

## The wonders of the Kimberley

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### A glimpse at its unique environment. *Fossils – ‘Seeing is Believing’.*

(by Brian Kane)



Fossils provide us with the evidence of a time when the Kimberley was quite a different place. For instance, can you imagine a rainforest fringing the western coast of Australia or the sea spreading as far inland as Fitzroy Crossing in an often forgotten age millions of years ago?

Around 700 million years ago the Kimberley was covered by glaciers which subsequently melted, causing the sea level to rise and layers of sandstone to be deposited. By 540 million years ago a variety of plant and animal life started to evolve in the Kimberley. It is very interesting that we can observe some of these today as they are preserved in the sandstone rocks as fossils.

The main fossils in the Broome region are pollen grains, leaf



impressions and fossilized wood. The leaves are mostly ferns of which 6 species have been identified, suggesting that the area was once a very wet but warm environment.

(30 million year old fossils found in Sandstone at Gatheume Point in Broome – photo BK)

In the wider Kimberley there existed a great barrier reef 375 million years ago which included Windjana and Geikie Gorges. Overall the reef extended from the Edgar Ranges south of Broome to Kununurra. We now know that Gastropods, brachiopods, fossil sponges, nautiloids, bivalves, fish, ammonoids (shelled animals), primitive prawns, snails, 25 species of armour-plated fish (the Gogo fish) and stromatolites were present in this great barrier reef in the Kimberley.

The world famous Gogo fish fossils were first found in the 1940's by a German palaeontologist and the Gogo fish fossil is now WA's State fossil emblem. Amazingly, in 1986 a complete fish fossil was found which was 375 million years old, revealing the head of a fish covered by a shield which protected it from enemies. Also a two metre long eel fossil was found with teeth sharp as daggers. Some of these fossils are now displayed in museums throughout the world.

Much can be learnt about the ancient Kimberley past history by simply scratching and digging below the surface and who knows what hidden treasures are yet to be revealed.

*Further information: BK's Kimberley nature web site:*

<http://www.stmarysbroome.wa.edu.au/home/nature/aaopen.html>