

BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Newsletter

February 2024

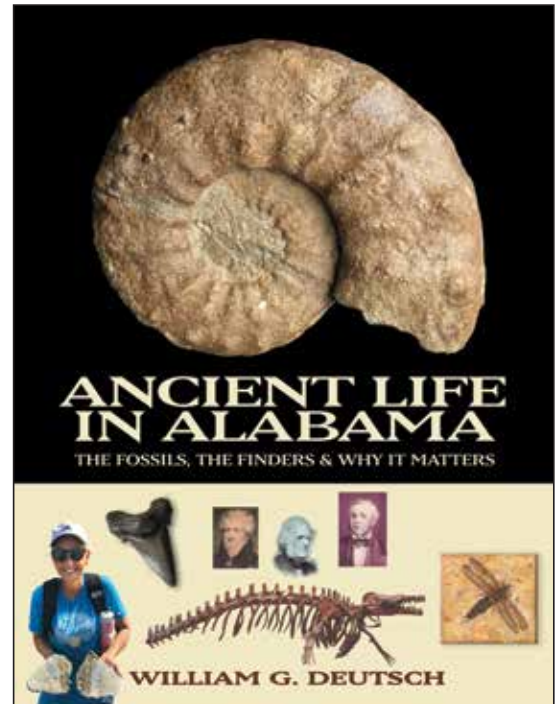
500 Million Years of Alabama History to Unfurl

PLEASE JOIN US ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26 AT 7 P.M. in the Auditorium of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens for the 82nd Annual Meeting of the Birmingham Historical Society. President Wayne Hester will preside.

“Recorded history” is said to have begun with the drafting of the Sumerian cuneiform tablets, approximately 5,000 years ago. Beginning in the 19th century, the study of fossils has evolved to tell a significantly longer span of earth’s history: 500 million years, i.e., “Deep Time.” Per our speaker Bill Deutsch: “Alabama has been part of this unfolding story since the modern science of Paleontology began, and fossil richness will keep it center stage.” Dr. Deutsch will take us on a mesmerizing “Walk Through Deep Time,” unfurling Alabama’s rich fossil legacy and its connections to our history, geology, and world-class biodiversity.

Following Dr. Deutsch’s talk, Carolanne Roberts will announce the winners of the Fruity Wonders Cake Competition, extolling our members’ creations and sharing comments from our esteemed, and secret, judges.

Then, it will be time for getting a copy of *Ancient Life in Alabama*, chatting with Bill Deutsch, sampling cake, and paying 2024 Society dues. Copies of Deutsch’s 264 page, heavily illustrated book will be available for sale for \$30 cash, check, or charge.



About the Author

Dr. William (“Bill”) Deutsch is a Research Fellow Emeritus in the Auburn University School of Fisheries, Agriculture, and Aquatic Sciences. The New York native holds degrees in Biology, Anthropology and Zoology, and Aquatic Ecology, the last a PhD from Auburn. During his 26 years as an aquatic ecologist in Alabama, with a longstanding interest in fossils, Deutsch has participated in fossil-hunting expeditions across the nation. He has taught, lectured, and written widely about the natural wonders of our state, especially its rivers and its fossils and what they can tell us about the present and times long past.

“Since moving to Alabama nearly 40 years ago, I’ve learned about its rich variety of fossils. Rock outcrops are fanned out in a relatively discernable pattern, with bands of fossils representing each geological era. The story of more than 500 million years of life is here, just under our feet. Tropical seas teemed with sharks, mosasaurs, and reef life. Coal-forming swamps ringed coastlines with huge dragonflies and millipedes, slithering amphibians, and towering horsetail plants. Dinosaurs of several types were here along with toothed birds, legged whales, rhinoceroses, mastodons, and giant sloths—the highest fossil diversity of any state east of the Mississippi River! In Alabama? Who knew? How and when did this happen?”

— Bill Deutsch, “Preface,” *Ancient Life in Alabama: The Fossils, The Finders & Why It Matters*, July 2022.

Correction: Regretfully, the listing of Heritage Society Members for 2023 in the Society’s Annual Report failed to include Mr. & Mrs. Don Cosper, Dr. & Mrs. James F. Davies, Mr. & Mrs. Walter Dean Jr., and Carolyn Sloss Ratliff.

CALLING ALL CAKES

for the Fruity Wonders Cake Contest

THE RULES: Bake your cake and bring the form (on back) and your cake for judging to the Birmingham Botanical Gardens Auditorium between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m. on February 26.

