

The Kent Fossil Database

The north Kent coast is very popular with fossil collectors due to the many fossils that can be found on the foreshore, having been eroded out by the tides.

Many very good fossils have been found but, though some find their way into local museums, most finish up in private collections and are 'lost' to science. This is not a criticism of fossil collectors as some of the finest specimens have been carefully extracted, prepared and curated; and the owners have established links with local museums and the Natural History Museum in London.

A few local geologists decided that a responsible action would be to compile records for as many of the less common specimens as possible.

Tony Mitchell, who initiated and administers the on-line 'EDNA Fossil Insect Database', volunteered to create a similar database for these records. Initially it was planned to record only Pleistocene mammalian fossils from Kent; but records for all Kent fossils and Pleistocene mammals from outside Kent, are now included. The number of records, from both museums and private collectors as far away as Plymouth and Oxford, is now over 11,000 and growing. It is hoped that the database will soon be available on-line.

A major consideration is the privacy and security of owners. Each collection is identified only by a code in the database. The owner's identity is not published and is known only to the Database Administrator. Researchers seeking further information must contact the Database Administrator who will then contact the owner with their request. It is then up to the owner to decide what further action, if any, is taken.

If you would like your collection to be represented in the Kent Database of Fossils, please email the following data to Tony Mitchell at aa.mitchell@btinternet.com.

- **Name** of the fossil. Basic identification, e.g. Shark or *Micraster* sp. is better than an incorrect Latin name.
- **Part**, e.g. Femur and approximate number of specimens (if more than one)
- **Site** where it was found, in as much detail as possible.
- **Geological data**, stratum, geological period etc (e.g. grey chalk or Ypresian)

Recent experience has demonstrated that some collectors do not record site data after collecting fossils so that this information has died with them. One reason for this Database Initiative is to encourage collectors to catalogue their collections.