

My personal story with IGCP673

Project: IGCP673

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What's your area of expertise and what kind of problems do you explore?

I'm a palaeontologist by training and acquired my Masters degree from the Evolutionary Studies Institute at the Witwatersrand University in South Africa at the end of 2015. I've been working in the museum of the Geological Survey of Namibia since 2004 and have had visitors from all walks of life, many different countries and age groups asking me about fossils and when life started. I myself have always been fascinated about the beginnings of life and how it became so complex and diverse. I have also had the privilege of serving on the National Heritage Council and its committees in an advisory capacity for several years.

In addition to this I'm interested in Geotourism which is really taking off in Namibia. The southern parts of Namibia have so many interesting sites that preserve the earliest animals we call the Ediacara. Protecting these sites with stakeholders such as land owners, local communities, tour operators and also receiving the necessary support from the National Heritage Council of Namibia is just as crucial. But at the same time, protecting them is not enough. We need to educate visitors to our beautiful country about the importance of these sites and the fossils and how preserving and studying them can tell us more about our own beginnings.

How does this area affect us or earth?

Studying the beginnings of complex life on earth as well as changes in the geological landscape, i.e. rocks telling us a story of environment, climate and catastrophe could instill an awe for life itself and our natural surroundings in the coming generations. This could inspire young generations to focus on how we can prevent man-made catastrophes, which affect biodiversity, the survival of species and how we approach life and our natural surroundings in general. I believe that it is no longer a luxury to study fossils and geology, but a necessity in learning from the past and what we could do differently.

How does your area of expertise fit into the project.

My expertise as a palaeontologist involved in outreach and heritage conservation enable me to contribute to various aspects of this project. These include scientific research, which involves studying the fossils themselves as well as the geology, developing ways of getting the information on what we discovered during our research to the people of Namibia and visitors from outside the country, and finally to contribute to protecting these rare fossils and the sites where they are preserved so that we don't lose them for our future generations.

What is something interesting you found or something that got you intrigued so far?

At one site (Farm Aar) there are indications that the Ediacara lived in specific areas, possibly sheltered enclaves that gave protection to younger individuals from storms. This indicates something about their ability to adapt to certain habitats to ensure survival, especially of the more fragile “youngsters”.

At another site (Farm Pockenbank) a few cms of rock outcrop in the same spot indicate a sudden change in environmental conditions, from calmer ocean conditions to more energetic conditions, which also reflects in the presence or absence of fossils.

Pictures of field work



At Ernietta Hill with several scientists and students from Europe, including Ulf Linnemann and Gerd Geyer.



Patricia Vickers-Rich on Farm Aar.



Mike Hall working on logging a detailed section on Pockenbank



Maria Ovtcharova sampling ash beds for dating



Kombada Mhopjeni at her Cloudina discovery on Farm Pockenbank