

COOL IMAGES

Weird Fossil Menagerie

This fossilized arthropod (*Marrella splendens*) set many a pulse racing a few years ago when paleontologists realized that the black splotch might be a rare example of organic fluids squeezed out of the crablike critter's innards

as it decayed. Plucked from the Burgess Shale, the world-famous site in the Canadian Rockies chronicling the Cambrian explosion of multicellular life over 500 million years ago, the fossil is featured in a Web gallery* at Yale's Peabody Museum. Yale invertebrate paleontologist Tim White and students have posted about 600 "exceptionally preserved and spectacular" invertebrate fossils, many of which are bizarre marine creatures bearing little resemblance to modern life-forms. Organized both by taxon and lagerstätten (famous site), the specimens span Precambrian worms to Tertiary corals. For more online fossils, see this exhibits list.†

* www.yale.edu/ypmip

† www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/collections/otherpal.html

HOT PICKS

Earthly matters. You can browse the latest geology abstracts, read a primer on climate change, map U.S. census data, or peruse an "Earth Affairs Magazine" at Columbia Earthscape, an ambitious new site that promises "to transform the way researchers in the earth sciences, teachers, students, and decision makers get access to critical information." A free 30-day trial will give you a peek at this subscription-based venture. www.earthscape.org

Small and smaller. Blowing the horn for the creatures of the microscopic world are two new educational sites from the American Society for Microbiology, timed with a PBS series airing this month (*Science*, 5 November, p. 1096). Check out a "microbe portrait gallery," amazing facts, activities, and more at www.microbeworld.org

NET NEWS

Online Course Reviews Bare All

Getting slammed by students about one's teaching can be painful for professors, but now there's an even greater danger to faculty egos: uncensored Web forums where students offer unrestrained praise—or denunciations—of their classes. At least one professor has thrown a counterpunch, last month suing a site over its public vetting of his teaching.

It's common for academic departments to use confidential student reviews in promotion decisions, and at some campuses students for years have produced booklets of edited reviews to help peers choose classes. Posting raw, anonymous reviews on the Internet, however, is a recent phenomenon. For example, Teacher Review, a 2-year-old site,* posts unedited comments on courses at two San Francisco schools. Some reviews are thoughtful, others are vicious, and many are peppered with remarks ranging from "way cool" and "he da man!" to "tells raunchy jokes" and "this guy is anal!" Angered at some of the re-

NETWATCH

edited by JOCELYN KAISER

views posted about himself, English professor Daniel Curzon-Brown of City College of San Francisco last month filed a lawsuit seeking to block the postings and remove links from the college to Teacher Review, which is run off-campus by a student. Curzon-Brown, who's also seeking monetary damages, alleges that false and defamatory statements were made about him and others.

Not all professors oppose the sites. San Francisco State University biologist Ralph Larsen, also rated on Teacher Review, says, "Students are going to get the word out, anyway." Gary Freeman of the University of Texas, Austin, whose developmental biology class is rated at another site,† says that to him it's no different from a tradition at Austin, where departments post big sheets of paper at registration for students to scrawl their opinions: "This kind of information is all over the place." But chemist John Moore of the University of Maryland, College Park, who's also been reviewed,‡ worries that the sites could give students a one-sided view—not to mention cause "psychological harm" to professors. "I don't see that it's very helpful," he says.

* teacherreview.com

† grade-it.com

‡ come.to/collegepronet

SITE VISIT

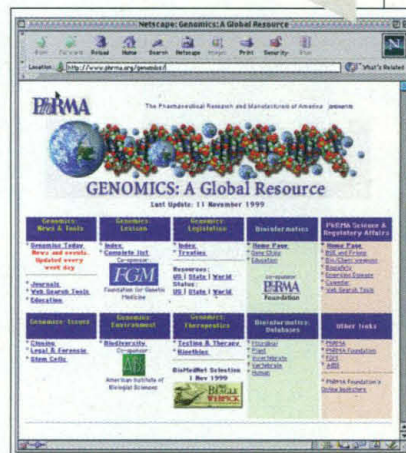
Genomics Grapevine

Deaths in gene therapy trials. The potential threat to monarch butterflies from transgenic corn. The moral dilemma of stem cells, taken from discarded embryos in hopes of treating diseases such as Parkinson's. For info on these and other current controversies in genetics, pay a visit to Genomics: A Global Resource.

Updated each weekday, the site's Genomics Today page offers news articles and press releases from over 30 sources on everything from gene discoveries to protests against genetically modified crops. A legislative page tracks hearings and other congressional news, and other sections focus on hot-button topics. Some are more up-to-date than others: Last week the stem cell pages included September statements from a national bioethics commission and from President Clinton, whereas the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) news hadn't been updated since June.

Still, you'll find scores of links to resources—such as genomics databases—and background documents, such as treatises on biological weapons and biological diversity. Another highlight is a genetics lexicon where you can brush up on such terms as gyandromorph (an organism with both male and female cells) or homeobox, which is a short string of nucleotides occurring in many different genes. Although the site's main sponsor is the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a lobby group for drug companies, it does not offer its own spin on developments in the breakneck-paced genomics world.

www.phrma.org/genomics



Send Internet news and great Web site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org