

# PAUL OLSEN



## Rock hound... and Renaissance Man

He's a writer-artist-  
photographer-inventor  
but his first love is fossils

Rock hunting has taken Paul Olsen to the furthest regions of France, England, Switzerland, Denmark and Italy. But it was in his own "backyard" that Paul, eighteen, of Livingston, New Jersey, discovered his greatest buried treasure: dinosaur fossils.

An ardent rock hound since the age of six, Paul began his studies in earnest at fourteen. "My mother brought home an article showing that dinosaur footprints had been discovered in Roseland, the town right next to mine. I had always been fascinated by fossils. Most kids are. But I didn't know there would be excellent fossil localities right near me—probably within walking distance."

Paul and his friends, however (most notably Anthony Lessa, eighteen, also of Livingston), soon found out from first-hand experience. Their rock-hunting expeditions to Roseland Quarry and other nearby sites quickly brought to light: 1,500 dinosaur tracks, forty insect trails ("called 'intoxicated insects' because their footprints seem to wind drunkenly without rhyme or reason"), fish fossils, bits of dinosaur bone, aquatic plants, plant remains of cycads, ferns and evergreen cones . . . and one beetle wing. "They're all from the Triassic period," explains Paul—meaning the first dinosaur period, or two hundred million years ago.

Paul dismisses his early accomplishments as "easy." "On our first expedition to the quarry," he says, "we uncovered dinosaur prints within only two hours. They're very easy to spot—you just see three toes in the rock. It looks like a large bird track."

From then on it was full steam ahead,

and within three months Paul and his friends had exposed six hundred square feet of rock. "To do this we had to dig through fifteen feet of overlying sandstone—peeling off rock layer after rock layer, like pages in a book. We even found an entire trackway of footprints—in *situ*—exactly where the animals had walked two hundred million years ago."

Paul's activities soon brought him nationwide publicity—newspaper and magazine articles, television appearances and a special commendation from President Nixon—but he had no intention of keeping all the glory to himself. "We've donated everything we've found to museums and institutions throughout the country, and now we're campaigning to have Roseland Quarry preserved as a dinosaur park."

Although his first love is fossil-hunting, Paul doesn't believe in tying himself down to one subject or two. "I like to think of myself as a Renaissance Man," he says, "something that isn't very common in this age of specialization." Among his other interests are art—"I paint, sculpt and experiment with fiber glass and plasticene forms"—and photography. "At first I used it only to record my work, but now it's developing into an art form. I have my own darkroom, and currently I'm patenting two new inventions for automatic camera focusing."

Another of Paul's favorite pursuits is oceanography. "I've been building a submarine out in the backyard since the eighth grade," he says, "and the hull is completely finished now. I developed my own construction technique using polyurethane foam and fiber glass, and the whole thing weighs only 150 pounds."

In addition, Paul has set up his own elaborate system of marine aquariums. "I rear shrimp, clams, mussels, sea anemones and snails, and I plan to write a book about it all someday." Also in the works is an anthology about his rock-hunting experiences and adventures. "I want people to know what a wealth of fossils there is around here. Why, I can name fourteen localities within a ten-mile radius of my house where you can find fossils considered quite rare."

During his "free" time, Paul heads for faraway fossil sites—Fur and Møns Klint in Denmark, the Jura Mountains in France, Folkestone and Lyme Regis in England, or the Alps in Italy and Switzerland. "My best find was fifty-five-million-year-old fish and insect fossils in the Mo Clay Formation in Fur. I came back with 125 pounds of rock."

At home Paul spends most of his time at his studies. A freshman at Yale University, he plans on a career in paleontology but, typically, refuses to limit himself to only one subject. "That," he says, "is one of the worst things any man can possibly do."