

The *PLASTER JACKET* is a newsletter. Questions, announcements, and other communications are solicited from all readers. Information of general interest will be included in future issues.

It is our intent to produce this series at the rate three to six issues per year. We hope to add as many genuinely interested paleontologists as possible to our mailing list. If you are interested please send your name and address to the *PLASTER JACKET*. The issues are distributed free of charge to all interested people.

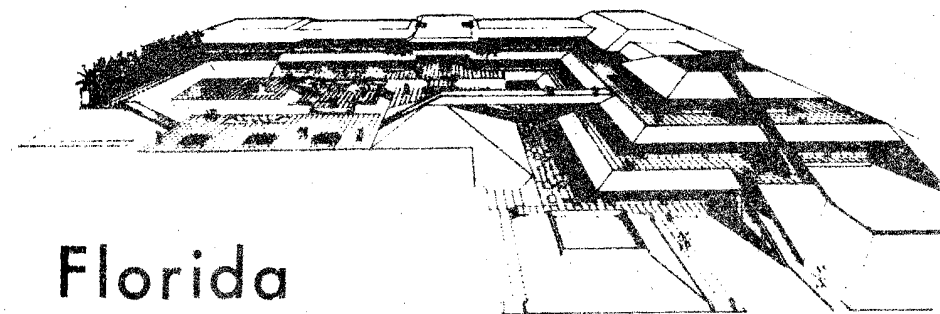
This public document was promulgated at an annual cost of \$3000 or \$0.20 per copy to circulate authoritative material on Florida paleontology and to foster communication among enthusiasts of this subject.

THE *PLASTER JACKET*
Florida State Museum
University of Florida
Gainesville FL 32611

THE PLASTER JACKET

NUMBER 26

OCTOBER 1976



Florida

Paleontological

Meetings Issue

THE FLORIDA STATE MUSEUM

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Both in our travels around Florida and here at the Museum, our fossil collecting friends have asked questions such as: How do I prepare or preserve my fossils? I know where an entire animal is located, but should I touch it? Who can I get to help? What records shall I keep? In this paper I will briefly consider excavation, preparation and lab techniques, along with the equipment and supplies needed for such work. Hopefully this will give the reader an idea of what to use and how to go about collecting fossils.

First let us look at what a fossil really is. Stanley J. Olsen, in his *FOSSIL MAMMALS OF FLORIDA* (1959), defined it in this way: "a fossil is anything of organic origin which has been preserved in the earth's crust by natural causes. (Organisms which have been buried in the earth during historic times are usually not included in this category.)" From being preserved in the mineral-laden earth of Florida for many thousands to millions of years, most fossil bones and teeth are penetrated by various minerals making them denser than in their original state. Major minerals infiltrating fossils and replacing or supplementing the original materials are silicates and carbonates. Phosphate is also added in some areas, thus adding to the phosphate already present in vertebrate skeletons. Occasionally remains are found with very little mineral replacement. These bones are usually quite fragile and must be handled with extreme care.

A simple test can be applied to help verify if your specimens are fossil or present remains. Hold a small section of the specimen in an open flame until it chars (a match will do). If the specimen

has lost its organic chemicals (which happens in a matter of years or even months), it should not give off much smell, but if it is fairly recent, it will char and smell like rotten flesh.

FIELD COLLECTING

There are numerous collecting areas within our fossil rich state. Each area presents a different problem, both in collecting and preserving techniques. First, one must remember before going into any collecting area that permission M U S T be acquired before entering on private land. Many areas are being closed to collectors because of abuse and littering of these private lands. If the land is posted with "No Trespassing" signs, remember--you can be taken to court for going onto this property. Many owners today are enforcing these signs. GET PERMISSION FIRST.

Many mining areas around the state are rich in fossils. They are one of the areas with strict enforcement of the no trespassing laws. This enforcement is necessary to protect the paleontologist and the mining companies. Cave-ins, heavy equipment, quicksand areas, and other hazards are abundant in many mines. These laws are to protect you and the mining company's liability, and must be respected.

Even on public land the paleontologist must observe the rights of its owners. The owners of state land are the people of Florida, as represented by Florida statutes and state agencies. In state parks especially, collecting natural history objects is forbidden, because it contradicts the parks' purpose to preserve nature for the continued enjoyment of all visitors. On other state lands, including tidelands and all springs and streams that are "navigable waterways," the relevant law is the Florida Archives and History Act (Chapter 267 of the Florida Statutes) in which Article 061 states that it is the policy of the state "to protect and preserve historic sites and properties, buildings, artifacts, treasure trove, and objects of antiquity which have scientific or historical value or are of interest to the public

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. . . " In practice, however, the two agencies most deeply concerned with such matters, namely the Division of Archives, History, and Records in Tallahassee and the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, regard most vertebrate fossils as falling outside the intent of this article.

