

too wished to see the public educated and more system introduced into excavations. As an educative measure in the first instance, the Commission prohibited the removal of all vertebrate fossils, whether *in situ* or loose-lying, without the written consent of the Commission; but when the very considerable discussion which followed had received the widest local publicity and the Commission was satisfied with the extent of the public appreciation of the issues involved, the prohibition was relaxed and made referable to *in situ* specimens only.

The legislation under discussion is supported by the South African Museums Association, a body which recently recommended an extension designed to prohibit the unlicensed removal of *in situ* invertebrate fossils as well. The Commission therefore has full scientific support despite the fact that it has not gone quite so far as such a representative, responsible and expert body as the Museums Association would have it go.

In both the archæological and the palæontological fields the restrictions are imposed solely to preserve such evidence as only *in situ* specimens can yield—and no amateur need hesitate to apply for permission to explore these fields. He will find the Commission eager to do everything possible to enable him to carry out his work. All that is required of him is to prove his competence and his earnest.

To dispose of Prof. Watson's assertion that the restrictions are for the protection of South African palæontologists, it need only be remarked that no less than five invitations have recently been extended to overseas palæontologists to visit and conduct field-work and excavations in South Africa—and if more wish to come they have only to prove their competence to be assured of a very warm welcome. In fairness to Prof. Watson, however, it must be recorded that his criticism was based on a law that prohibited the removal of any vertebrate fossils whether *in situ* or loose-lying on the surface—a law that is now obsolete.

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I AM afraid I am not completely convinced: the very length and warmth of Prof. van Riet Lowe's reply rather increases my uncertainty. As a necessity of war, we have had much experience of bureaucratic controls in Britain—far more than Prof. Lowe can have ever experienced—and there is no doubt but that the result is a stifling of individual effort. Prof. Lowe suggests that the situation in England is not comparable with that in South Africa, as the former country is so poor in archæological remains compared with the sub-continent. Surely that would be an argument for more controls in Britain than there!

Of course, it is always a question of the way an Act is interpreted and administered. So long as Prof. Lowe is in charge all will be well; but his successor may be a quite different sort of individual. Committees move slowly and tend to meet rarely—I have much personal experience as a county councillor—and I fear that permits to excavate will be a long time in arriving. Again, does the bureaucracy intend

to set up a system of inspection? South Africa is an individualistic country with a scattered population. Frankly, if I had a rock-shelter on my farm and wished to dig, I should write to Prof. Lowe, as I know I should receive from him immediate and sympathetic treatment. Should his successor be a pure bureaucrat, I should be tempted just to go ahead and no one would be the wiser. But I could not publish my results, and so my information would be lost to science.

M. C. BURKITT.

SINCE the publication in *Nature* of July 14, 1945, of my letter about the South African restrictions on the collection of vertebrate fossils, I have received letters from two South African palæontologists, one of whom supports, while the other opposes, the Act in question; but both agree that its intention was to prevent the collection of such materials by South African amateurs. I am extremely glad to learn that there is no intention of interfering with the activities of visiting men of science.

The restriction was based on the idea that an amateur collector might remove the more obvious part of a specimen, leaving behind other parts of importance, and thus destroy valuable evidence. But this real danger must be viewed in the light of the fact that there are four vertebrate palæontologists in South Africa, three of whom on account of their age or official position are unlikely to do much collecting in the future, and that the great majority of the really new animals found during the past twenty years have been collected by amateurs, some of whom do excellent work.

As originally proclaimed on September 20, 1938, a fine of £25 was imposed on anyone who, without the written consent of the "Museums" Commission, removed a fossil bone. If enforced, this regulation would merely have ensured that very many fossils would have followed a 15-ft. skeleton which, in a few years before 1929, was washed away at Lady Frere. On June 23, 1945, when no prosecution under the original order had been attempted, it was modified to allow of the collection by anyone of fossils lying on the surface, though not their removal from the rock. The effect of this new regulation would be to compel amateurs to leave in the rock the buried parts of a skeleton of which the head had fallen loose: in fact, to encourage the kind of damage the original order was designed to prevent.

It is, I think, clear that neither order could possibly be enforced against a South African, but it is evident that in either form it could be employed against a visitor to that country, hence my original mistaken interpretation!

In any event the order comes unfortunately from a country which has for some twenty years tolerated the existence in a national museum of a great collection of fossil vertebrates containing many important specimens, still undescribed and in practice inaccessible to palæontologists.

The letter from Prof. van Riet Lowe which precedes this is perhaps a little disingenuous, because it mentions few dates and does not make it clear that the five American and German collecting expeditions to which he refers preceded the National Monuments Amendments Act of 1937, a matter that was in my mind at the time of my original letter.

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