

New Guidebook Recounts Surprising Local Find

by Jackie Richardson, Record-Journal Staff

MERIDEN — It was in 1967 that 7-year-old Robert J. Barron dislodged a rock from the stone wall in his backyard. As it turned out, this was no ordinary rock.

The boys had discovered a 10-pound piece of red sandstone that contained a well-preserved, 180-million-year-old, partial skeleton of a hypsognathus, an early reptile from the boundary of the Triassic and Jurassic periods.

“It was quite simple and accidental. Myself and David Bazzano and my younger brother were out in the backyard playing ball or Frisbee and the Frisbee went into the stone wall and I dislodged one of the stone rocks in the wall,” Barron said, recalling “the day.” He now lives in Uncasville.

The boys brought the specimen to Barron’s mother, who contacted the Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven. The boys earned themselves what Barron called a VIP tour afterwards.

The story in “Great Day Trips in the Connecticut Valley of the Dinosaurs,” a new book by Brendan Hanrahan, talks about that day. What Barron, his brother Jim, and Bazzano found were the backbones, ribs, forelimbs and skull of the reptile.

“It was one of the best specimens of a hypsognathus ever found,” said Armand Morgan, a Peabody Museum instructor in the Office of Public Education. “Every fossil is another link in the story. And this one is particularly significant because it was such a beautiful skull. Skulls are very important diagnostically. A skull tells you a lot about the animal. It gives you ideas about its lifestyle, what it looked like, who it’s related to.”

“It was the most important discovery since 1889, which was the last time a reptile fossil was found in Connecticut,” said Hanrahan, author of the book and creator and publisher of the series. The boys found “evidence of a small reptile that went extinct about the time when the dinosaurs took over.” Such finds help scientists to try and reconstruct that time period since “many paleontologists believe that understanding this time in the ancient past — around the Triassic-Jurassic boundary — may be vital to anticipating our future,” he says in his book.

Barron revisited the specimen at the Peabody Museum in 1996, bringing his family along for the trip. “It was a blast from the past for sure. I have two boys now that are 11 and 13, so they basically got the same VIP tour that I got when I was a little bit younger than they were,” he said. “We got to see all kinds of neat bones and skeletons. It was great.”

“The connection between the books and this story is that there are many surprises in Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley that families and weekend adventurers need to explore,” said Hanrahan.

“The Road to Discovery” series, which came out in May, also features “Great Day Trips to Connecticut’s Critical Habitats,” “Great Day Trips to Discover the Geology of Connecticut,” and “Best Fishing Trips in Connecticut.”

The books can be purchased at independent bookstores, at the Peabody Museum or online at www.cttrips.com.

record-journal

June 24, 2004