Sometimes perfect skulls or entire skeletons can be found in rivers, mines, or road cuts. If such a specimen is found in an actively mined or construction area, notify the superintendent or his office of the find and see if they can work around that area until the specimen can be carefully excavated. Also notify the museum, so they can help. Not only the specimen itself but also its place of occurrence is of great scientific importance. The surrounding strata, the placement of the bones, and the associated smaller materials can greatly add to our knowledge of these animals.

Sometimes professional help is not readily available, and you may have to tackle the problem directly. The overburden should be carefully removed from above the specimen. Determine the size and outlines of the deposit and remove all the overburden to within a foot from the top of the specimen. A common error is to try to hurry by working from the side into an overhanging bank. The next step is to work down from the top and slowly remove the remaining overburden, using small spades or trowels. Expose the entire site before removing any of the bones. Photograph in detail the entire operation as you work; these photographs can help the professionals at a later date.

The matrix around a specimen may have smaller animals disbursed throughout. This material should be screened for microfossils. It helps if there is a water source nearby, as is usually true in Florida. Samples of the matrix should be washed through graded nesting screens, from 1/4-inch to window screen (26 mesh) or even smaller, if possible. If the microfossils are plentiful, large quantities should be screened and properly labeled as to strata level as:

above, with, or below the larger fossil material.

After all of the overburden has been removed and all the specimens are exposed, all the area should again be photographed or diagrammed to show location of the animal remains. Carefully remove the smaller specimens that are not broken. Larger pieces should be cast in a plaster jacket for safe removal. Refer to *PLASTER JACKET NO. 6* for the correct technique in applying a plaster jacket. Repair and cleaning procedures will be discussed later in this paper.

In most mining and dredging operations one can find overburden spoil banks. Fossil remains can be found in many of these spoils, especially after they have had time to weather from rain or wind. Very rarely are complete specimens found, as skulls or large bones are usually broken when the overburden is dumped onto the large spoil mounds. Even so, some very important finds can be made at such sites, especially if the collector is diligent.

Beach collecting is very similar to spoil collecting. The ocean cuts into fossil deposits and waves carry them up onto the beach. Beach collecting, like spoil-bank collecting, requires very little in the way of equipment. A good pair of walking shoes, a pail, some small plastic bags with labels (for small fragile specimens), and good eyesight are all that is required.

KEEPING RECORDS

Maintaining records of your valuable finds are very important. Complete locality data must be maintained to give each specimen scientific importance.

A small piece of paper (waterproof ledger preferred) should be placed in your collecting container with the following data: State, county, locality name or as detailed location information as possible, date, and collector's name (example: Florida, Alachua County, 10 mi south of US 441 on Seaboard Coastline Railroad, spoils near tressel, 24 October 1976, John Doe).

It will help to get a 7-1/2 minute topographic map of your collecting area. These are available, along with an index for the state, from the U.S. Geological Survey (see Appendix). From this map you can determine the exact location and elevation of your sites. A collector may visit several different areas during a day. The above information keeps one location separate from another and aids in cataloguing once you arrive home.

At home the field tag information is transferred to a catalogue. The catalogue will list each specimen that is worth keeping. Develop a numbering technique for your specimens. A simple method is to use your initials and a number (JD101). The catalogue will consist of specimen number, identification of specimen (name), complete locality data, nature of specimen (tooth, vertebra, partial mandible, etc.), collector's name, date collected, and any remarks that might be important to the specimen (see Figure 1). If the identification is unknown, it is not critical; some descriptive phrase ("flat brown fish (?) tooth") would do just as well.

The specimen number recorded in the catalogue now must be placed on the specimen. The number can be written directly on the specimen if the bone color is light. A dark specimen must have a small strip of flat white enamel paint placed on a spot that will not cover up any important identification characters (usually along the side of a tooth, on the side of a long bone, etc.) (see Figure 2). The ink used in lettering the fossils should be permanent. At the Museum we use Higgins Engrossing Ink. This ink is a waterproof black-carbon writing ink and can be used in most fountain pens. It is available at most office supply stores. As an extra precaution one can coat the label with a chemical hardener (see below).

If you are very energetic and would like to go one step further, a specimen label can be made out for each fossil. This is a small label with all of the information found in the catalogue. It is kept with the fossil at all times (see Figure 3).

