



The Fossils of Blackberry Hill: Solving the Mystery of the First Animals on Land

Kenneth Gass

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The Fossils of Blackberry Hill: Solving the Mystery of the First Animals on Land is the first book to cover the unique group of rock outcrops in Central Wisconsin that appears to have put an end to a one-hundred-fifty-year-old mystery of global interest. Since the mid-eighteen-hundreds, fossilized footprints and trackways have been found on beach deposits in what is now North America that dated back to the Cambrian Period, some five hundred million years ago - but fossils of the animals that made them avoided detection all that time. Thanks to Blackberry Hill, the identity of some of the first animals to walk on land is a secret no more. Numerous color photographs of spectacularly preserved tidal flat trackways, animals, and parts of the habitat itself, all frozen in stone, help to tell the story of some of the first animals to explore this strange, new environment. Current interpretations made possible by the fossil discoveries are presented, including how some of the trackways were made and what might have lured the animals ashore. Peculiar, winding trackways from giant, slug-like organisms and other boneless animals are shown covering entire surfaces. This book also shows other surprises revealed at Blackberry Hill, including body and trace fossils of another tidal flat dweller never before found in rocks as old as these, and the first occurrence to show that large jellyfish were abundant in Cambrian times and were already subject to mass strandings. In this book, Kenneth Gass thus demonstrates why Blackberry Hill holds its special place in the history of life on Earth. WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING: “A mystery revealed, The Fossils of Blackberry Hill charmingly tells the story of how clever scientific detective work has answered the question of what those first animals to visit the subaerial environments of our world really were?however fleeting their visits from their ancient ocean habitats may have been. Engagingly told by Chris Gass, one of the key participants, the story reveals the importance of a highly special area that holds the fossilized evidence that shows what really happened ...” – Niles Eldredge, evolutionary biologist, author “The early history of life on land is a conundrum that has perplexed some of the foremost figures in the history of paleontology since the era of Richard Owen and Charles Darwin over 150 years ago. At center stage in this mystery are trackways on sedimentary rocks that we now know are of Cambrian age - some 500 million years old - and were made by animals making the first excursions out of water in life’s history. In “The Fossils of Blackberry Hill”, Chris Gass weaves together the history of science and groundbreaking research conducted over the past 20 years to reveal the identities of these ancient trace makers. His book is a scientific detective story in words and photographs.” – Gregory D. Edgecombe, The Natural History Museum (London) “An absorbing introduction to a rich source of paleontological information . . . fascinating color photographs . . . the book offers intriguing examples of how paleontology works . . . appealing scientific detective story.” – Kirkus Reviews

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