

H. S. "CORKY" JONES: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Corky Jones (right) and Albert E. Swanston (SMNH) taken in the summer of 1950 about 15 mi. n.w. of Eastend, in the early Oligocene deposits

"He is nobody important - an old-timer who lives in a little three-room house near the center of town and probably never made two hundred dollars a month in his life, ... he has never scorned learning, he has always been willing to try importing it".

Anyone, young or old, who has tried to become a scientist, knows the obstacles. Today libraries, museums and universities are the teachers, each in its own way. Yesterday, some 80 years ago, it was quite different, especially in a small prairie town.

When Harold S. Jones, known to most as "Corky," came to Eastend in 1898 there was not much there. In fact he witnessed the beginnings of the town, the arrival of the railway, the dissolution of the Eastend North West Mounted Police. He witnessed many things, local and international, both good and bad.

The purpose of this article is to pay tribute and to attempt to do justice to the community of Eastend and the memory of Corky Jones by making a brief sketch of his palaeontological contributions. I will say at this point that I never met the man.

All I have to go by is a few articles, correspondence between himself and Dr. Charles M. Sternberg, photographs and most importantly, the impressions I am left with when visiting Eastend, its people and the museum.

His curiosity for fossil collecting began before he came to Canada. While still a child, his father would take Corky to the fossil beds found on the Isle of Wight, on the southern coast of England.

Corky had no formal education in the field of palaeontology. He was self-taught. He relied on the scientific literature that he was able to scrounge. In the small town of Eastend, in the early part of the century, far from any academic outposts, learning more about fossils was almost impossible. A number of years after he arrived in Canada, he met a man with similar interests in fossils. He was Charles M. Sternberg, son of the famed fossil hunter, Charles H. Sternberg.

In the early 1920s Sternberg, then at the Geological Survey of Canada, caught up with Corky. In a letter commemorating Corky's work and dedication in Eastend supported by the Eastend Educational Association, Sternberg wrote, "while going through Eastend in 1921 I saw a horn-core of *Triceratops* in Mr. Lackey's office. I inquired and learned that it had been collected by Corky Jones. I immediately got in touch with Mr. Jones, ... this was a most important discovery because it proved the presence of beds of Lance age in an area where they were not previously known."¹ This was Corky's first major discovery.

Since that meeting, correspondence between the two flourished. Most of Corky's concerns involved help with identification. Sternberg to Jones, 17 August 1931:

"I am returning today, under separate cover, the bone which you sent me for identification, ...It is an ungual phalanx or claw bone of a large carnivorous dinosaur, *Tyrannosaurus rex*."⁵

Fossils were not the only things discussed in their letters. Jones to Sternberg, 16 June 1932:

"It is a changed country since my last letter, there is more grass and the country looks greener than it has done for years. Several things in the garden that we had thought dead are coming to life. It is almost as if some wizard had waved its wand over the land."³

Corky was aware of the fact that the majority of his letters to Sternberg were requests:

"I am beginning to think that you will think I am a regular "Calamity Jane" from my letters but still when one is living in the midst of it [fossil bearing rocks] there doesn't seem anything else to write about."³

In the 1930s Corky met another palaeontologist, Dr. Loris S. Russell, then with the National Museum of Canada. Dr. Russell gave a little more personal insight in his letter commemorating Corky. "I recall when he was town constable and had installed a wooden post in the main intersection to dissuade vehicles from cutting corners. This became known as Corky's police force, and when on Sunday morning it was found leaning at an inebriate angle, this dereliction of duty would be gravely reported to the "Chief."¹

Corky's second major find was that of a partial *Triceratops* skull in 1936. Jones to Sternberg, 10 September 1936:

"Last summer a party of us consisting of [Charlie] Holmes, George Beane and myself located a bone, ...all that showed was a ball-joint. We at the time thought a large femur but when we went down this summer to get it, we were surprised to find nearly a whole *Triceratops* skull stuck to the end of it."³

Corky had previous experience in finding fossils, mostly from surface collecting, so when it came to preparing and mounting larger specimens, it was a new challenge. Sternberg helped out immensely and in a two page letter to Corky, he explained the basic preparation and mounting techniques.

In his search for fossils around Eastend, Corky came to know the country very well. When Mr. and Mrs. Fenley Hunter of Flushing, New York wanted to look for fossils in western Canada, they contacted Dr. Russell who referred them to Corky. They were then informed by Corky that the Calf Creek area was very fossiliferous. The Hunters soon found an early Oligocene bone bed which has yielded since its discovery thousands of fossils; the most abundant is the large mammal called a brontothere.⁶

By the late 1930s Corky began to emerge as a fine palaeontologist, not only as a collector/preparator, but also in the identification of fossils. His growth as a palaeontologist was enhanced greatly by his association with Sternberg. He now had the ability to identify vertebrates from the Late Cretaceous ("Age of Dinosaurs") and the Early Oligocene (in the middle of the "Age of Mammals").