CATALOGUE OF FOSSIL VERTEBRATES		UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA				
Catalogue Number	NAME	LOCALITY	Number of Specimens	Nature of Specimen	COLLECTED BY	When Collected
10111	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Florida, Citrus Co. Inglis IA	1	partial skull	John Doe	24 Oct, 1976
10112	<i>Tapirus</i> sp.	"	1	incisor	"	"
10113	<i>Pliometanastes</i>	Florida, Alachua Co, McGhee Farm	1	metapodial	"	28 Oct, 1976
10114	<i>Carcharodon</i>	Florida	1	teeth	"	29 Oct, 1976

FIGURE 1. --- Sample catalogue entries.

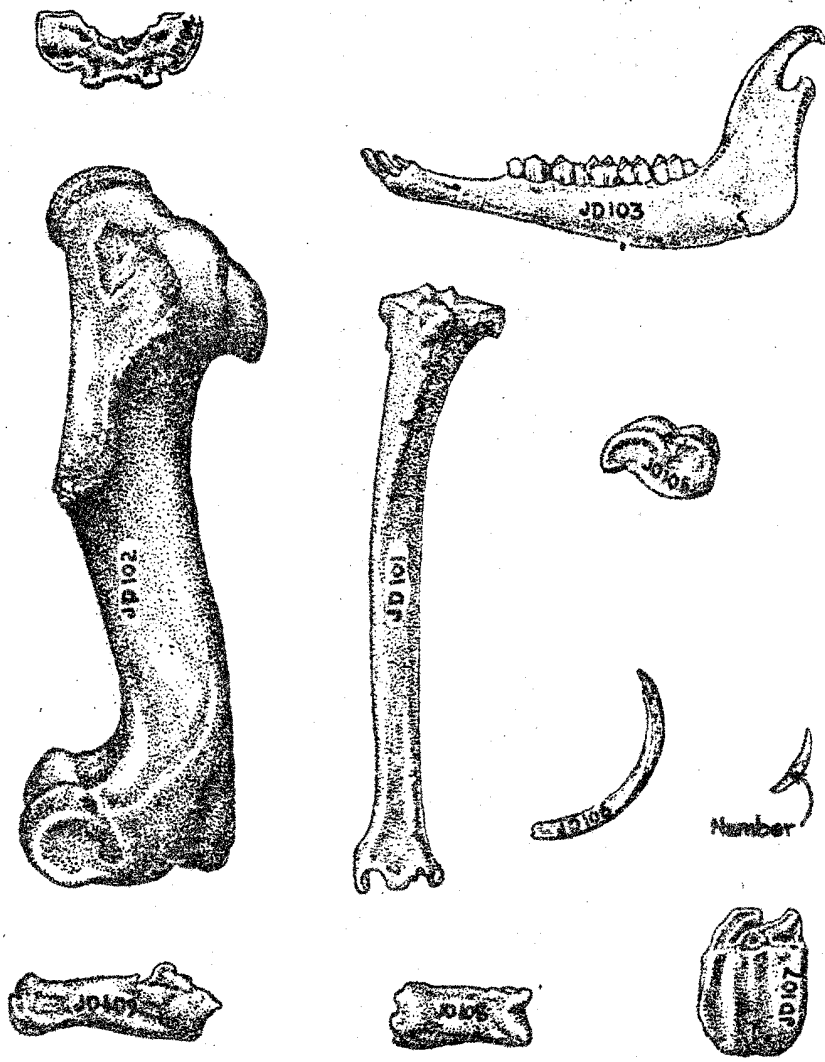


FIGURE 2.-- Catalogue numbers are placed on specimens using waterproof ink. Caution must be maintained not to cover up any important identification characters.

FLORIDA STATE MUSEUM FIELD LABEL

HORIZON _____
 LOCALITY _____
 COUNTY _____ STATE _____
 COLLECTOR _____
 DATE _____ 19 _____

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
 COLLECTIONS UF _____

FIGURE 3.-- Sample labels used both in the field and with each specimen in your collection. Field labels are made on waterproof ledger paper.

LAB PREPARATION

Proper cleaning and preserving techniques are very important in paleontology. They will guarantee the endurance of the specimen for many years to come. In this paper only a few of the major forms of preparation will be discussed. Newer, more technical methods are being discovered everyday.

Most of the material brought home will be individual teeth or bone fragments. These probably have minute (hairline) cracks. If such material were left alone for several years, these cracks would enlarge and eventually the specimen could crumble. The specimen should be treated with some form of preservative as soon as possible. However, it must first be reasonably dry. One of the best commercial hardeners is Monsanto Chemical Company's Butvar B-76. The major drawback in using this hardener is that it is sold only in 125-pound drums. It comes as granulated crystals and must be dissolved in a solvent. Depending on the use, either of two solvents can be used: for faster drying use acetone, for slower drying use alcohol of almost any sort. In mixing Butvar crystals with the solvent one must remember not to pour the solvent onto the crystals, or else the crystals will cake together and mixing becomes nearly impossible. Instead slowly pour the crystals into a container of solvent using continuous agitation. Each crystal will dissolve fairly rapidly and the thickness of the solution can be controlled.

