

Around Town...

The *Cheshire Herald*

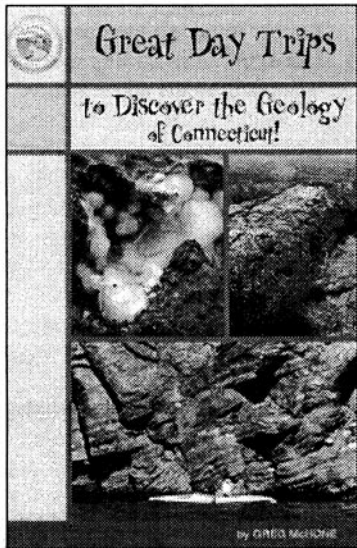
CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT, DECEMBER 16, 2004

A Peek Beneath *Books Outline State's Geological and Paleontological Treasures*

by Leslie Hutchison
Herald Staff

It was an unexpected and exciting revelation: a 200 million-year-old fossil skull was found in Cheshire in 1995.

That fact was shared by author and publisher Brendan Hanrahan who discussed the rare find last week at the Cheshire Public Library. He grabbed the audience's attention right away with word of the discovery, a decade ago, along Interstate-84.



Hanrahan said a paleontologist was walking near a road construction site on the interstate and saw "a white speck. He realized it was an old reptile tooth." The scientist, Paul Olsen, who is now a professor at Columbia University, "decided it was a small crocodile relative," an archosaur, named *Erpetosuchus* that lived in the early age of dinosaurs.

Other notable discoveries can be found in a series of natural history books that Hanrahan published last summer. The "Road to Discovery" books focus on paleontology, ecology and geology in Connecticut.

Hanrahan said Connecticut may seem ordinary, until you look below the surface. "Go one meter below the surface and it's amazing what you find," he said. In fact, he said, the state "may be the best place in the country to discover natural history" in part because key locations aren't far from each other.

"You can discover rocks that are over one billion years old in the northwest corner. It's accessible to all of us," Hanrahan emphasized. He also said mountains in eastern Connecticut "could have been as tall as the Andes," in prehistoric times.

The book series focuses on day trips families can make to discover the state's natural history, Hanrahan said. He developed the guides over the past two years with research that "rides on the shoulders of 175 years of scientific history" which was documented as early as 1818.

"The fossil history of Connecticut is not well-told," Hanrahan remarked, but the state is "part of active science today." He added that in the last 50 years, scientists have been putting together evidence of a continental collision in Connecticut.

One book in the series, "Great Day Trips to Discover Geology of Connecticut," describes a spot in Deep River where continents "crushed up against each other," Hanrahan said. "It's a contact boundary, you can literally see where two continents collided. It's proto-North America on the left and pieces of Africa on the right."

The geology guide book was written by Greg McHone, a Trinity College scientist. In his introduction, McHone writes, "Connecticut's diverse geology and small size make it an extraordinary natural laboratory. You might drive for days in other states and not see so great a variety or range of geologic features as can be discovered in Connecticut in one afternoon."

In a chapter on the "History & Geology" of Connecticut, McHone states that in the early 1800s, Yale scientist Benjamin Silliman, "established a mineral and fossil collection that would come to include the first verifiable dinosaur bones found in North America."

Later in the book, McHone writes that Silliman "reported that teeth from what is now thought to be a mastodon were found in 1827 near Cheshire." Bones from mastodons were later found in New Britain and Sharon. McHone also notes "the famous Farmington Mastodon, a nearly complete skeleton, was found in 1914" in that town.

Even the well-known and widely-visited Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill holds some surprises as noted by Hanrahan. He said the dinosaur footprints preserved under the dome at the park "tells an instant in time of a community of dinosaurs 200 million years ago immediately after a mass extinction" of larger animals. Hanrahan added, that the tracks were all made "within a month, or even 24 hours" of each other, truly a moment frozen in time.

For more information on the guidebook series, go to the publisher's website at: www.cttrips.com.