In the early 1940s however, things seemed to slow down for both Corky and Sternberg. Corky with his health and Sternberg with the war. Jones to Sternberg, 11 October 1944:

"I have done little fossil hunting the past few years, having no car of my own and the gas and tire shortage, I have no opportunity. I have also been told by the doctor to go easy. It looks as if the European part of this awful war is going to drag on for a few more months, several young lads from this dist [district] have been killed and [on the] missing list but I suppose this to all districts."³

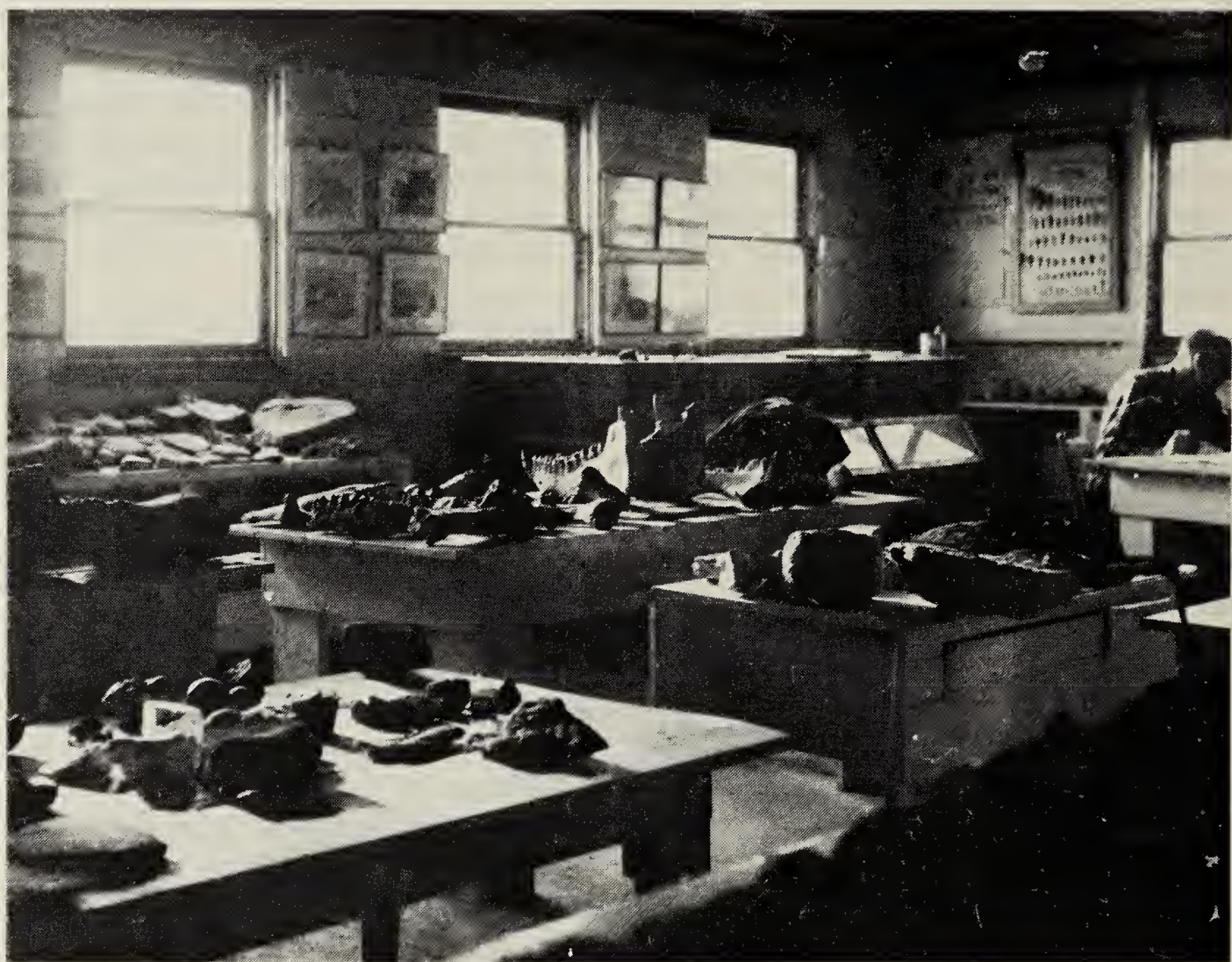
Sternberg to Jones, 17 October 1944:

"I have been on war work for most the time since April, 1940, but I still keep in touch with palaeontology, ...I have two boys in the Navy but they are both in Canada."⁸

Soon after the war, Corky was collecting fossils. A friend of Charles Holmes from British Columbia called Corky to see if he could obtain a fossil since he too was an avid fossil collector. Both Holmes and Corky agreed that they could collect a turtle (*Basilemys*) that they had previously found but not yet collected. This gift never transpired because once the specimen was recovered and prepared, it was too well preserved to give away. Holmes's friend from B.C. went back empty handed.