Butvar B-76 can be used for different purposes in the laboratory. A thin watery solution dissolved in acetone is primarily used as a preserving hardener. It can be brushed on in thin coats filling all cracks, sealing the specimen. The thinner the solution, the deeper it will penetrate. A glue for mending breaks can be made when the solution is mixed as a thicker liquid. Acetone is again the preferred solvent due to its high evaporative properties. This Butvar solution will not work on a specimen that is wet. The coatings will turn milky white and joints will not harden.

Specimens that are wet and require immediate repairs can be mended with any water-based white glue (such as Elmer's Glue or Elephant Glue). A safety precaution also must be observed. Acetone and alcohol are highly flammable. Keep away from any open flames or heat lamps and do not smoke while using these chemicals.

Normally the home collector cannot use a 125-pound drum of this preservative. The use of Duco Cement or other household glue is a good substitute. It is basically the same material, but comes already mixed in liquid form. It can be thinned with acetone as described above and used as a hardener or it can be left as a thick glue.

When a plaster jacket is employed to remove very fragile specimens from the earth, the painstaking task of carefully removing the specimen from the jacket is postponed for the lab. On all plaster jackets you must work from the underside of the specimen you jacketed and turned. The plaster is cut away from the underside of the jacket, if it was covered. Then the dirt, gravel, or clay is slowly removed by the use of small dental picks and brushes. Slowly work your way down to the level of the specimen (which had originally been on top). Expose the entire specimen, but in most cases the specimen will require light coatings of Butvar or Duco to keep fragmented pieces in place as the job proceeds. Once the specimen is fairly well exposed, repairs can be made. Carefully remove each broken piece individually, clean any foreign matter from it, and glue to an adjacent piece along all possible contact points. Never remove more pieces than you can safely assemble. Monumental three-dimensional jigsaw puzzles can easily be created by removing too many pieces from the jacket at once, and not using the jacket as a tool. The PJ performs the same task for a broken fossil as it does for a broken arm or leg--it holds everything in place while the pieces get mended. In a good jacket the pieces lie in proper association, making repairs easier than in a jigsaw puzzle.

To repair individual bones that were taken out of the field without the use of a PJ, or ones that you might have accidentally broken, a small sand box can be employed to aid in supporting the specimen. The sand can be pushed into any position under the specimen and keep the broken area tight together until the glue has had time to set.

Occasionally the collector is confronted with the problem of finding specimens encrusted with limestone, cemented clay, or other hard sedimentary deposits. This material is very difficult to remove without special tools or techniques. Most calcium carbonate deposits can be readily removed by dissolving with mild acid solutions (acetic or dilute hydrochloric). However, the specimens must not go unattended for any length of time, because the bone will lose its surrounding support. Also the acid can attack and dissolve the specimen itself. Even so, it is usually best to etch the deposit down close to the specimen, and then remove the remaining sediments mechanically by dental picks or other small tools. A small electric or compressed air tool is excellent for this purpose. Even better is an air-abrasive unit (sandblaster) that can direct very small particles of hard (or soft) abrasives next to the specimen, cutting away any unwanted material. This unit can safely remove sediments, from hard clays to volcanic tuffs and other hard silicates, without cutting into the specimen.

Another mechanical method that can be employed is the use of an air-hammer tool such as a Gravermeister. This is a miniature of the large air-hammers used on street work. The small vibrating tip can slowly chip away the hard matrix material. Since a slip of the hand can put this tip right into your specimen, it requires a steady hand and patience. Dental drills or other forms of hand grinders can be used in the removal of hard matrix. Again emphasis must be placed on the careful use of such tools.

Many of the specimens found are very rare items and you would like to copy these specimens to share with others. Accurate casting is the answer. To make a good cast, carefully study the specimen to determine the areas that have the most scientific importance (teeth, mastoid process, tuberosities of limbs, etc.). A relatively plain area must be chosen for the location of a pouring spout. This could be the foramen magnum in skulls or along the side of a limb bone. Also consider where the mold will be opened to remove the specimen and its casts. The area for the pouring spout must be formed in modeling clay to the desired thickness (see Figure 4). All openings in the specimen must be plugged with clay, so that the molding material will not cling or tear. On skulls the nasal aperture and foramen magnum are the largest openings to plug, but there are a dozen or more other cranial foramina as well. Usually the pouring spout is used as a support stand for the specimen while the molding compound is being applied.