JUDGING CATEGORIES: Most Colorful + Best Creative Use of Fruit + Best Visual Presentation + Best Flavor Profiles + Best Memory Statement + Best Overall

A Walk Through 500 Million Years of



A replica of the State Fossil, an Eocene whale (*Basilosaurus cetoides*), suspended at the Alabama Museum of Natural History. Discovered in the 1830s, Herman Melville referenced the whale in his 1851 novel, *Moby Dick*.



Artist's depiction of a young mosasaur hatching on the sea floor with an adult mosasaur nearby. About 1,500 fossil specimens of mosasaurs once common along the Alabama coasts are housed at the Alabama Museum of Natural History and McWane Science Center.



Jun Ebersole comparing teeth of living and extinct shark. McWane Science Center. Ebersole, whose research and exploration has focused on discovering 400 species of extinct sharks and other fishes, declares Alabama "a global hot spot for fossil fishes."



ABOVE: Crowns and stems of fossil crinoids, discovered by Richard Keyes in North Alabama.

BELOW: Fossil of an Alabama trilobite, Alabama Museum of Natural History.

Era	Period
Cenozoic [Recent Life] Age of Mammals, Grasses, and Ice	Quaternary
	Neogene
	Paleogene
Mesozoic [Middle Life] Age of Reptiles, Dinosaurs, Mosasaurs, and Flowers	Cretaceous
	Jurassic
	Triassic
Paleozoic [Ancient Life] Age of Trilobites, Fishes, and Ferns	Permian
	Carboniferous Pennsylvanian Mississippian
	Devonian
	Silurian
	Ordovician
	Cambrian
	Pre-Cambrian

A simplified version of the geological timeline with dates expressed in millions of years ago (mya). The Anthropocene Epoch has been proposed but is not yet official. Red arrows indicate mass extinction events. Timeline and

High Deep Time: of Alabama History

Epoch	mya	
Anthropocene	13,000 years	humans in Alabama
Holocene	0.0117	mastodons, mammoths
Pleistocene	2.58	modern horse
Pliocene	4.0	
	5.3	
Miocene	23	
Oligocene	34	
Eocene	56	whales
Paleocene	66	impact of meteorite
	145	
	201	Pangea begins to drift apart
	252	impact of volcanic eruption and a meteorite
	299	
	20'000	coal swamps
Carboniferous	Appalachian Mountains	
Mississippian	359	sharks
	419	iron ore
	444	
	485	limestone trilobites
	538	
	600	multi-cellular life
	3,600	



A museum diorama of an Ice Age landscape with mastodons.



A museum diorama of a Coal Age swamp.

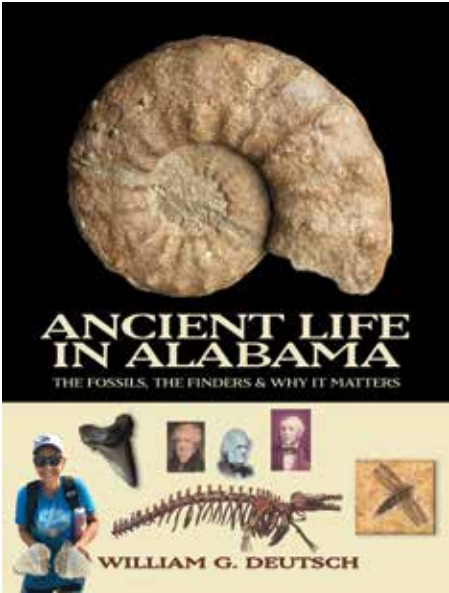


A museum diorama of a Mississippian shallow sea that once covered much of Alabama. Crinoids have flower-like crowns, and blastoids have helmet-like crowns, both with slender stalks anchored to the sea floor.

photographs courtesy Bill Deusch, *Ancient Life in Alabama: The Fossils, The Finders & Why It Matters*. Deusch's book includes full titles and credits for all images used.

Birmingham Historical Society
P. O. Box 321474
Birmingham, AL 35232

Learn more, February 26 at 7 p.m.



BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Heritage Cake Contest 2024

Fruity Wonders Cake Competition

February 26, 2024

CAKE BACKGROUND FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Mobile Phone: _____

NAME OF CAKE: _____

MY MEMORIES OF THE CAKE: _____

WHOSE RECIPE IT WAS: _____

WHETHER I MAKE IT OFTEN: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: 2-26-24

BRING THIS FORM WITH YOUR CAKE
to the Auditorium of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens
by 4 p.m. on Monday, February 26 for the judging.