Product Dimensions: 10.2 x 7.3 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #536,811 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #117 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Fossils](#) #227 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Paleontology](#) #975 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geology](#)

Customer Reviews

You might think a listing of the fossils found in a single site would not be all that interesting, but the Burgess Shale collection is extraordinary. For whereas most fossilization preserves hard tissues like bones, teeth, and shells, the geologic forces that formed the Burgess Shale also preserved soft tissues. The shale's fossil animals and plants are from the Cambrian, an era long before the dinosaurs during which a remarkable array of living things came into being. The site itself, in the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia, was discovered early in this century. Its full import wasn't grasped for many years, but the discoveries it eventually afforded, even if they don't include *T. Rexes*, certainly rival those made by any dinosaur hunter. Although looking--as this book lets us, up close and in detail--at fossilized sponges, algae, worms, and such may not inspire another Jurassic Park, budding and armchair paleontologists will have a field day, even though the accompanying text is thick with technical talk. Jon Kartman

This is utterly fascinating

I recommend reading this book before undertaking any other work on the subject of the Burgess Shale fossils. It avoids the speculative, controversial and metaphysical conclusions found in Stephen J. Gould's *A Wonderful Life* and Simon Conway-Morris's *Crucible of Creation* and presents

a superior first look at the remarkable Cambrian flora and fauna. The Fossils of the Burgess Shale begins with a simple, clearly written presentation of the site, chronology of fieldwork and the geologic essentials. The bulk of the book (199 pages) is dedicated to a celebration of the amazing life forms that have been uncovered. Fine B&W photography of selected fossils coupled with beautiful line-art reconstructions provides a visual framework that supports the highly informative and concise text. After reading this book, readers who wish to expand their knowledge of the subject will be well-prepared for the more personal interpretations of Gould and Conway-Morris.

If you've read "It's a Wonderful Life" or "The Crucible of Creation," this is the perfect pictorial companion. The photographs are superb, and are accompanied by drawings which really help put it all together. I never completely understood what the other authors meant when they said that the fossils were well preserved. Now I see what that means. Photos such as the one of Vauxia are astounding examples of preservation to say nothing of Olenoides. The photo of Aysheaia looks like a beautiful petroglyph. The descriptions help too. You can actually see where the inner organs lie in many examples once they are pointed out by the author. This is a book for anyone curious about the Cambrian. It is so detailed that it can also be an inspiration for designers who are looking for a different theme. Highly recommended!

I am still reading the book, and enjoying it. I only allow myself to read a few plates each night, as I will soon have finished the book.

I had thought about purchasing the Cambrian explosion but decided it was too expensive so opted for The Fossils of the Burgess Shale.

This book not only explains the great explosion of life and the tremendous diversity. The pictures and illustrations are exceptional.

Best fossils on the planet

If you've ever kept a scrapbook of old photographs, you'll understand the fascination of this collection. Instead of grandmothers, aged aunts or toddler cousins, this book reveals life from the dimmest past. With photographs and drawings, Briggs and his colleagues have restored to view rare animals that lived in ancient seas. These are our earliest forebears, and for that reason alone,

this book is worth repeated scrutiny. The images, with their stories of discovery and restoration, are offered in a spirit of shared discovery. These are very special creatures and it behooves us all to understand their value. Although the book is targeted for professional paleontologists, the authors give us text nearly as illustrative as the images. They are part of the team who personally enticed many of these fossils from their lithic prison. Beginning with an account of Charles Woolcott's trek into the mountains of British Columbia, they go on to describe the environment in which these creatures lived. The significance of the Burgess Shale fossils, of course, is that they are images of soft body parts, usually lost as fossilization proceeds. At the time of the original find in 1909, such artifacts, especially ones of such ancient deposition were pricelessly rare. Woolcott himself understood their value to science, but never dedicated the necessary time to tease out their full secrets. It took Briggs and others, particularly Simon Conway Morris to apply the painstaking effort to recreate the body forms locked in the shale. In so doing, they overthrew a number of blithe assumptions made by a number of commentators, in particular Stephen J. Gould who had popularized the Shale finds, but sadly misinterpreted what they represent. As you slowly turn over the pages of this book, reflect on the vast ages separating you from these creatures. The sea has always kept some bizarre secrets, but few can match the multi-spined Hallucigenia or mud-burrowing Ottoia. Haplophrentis might be mistaken for a Roman dagger lost in the sea until you read that its maximum length was but 30 millimetres long. A more formidable denizen of these waters is the Anomalocaris, with its hooked feelers and rasping mouth. Swimming in a sea with this half-meter long predator might not have been dangerous, but observing it might best be done from the beach. This book is a clearly valuable contribution to our understanding of life's history and the process of evolution. It belongs on the shelf next to the other albums of family history. Take it down from time to time and simply open it at random. With half-closed eyes it isn't difficult to see these creatures in their daily lives, clutching rocks, swimming through the water, or burrowing into the bottom. They are your forebears, and deserve as much of your respect as does Aunt Matilda.

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