There are many methods of applying a molding compound to the specimen. Brushing or dipping are most commonly used. It will take practice before this technique can be mastered. Do not start work on your prized specimen first; practice on a recent cat skull or some other common piece until you have mastered the procedures.

The molding compound most often used at the Museum is natural latex (see Appendix for trade names). It is a waterbase compound which can be thinned with water. The specimen must be prepared to accept the molding compound. Usually a good silicone mold release spray is sufficient. All areas to be coated with latex should be sprayed with a heavy coat. This will keep both the specimen and the mold from being damaged when they are later separated.

Brush a thinned mixture of the molding compound over the entire specimen. Try to avoid any accumulation of air bubbles in the latex. Air bubbles will reproduce in the latex casting. Allow the latex to dry before

applying additional coats. Slowly build up to the desired thickness. If reinforcement is necessary, add pieces of cheesecloth to those areas and coat with latex. Later the casts will have to be removed in one piece; to facilitate this it will help to build up certain areas more thickly. Also build up the mold more thickly in the area where the original and the casts will be removed. After the final coat of latex has dried an overmold or mother mold must be constructed. The overmold is a jacket made of plaster that will hold the flexible mold in the original shape of the specimen even after it is removed. All dimensions will remain true if the overmold is used properly.

Study your specimen again. Note where each undercut is located on the latex coated specimen. Overmolds of skulls or other complex pieces will comprise several interlocking pieces. All undercuts must be filled with filler-blocks made for easy removal. To keep the overmold from adhering to the latex, a coating of vaseline is applied over the latex, and to the adjoining sections of the overmold. After the overmold pieces (including filler-blocks) cover the mold in an even-flowing surface, the final overmold can be applied (see Figure 5). This outer overmold will usually consist of two to five pieces depending on the shape of the specimen. Smooth on the plaster to build up each section one at a time. Make sure that any division between sections has been coated with vaseline. Carefully loosen each section from the specimen before applying the plaster for the next. This will prevent a compounding of locked pieces that will be very difficult to remove after the overmold is completed.

Now that the mold and the overmold have been completed, the specimen can be removed. Carefully make the necessary incision along the thickened latex for removal of the original specimen. Then slowly separate the specimen from the latex, to avoid tearing the latex or breaking the specimen.

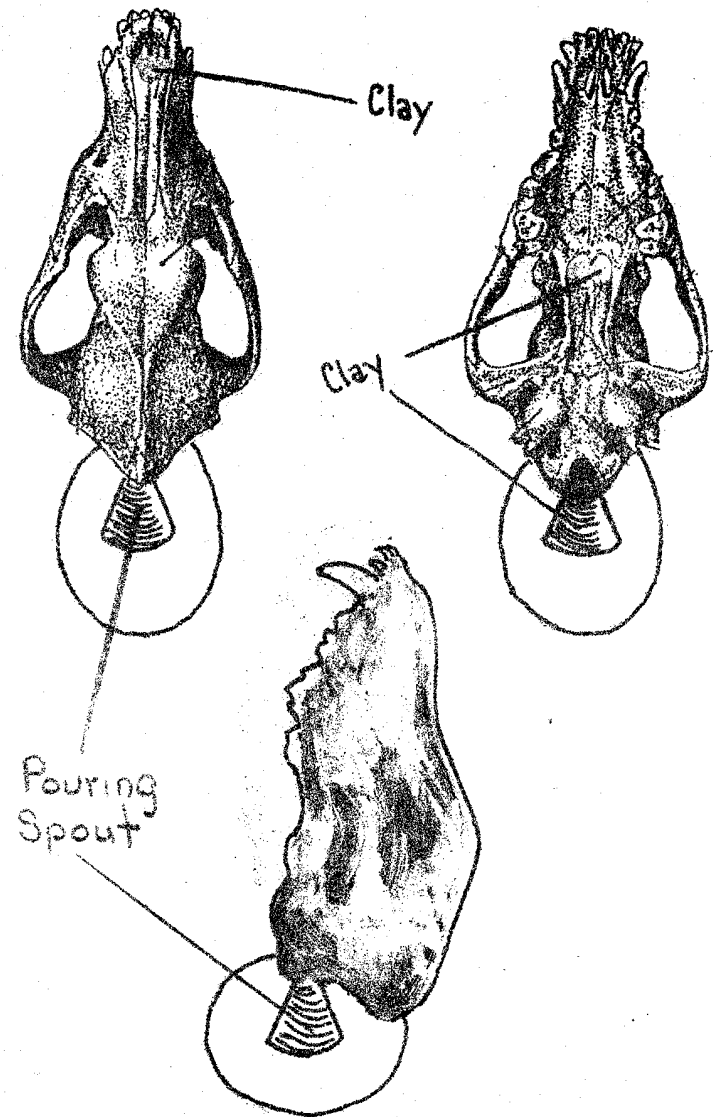


FIGURE 4.-- All major openings are filled with modeling clay prior to adding the molding compound. Brush on thin coatings of molding compounds.

