

## Famous Fossil Beds Are Endangered

Scientists fear that the Florissant fossil beds in central Colorado—considered one of the finest fossil concentrations in the world—may be destroyed in the near future by real estate development. Efforts are under way to preserve the fossil area as a national monument. But, on the eve of congressional hearings on the monument proposal, a Colorado real estate firm purchased roughly 30 percent of the land involved and revealed plans to subdivide the land for housing development. Almost all scientists familiar with the area agree that the construction of housing would destroy the fragile beds. "It will be an irreparable loss—just terrible," Harry D. MacGinitie, a paleobotanist who has worked in the area for more than 3 decades, told *Science*.

The fossil beds lie in a mountain valley, about 35 miles west of Colorado Springs, near the small community of Florissant. Some 34 to 38 million years ago, during the Oligocene period, an ancient lake covered much of the area. Volcanic eruptions apparently rained down clouds of dust and ash upon the lake and its forested shores, thus capturing and preserving thousands of insects, plants, and other forms of life with rare delicacy.

MacGinitie, who is an associate in the Museum of Paleontology at Berkeley, said the site is "known all over the world" as having "one of the finest concentrations of fossil plants, insects, and fishes all in one area." He said that the insect fossils are "almost unrivaled" and that the plant specimens are "beautifully preserved." There are also unusual fossils of *Sequoia* stumps, but only a few small mammals.

Estella Leopold, a paleobotanist with the University of Colorado, finds the area "unique in the enormous diversity of organisms present—everything from algae to higher plants." She also said there is an "incredible abundance" of fossils. "I worked an hour recently and got 40 really marvelous leaf specimens and two bugs," she said. "Usually you have to work hard to find one or two specimens an hour at even the best localities." According to the National Park Service, Florissant has yielded some 60,000 specimens of more than 1,000 different species of living things.

Three bills are currently pending in Congress that would designate 6,000 acres of the fossil bed area—which is known to exceed 12,000 acres—as a national monument. Similar legislation died in three previous congresses—largely because of apathy rather than outright opposition. But this year there seems to be more steam behind the proposal.

Colorado's two Republican senators—Gordon Allott and Peter H. Dominick—have cosponsored one of the bills. Allott, who is ranking Republican on the Senate Interior Committee which is handling the legislation, has expressed "a sense of urgency about the passage of this bill." Dominick has warned: "We must protect the area before it is too late." Last week the Interior Committee's parks and recreation subcommittee held hearings on the legislation in Colorado Springs.

Shortly before the field hearings began, however, Central Enterprise Realty Company of Colorado Springs purchased some 3000 acres in the Florissant vicinity from an out-of-state owner. Interested scientists say about 1800 of these acres lie within the boundaries of the proposed monument. K. C. Wofford, a partner in the firm, told *Science* his company plans to subdivide the land and sell it off "immediately" to people interested in putting up housing. Wofford said he had a "firm purchase contract" with the previous owner of the land and expected to close the deal "in a few days." He also said he is bargaining for more land in the area.

Meanwhile, Colorado conservation groups have asked the realtors to delay development until Congress has a chance to act. If negotiations fail, they plan to file suit. "We'll have to do something," one attorney said. "The bulldozers are ready to cut the roads."—PHILIP M. BOFFEY

English professor who had begun working his way up the university's administrative ladder in the early 1950's, became president of the Austin campus in 1960, when Wilson was promoted to chancellor of the University of Texas system. Then, the following year, Ransom replaced Wilson as chancellor; Norman Hackerman, formerly chairman of the chemistry department, eventually became the administrative head of the Austin campus, first under the title of vice chancellor, and then, in 1967, as president.

Enrollment at the Austin campus is now growing by about 2000 students a year, a growth rate that shows no signs of slackening even though a great many Texas students now attend junior colleges for their first 2 years of college work. (Last fall the university admitted far fewer freshmen than transfer students from other institutions.) All told, this year the university has had about 25,700 undergraduates, plus about 1300 law students and 5000 graduate students.

Although the state Coordinating Board on higher education has fixed an enrollment ceiling of 35,000 for the Austin campus, the university's Board of Regents is seeking, successfully it appears, to have this ceiling removed. The university itself has set enrollment limitations for certain programs, such as law, but it has no policy or plan for limiting its total enrollment. Some key people, including the dean of arts and sciences and the dean of the graduate school, feel that it would be best to hold the undergraduate enrollment at its present level, while allowing the comparatively small graduate enrollment to increase by about another 5000. Yet, whatever the disproportion between the number of undergraduate and graduate students, the university last year conferred some 390 doctorates, twice the number awarded 10 years earlier.

The university's legislative appropriation of \$40.2 million for the next academic year is little enough, given the size of the institution and the scope of its activities, but it is several times what the university was receiving in the late 1950's. Faculty salaries are, on the whole, below those paid at leading private institutions and the more affluent state universities. Yet, 10 years ago, today's average salary of \$14,000 (for a "B" rating on the AAUP scale) would have seemed princely.

The university has become a major