

Editor's Page

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Many examples of vandalism, despoliation or even decimation of famous and other geological sites are now being reported in geological literature. The most recent that springs to mind is that by Stouge and Knight¹ who describe and picture results of vandalism of the famous Table Point Formation of western Newfoundland, where classic invertebrate faunas have been wantonly removed with varying degrees of success. The result of such action is that bedding plane surfaces have been severely damaged and future potential scientific research severely affected. Whilst this example is one of many geological sites that can be regarded as 'accessible' to amateurs, students and specialists alike, vandalism is by no means restricted to mere accessibility. Bridgewater and others², for example, have recently described the wanton disfiguration of the famous Skaergaard outcrop in western Greenland. Fortunately, reports made by Stouge and Knight and Bridgewater and others have helped to advertize the fact that such important geological sites are being vandalized and that future visitors should, perhaps, give more thought to wanton destruction. Fortunately too, these sites still remain intact. What is of more concern, however, is that sometimes geological 'classics' are, on occasion, totally destroyed. Lovell³, for example, has recently noted that a loose slab of trace fossil-bearing sandstone in the Permo-Triassic of Arran (which he described in Pollard and Lovell⁴) had been totally obliterated by casual collectors. More seriously, Harland (pers. comm.) informs us that his holotype of *Caprionichnus steinvikensis* which was located on a small wave-cut platform in Langesund, southwest of Oslo, has mysteriously disappeared within the last two years. How can these classics be possibly replaced?

Who then are the culprits responsible for such despoliation or decimation of these and other geological sites? As geology has undergone an enormous expansion over the last decade both students and amateurs alike have exhibited a corresponding increase. So-called professional geologists have also undoubtedly increased in number as have the requirements of materials needed by commercial specimen supply companies. With such inter-related increases it is difficult to actually allocate the blame to any single individual or group unless the blame is self evident. An example of the latter was recently given in Gittens⁵.

"The large volume of scree shown here was generated with power tools by German fossil collectors. The site is a classic one for finding fossils of the Silurian fish *Jamoytius* and is a site of special scientific interest. The German parties who visited this outcrop at Lesmahagow (Scotland) took back the cliff face by several feet and opened two small "quarries" some five feet square. They left beer and food cans, German newspapers, a broken spade and a dated envelope as evidence. It appears that these vandals made two raids, one in the autumn of 1976 and another in the following spring. They removed an unknown quantity of valuable scientific material."

Unfortunately, however, it is not often that the blame can be directed towards an individual or group of individuals. Besides, in many respects, isn't it too late anyway? What we must ask ourselves, however, is that are we ourselves not in part to blame? True, on an individual basis, there is little we can do with regard to keen amateur collectors or indeed commercial supply companies. Provided there is no lawful protection of geological sites such groups are and always will be a potential hazard. But shouldn't we ourselves respect and encourage fellow professionals and students alike to respect the fact that geological sites of one variety or another are not infinite and indestructible. Should we not attempt to discourage casual collecting of material which, in the majority of cases, will undoubtedly be removed to some garbage dump or other at some future date. Should not we ourselves and others attempt to, in the words of Bryan Lovell, "stop hammering". Because the publication of standard itineraries for important areas, either in the form of commercial publications aimed at the amateur rock, fossil or mineral collector or the more technical and academic guides, for the student and researcher, has virtually reached its peak, isn't it time irresponsible despoliation was terminated?

We do not offer a panacea to this wanton destruction but we do remind you of the individual responsibility you yourself must assume. In a future editorial we will discuss some of the aspects and problems involved with the lawful protection of geological sites — meanwhile think about it!

¹STOUGE, S. and KNIGHT, I. 1981. Table Point, Western Newfoundland An Example of Disfiguration of a Famous Outcrop. Geoscience Canada, 8, pp. 132-134.

²BRIDGEWATER, D., DAVIES, F.B., GILL, R.C.O., GORMAN, B.E., MYERS, F.S. and TAYLOR, P. 1978. Wanton disfiguration of famous Skaergaard outcrop deplored. Report of activities 1977, Greenland Geological Survey, Report 90, pp. 12-14.

³LOVELL, J.P.B. 1977. Stop hammering New Scientist, 76, p. 817.

⁴POLLARD, J.E. and LOVELL, J.P.B. 1976. Trace Fossils from the Permo-Triassic of Arran. Scottish Journal of Geology, 12, pp. 209-225.

⁵GITTENS, D. 1977. Preserving Britain's Geological Sites. New Scientist, 76, pp. 624-625.