Once the specimen is removed and the mold has been cleaned of any foreign particles, you are ready to make your first cast. Glue the incision back together using a rubber cement (Carter's Rubber Cement). Fit each filler block and over-mold section in place and strap tight using large rubber bands. Set your mold on the base and fill to the top with a thin solution of a good grade Plaster of Paris (Hydrocal). Shake and vibrate the mold several times to release any air bubbles that might accumulate. Small surface areas like tooth cusps or the tip of the coronoid process need special care to assure that plaster reaches them and that they are free of bubbles.

Allow plenty of time for the plaster to harden before attempting to take out the cast. Carefully remove each section of the overmold, unzip the incision in the mold, and remove the cast as you had removed the original specimen.

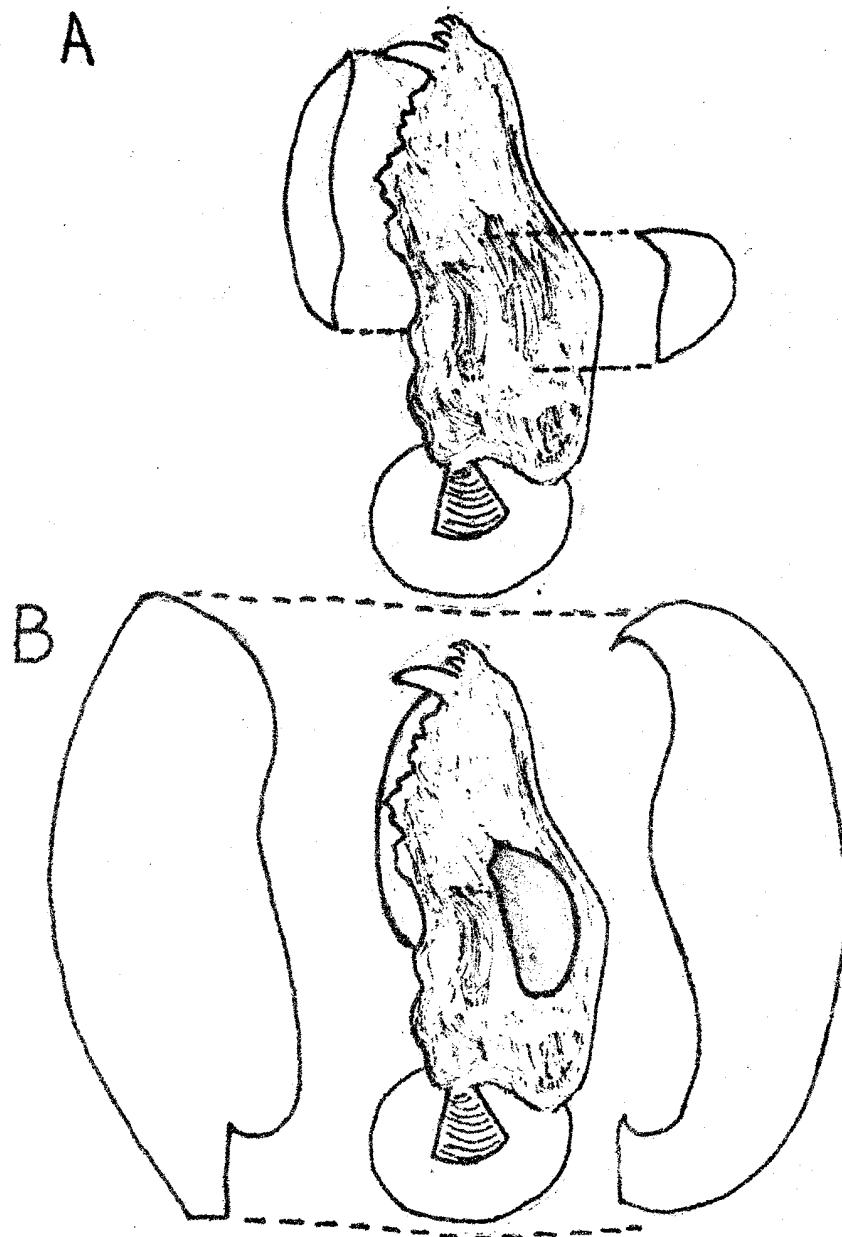
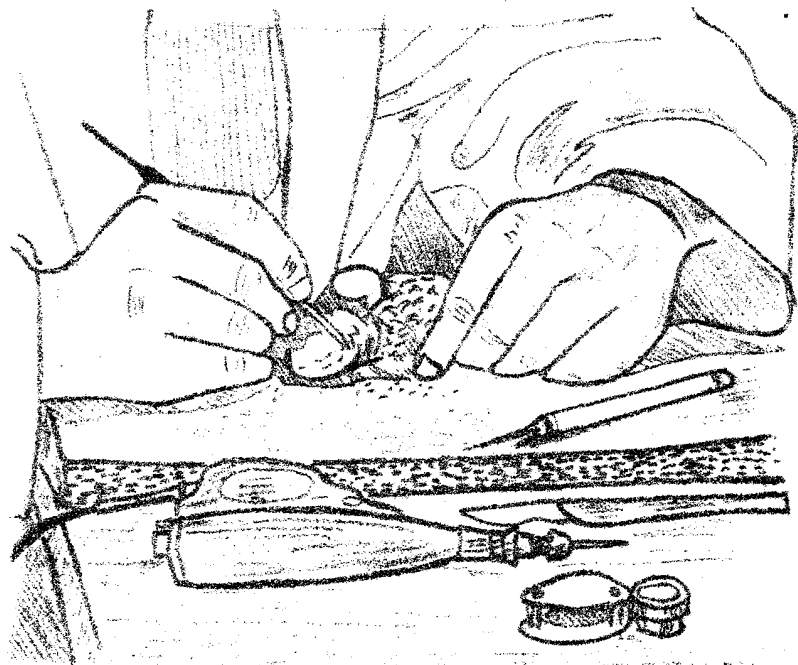