In 1947, a specimen discovered in the Frenchman River Valley would later become one of the best specimens ever collected by Corky. This was the shield or crest belonging to a horned dinosaur known collectively as ceratopsians. Most ceratopsians collected from the Eastend and Frenchman River Valley areas belong to the genus *Triceratops*. However, the crest collected in 1947 by Corky did not fit the *Triceratops* description. In discussing the specimen with Sternberg (Jones to Sternberg, 6 August 1947) Corky remarked, "It is definitely not 'Triceratops' and I have no picture of anything quite like it."³

Letters to Corky from Sternberg suggested a number of possibilities ranging from *Anchiceratops*, *Arrhinoceratops* or *Pentaceratops* (letters 23 August 1947, 3 November 1947 and 20 February 1948).⁵ Though these suggestions came before and after receiving photographs and measurements, Corky was still not quite convinced. It was not until 1981, three years after Corky's death, that a palaeontologist noted the crest in the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences* and this was only in passing.⁸ Almost 40 years after its



The museum in the old school basement, 1962. Bruce McCorquodale (SMNH)

discovery, a full description identified the specimen as belonging to a rare ceratopsian called *Torosaurus*, the only one known in Canada.⁷

Although he collected many fossils before and after *Torosaurus*, this and the *Triceratops* skull are the most visual to the visitors of the Eastend Museum where Corky's fossils are now on display. He was also responsible for collecting a fossil leaf impression, now called *Cinnamomum jonesi*.

These accomplishments may seem of interest only in passing to some academics but two facts should be stressed. First, he did not have any higher educational schooling; secondly, he was never paid for his services of finding, collecting, preparing, mounting, identifying and

displaying the fossils and artifacts that he collected. It has been said of Corky that, "having bones around, he could not be content until he got books and learned what they might be. What ever the defects of his education, he knew the indispensable first step - how to go about learning."⁴

It must have been devastating to Corky in 1952, when a flood engulfed the basement of the old school where his fossil collection was first housed. This flood destroyed a number of specimens including the associated fossils collected with the *Torosaurus* crest. But friends, both local (like Jean Dordu) and professional (staff from the National Museum of Canada and the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History) helped restore the collection. It was later moved into the new school and has since moved again into the Pastime Theatre.

Since then, Corky's notes and records have been lost and some of the fossils have begun to show their extreme age. On 28 March 1978, the town of Eastend lost part of its history. Harold Saunders Jones died. What is left are the fossils and artifacts he collected, long ago.

"It is question whether or not the museum means anything outside of an easily satisfied and idle curiosity, ...it offers them [the school children] more information on the history of their own place than anything else, ...and even if no Whitemud¹ child takes fire from Corky's collection and becomes an anthropologist or paleontologist, something may still have been accomplished by his example. Any child who knows Corky can see knowledge being loved for its own sake."⁴

I thank Richard Day (NMC, Paleobiology Division) who unselfishly searched for and supplied me with letters between Jones and Sternberg. Comments on the preparation of this manuscript were generously given by John E. Storer (SMNH) and Julie Cormack (University of Alberta, Edmonton). I am still interested in receiving copies of letters, notes and photographs of Corky and his work. If these are available, they could be sent to the Eastend Museum or to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, to T. Tokaryk.

- ¹ EASTEND EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION. 1964. In Recognition of H. S. "Corky" Jones. Unpublished letters commemorating the work and dedication of Corky.
- ² EASTEND HISTORY SOCIETY. 1984. Turner-Warwick Printers, N.B. 895 pp. Range riders and sodbusters.
- ³ JONES, H.S. [Letters TO C.M. Sternberg]. Located at: The National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, and the Eastend Museum, Eastend.
- ⁴ STEGNER, W. 1977. Wolf Willow. First Laurentian edition. 306 pp.
- ⁵ STERNBERG, C.M. [Letters to H.S. Jones]. Located at: The National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, and the Eastend Museum, Eastend.
- ⁶ TOKARYK, T. 1985. A Historical Review of the Brontotheriidae Collected in Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 43(3):151-154.
- ⁷ TOKARYK, T. In press. Ceratopsian Dinosaurs from the Frenchman Formation (Upper Cretaceous) of Saskatchewan. The Can. Field-Nat.
- ⁸ TYSON, H. 1981. The Structure and Relationships of the Horned Dinosaur *Arhinoceratops* Parks (Ornithischia: Ceratopsidae). Can. J. of Earth Sci. 18(8):1241-1247.

* The original name for the town of Eastend, and the river which flows through it, the Frenchman.