FIGURE 5.-- A) Adding filler-blocks to undercut areas; B) manufacture the final overmold.

APPENDIX

This paper has dealt with a few of the specialized processes used in paleontology. Most require on-the-job training, but with time and ingenuity most of these techniques can be mastered.

The following are some of the names and addresses needed to order supplies and tools to run a paleontology lab.

TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS

U.S. Geological Survey
1200 South Eads Street
Arlington VA 22209

MOLDING COMPOUNDS

Polymer Chemical Company
131 Barron Drive
Cincinnati OH 45215

(Natural latex
rubber)

Dow Corning Corporation
3400 Peachtree Road, NE
Atlanta GA 30326

(RTV Silastic
for small flex-
ible molds)

HARDENER

Monsanto Chemical Company
3400 Peachtree Road, NE
Suite 504
Atlanta GA 30326

(Butvar B-76)

MODELING CLAY

American Art Clay Co., Inc.
Indianapolis IN 46222

(Permaplast Model-
ing clay)

or

Most art supply stores

AIRBRASIVE UNIT

Gra-Mar, Inc.
3165 McCrory Place
Suite 265
Orlando FL 32803

(S.S. White Air-
brasive Unit)

AIR-HAMMER UNIT

GRS Corporation
P.O. Box 1157
Boulder CO 80302

(Gravermeister
Air Hammer Unit)

DENTAL PICKS AND CHISELS

Arista Surgical Company
67 Lexington Avenue
New York NY 10010

MISCELLANEOUS SUPPLIES

Acetone - most paint stores or hardware

Cheesecloth - large fabric centers

Plaster of Paris - building construction suppliers
("molding plaster")

Waterproof ledger paper - printing shops or office
suppliers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This 26th number of THE PLASTER JACKET is being issued in conjunction with the FLORIDA PALEONTOLOGICAL MEETINGS, an all-day session at the FLORIDA STATE MUSEUM in Gainesville, as announced in the 25th PJ. Its author, Mr. Howard H. Converse, Jr., has previously contributed a major section of PJ No. 10 on the paleontology of the Kissimmee River region, part of No. 18, (even while on Komodo Island, in Indonesia, studying "dragons"), and all of No. 21, A PLEISTOCENE VERTEBRATE FAUNA FROM PALM BEACH COUNTY. He also embodies the close relationships between professional and non-professional paleontologists in Florida, for in 1970 Mr. Converse joined the Museum staff as Technician Supervisor. He has pursued his paleontological activities just as energetically both before and after that appointment.

This issue fills an important gap in the PJ coverage. The question most frequently asked of museum staff, after "What is it?", is "How do you take care of it?". Dr. Walter Auffenberg started the answer in issue No. 6 on WHAT IS A PLASTER JACKET?. Now Mr. Converse adds many other pointers on curating fossil vertebrates. This issue serves as a manual for the lab sessions at the meetings on October 23rd.

ARE TEN YEARS OF THE PLASTER JACKET ENOUGH!
(Editorial)

This question has come up often during the past two years, especially when funds are short and other duties oppressive. When the number of PLASTER JACKET issues dwindled to two a year in 1973 and 1974 and to only one in 1975, it was probably evident to our faithful readers that something was amiss. Many asked what was wrong, and many others wondered if they had been dropped from our mailing list.

First let's admit that we never have been a big-time journal. Our annual budget, eked out of other museum publication funds, has been a hundred dollars a year --in good years. The entire mailing operation has been carried out by Mrs. Johnnie Crago, a volunteer and member of the Museum Associates. Most of the other secretarial and artistic efforts have been incidental contributions, sandwiched in between higher priority duties, by Ms. Chandra Aulsbrook, Museum Technician, Ms. Rhoda Rybak, Editorial Assistant, and Mrs. Marjorie Crutcher, a volunteer and member of the Museum Associates. The curators in paleontology all had other worries and problems too. Because it had always been marginal in terms of everyone's other duties, the PLASTER JACKET was the first to feel the big squeeze of the past few years.

There was another question, too. How many kinds of fossils and how much detail should we cover in a non-professional booklet? Were 20 issues enough? Or 30? If someone really wanted to study a fossil group, he or she would need a library full of books and journals, anyhow. So why pretend to cover it all? Were we approaching the limits of useful coverage for most readers? These were the practical and philosophical questions that nagged at the PLASTER JACKET as it neared the end of its first decade.

This issue of the PLASTER JACKET marks the beginning of a second decade. It's good time to take stock of what we have or have not done during the first ten years, and to set our goals for the next ten years. (To paleontologists, a decade is as an instant; so we better not blink, or this second decade will have passed into obscurity.)

Let us glance back at the goals we stated on the back of PLASTER JACKET NUMBER 1, back in September, 1966:

"This is the first issue of the projected series concerning the fossil vertebrate animals of Florida. The purpose of these newsletters is to foster communication among the growing number of enthusiasts of this subject.

Each number in this series will be devoted to some important topic or topics related to vertebrate paleontology. In addition, it will serve as a forum for announcements and news notes regarding activities in this field. Questions and communications are solicited from all subscribers. Information of general interest will be included in future issues of the *PLASTER JACKET*.

It is our intent to produce this series at the rate of about one issues per quarter year. We hope to add as many genuinely interested paleontologists as possible to our mailing list. If you are interested please send your name and address to the *PLASTER JACKET*. The price of this series is a real interest in the subject matter."

We have not met all those goals, but we have met the important ones fairly well. The first purpose was to get in touch with interested paleontologists, and that we have done. The number who requested the *PJ* (and renewed their request when the list was revised) totalled 1700 at the end of the decade. Of these, 67 percent were from Florida, with a surprising 32 percent from elsewhere in North America and 1 percent from other continents. In some cases, our foreign subscribers actually visited Florida, but in more cases we do not know. (Please note that there has been a recent purge of our list; send your new request in if you wish to remain on the list.)

The second goal, to produce a series of informative issues concerning fossil vertebrates of Florida, has been realized. We had hoped to get out four issues per year (and in 1968, when we were really optimistic, we said eight), but we have averaged less than three. Even so, most major groups of vertebrate fossils have been touched upon. Some important groups such as rhinos and ruminants still need attention, and there are many other subjects still waiting to be broached. We have ventured into invertebrate fossils and archaeology, too, as many of our museum curators have been willing to join this good cause.

The third goal was "to serve as a forum for . . . activities in this field." For this purpose we have had news notes from time to time, including two complete issues of notes. But these have largely fea-

tured the work of museum paleontologists rather than an open forum. Perhaps, broader coverage would be desirable.

We of the *PLASTER JACKET* looking back over this first decade, are moderately well pleased. The response has been most encouraging, even when we have not done all we intended. And the basic needs for communication in Florida paleontology still exist. Indeed, we are more impressed now than a decade ago by the number of people sincerely interested in Florida paleontology.

So we shall go on into the second decade. And we pledge to try harder. We will not make any new promises now. We will merely try to keep moving toward our original goals. We will probably include a little broader coverage of fossils, not just vertebrates. And, hopefully, we will be able to serve more actively as a forum for Florida paleontologists. The *PLASTER JACKET* is really just a few sheets of paper with carbon on it. The important thing is what it represents in terms of the progress and communication among Florida paleontologists. It is appropriate, therefore, that the first issue of the second decade is linked to a meeting of Florida paleontologists at the new facility of the Florida State Museum. Hopefully, there will be more such interaction and progress during the second decade. One decade of the *PLASTER JACKET* is surely not enough!

S. David Webb
EDITOR