WILLIAM J. MEISTER DISCOVERY OF HUMAN FOOTPRINT WITH TRILOBITES IN A CAMBRIAN FORMATION OF WESTERN UTAH

MELVIN A. COOK*

Early in June, 1968, I was introduced to Mr. Meister by Burton Tew, Research Scientist, Baccus Works, Hercules Incorporated. Mr. Meister had with him a most remarkable fossil specimen of a human footprint embedded in which were two very distinct and easily recognizable trilobites and several smaller, less distinct ones.

The specimen comprised two approximately inch thick slabs displayed in a plaster-of-paris cast. One slab contained the footprint and its associated trilobites and the other its mold. The footprint was that of the right foot of a human wearing a sandal. The rock in which the print was impressed was obviously natural, genuine, and characteristic rock.

Since Mr. Meister's interesting discovery, other persons have found similar but less spectacular specimens in the same area, two of which have been shown to me.

In late August, Dean Bitter, educator in the public schools of Salt Lake City, showed me a specimen of rock with two sandal-shod footprints he claimed to have found in diggings in a hill at Antelope Springs near that where the Meister fossil was discovered. Later Mr. Meister showed me a specimen he said was discovered by George Silver, a friend, in the same location as the original discovery.

While neither of these specimens revealed trilobites in the footprints themselves, one of them showed a small trilobite in the same rock. The sandals appeared to be of the same vintage in the five prints that have been exhibited to me.

In a telephone conversation with Dr. Clifford Burdick and Mr. Meister, I learned that Dr. Burdick had discovered the footprint of a barefoot child when he went with Mr. Maurice Carlisle to the site of the Meister discovery to check the authenticity of it.

While I am by no means an authority on fossils and footprints, the Meister specimen seems to me clearly to speak for itself. Even aside from any doubt as to the identity of the formation in which the discovery was made, it is a serious contradiction of conventional geology. That is, the feature of this specimen is the intimate simultaneous occurrence of modern (sandal-shod) men with trilobites. Furthermore, no intellectually honest individual examining this specimen can reasonable deny its genuine appearance. Finally, in my judgment, Mr. Meister is a fine gentlemen of complete honesty and integrity.

*Professor of Metallurgy, University of Utah, and President, IRECO Chemicals, West Jordan, Utah.

DISCOVERY OF TRILOBITE FOSSILS IN SHOD FOOTPRINT OF HUMAN IN "TRILOBITE BEDS"-A CAMBRIAN FORMATION, ANTELOPE SPRINGS, UTAH

WILLIAM J. MEISTER, SR.*

As a trilobite collector and "rockhound," I have often enjoyed searching "the trilobite beds" of Antelope Springs, about 43 miles northwest of Delta, Utah, for my favorite fossil. Although I had previously found many excellent trilobite specimens in this so-called Cambrian formation, none can compare with my astonishing discovery of June 1, 1968.

I arrived at Antelope Springs on Decoration Day in company with my wife and two daughters and Mr. and Mrs. Francis Shape and their two daughters. We all remained at this location four days. Upon arrival we immediately began chiseling at the rock in search of trilobites.

Trilobite Within Footprint

On the third day while the Shapes were relaxing in camp (the four girls were with us), I broke off a large, approximately two-inch thick slab of rock. Upon hitting it on the edge with my hammer, it fell open like a book. To my great astonishment I saw on one side the footprint† of a human with trilobites *right in the footprint itself.* The other half of the rock slab showed an almost perfect mold of the footprint

*Mr. Meister is Drafting Supervisor, Baccus Works, Utah, Hercules Incorporated.

†Editor's Note: In telephone conversation, Dr. Melvin Cook has reported that, according to William J. Meister, the trilobite beds are located about halfway up a 2000 foot fairly high, mountain face. (See Figure 6.) The strata are horizontal. Meister was forced to stop many times as he climbed up the face of the mountain. He had to make footholds in order to climb and to work in the area which was about halfway up the side. There was a ledge-like protrusion from the face below the working area.

Quite obviously this footprint could not be the result of any carving since, until found by Meister, it was covered by the strata above.

Figure 2. Enlargement of fossil Trilobite from heel part of Figure 1. Photo by Enno Drown.

Figure 3. Enlargement of fossil Trilobite from front portion of footprint of Figure 1. Photo by Enno Drown.

and fossils. Amazingly the human was wearing a sandal!

The footprint measured 10¼ inches in length, 3½ inches in width at the sole, and 3 inches in width at the heel. The heel print was indented in the rock about an eighth of an inch more than the sole. The footprint was clearly that of the right foot because the sandal was well worn on the right side of the heel in characteristic fashion. A photograph of the footprint and its mold are shown in Figure 1.

The most remarkable feature of the footprint was that it had in it several easily visible trilobites. One of the most distinct trilobite fossils occurred on the right side of the heel of the footprint. An enlargement of this fossil is shown in Figure 2. Another of comparable size was found toward the front of the footprint, an enlargement of which is shown in Figure 3. Some of the smaller trilobites may be seen in the enlargement from the sole shown in Figure 4. These enlargements were kindly made for me by Enno N. Drown, photographer at Hercules Incorporated.

Shortly after discovering the human footprint with its associated trilobites, I mounted my specimen in plaster-of-paris to make sure it would not become mutilated, and, in company with Burton Tew, an associate at Hercules Incorporated, I showed it to Professor Melvin A. Cook of the University of Utah. He recommended that we show it to some of the geologists at the University of Utah, but I was not able to find one who would take time to examine it. However, I was able to obtain considerable favorable publicity from the Deseret News (Figure 5 was taken by a Deseret News photographer), and an article was carried by UPI nationally as well as internationally.

Further Corroborating Finds

On July 4, I accompanied Dr. Clarence Coombs, Columbia Union College, Tacoma, Maryland, and Maurice Carlisle, graduate geologist, University of Colorado at Boulder, to the site of the discovery. After a couple of hours of digging, Mr. Carlisle found a mudslab which he said convinced him that the discovery of fossil tracks in the location was a distinct possibility, since this discovery showed that the formation had at one time been at the surface.

The first week in August, Dr. Clifford Burdick, well-traveled consulting geologist of Tucson, Ariz., visited the site of the discovery at Antelope Springs with Mr. Carlisle. On this visit Dr. Burdick found a footprint of a barefoot child in the same location as my discovery. He showed me this footprint August 18. The day before, my family and I had met Dr. Burdick at Ante-

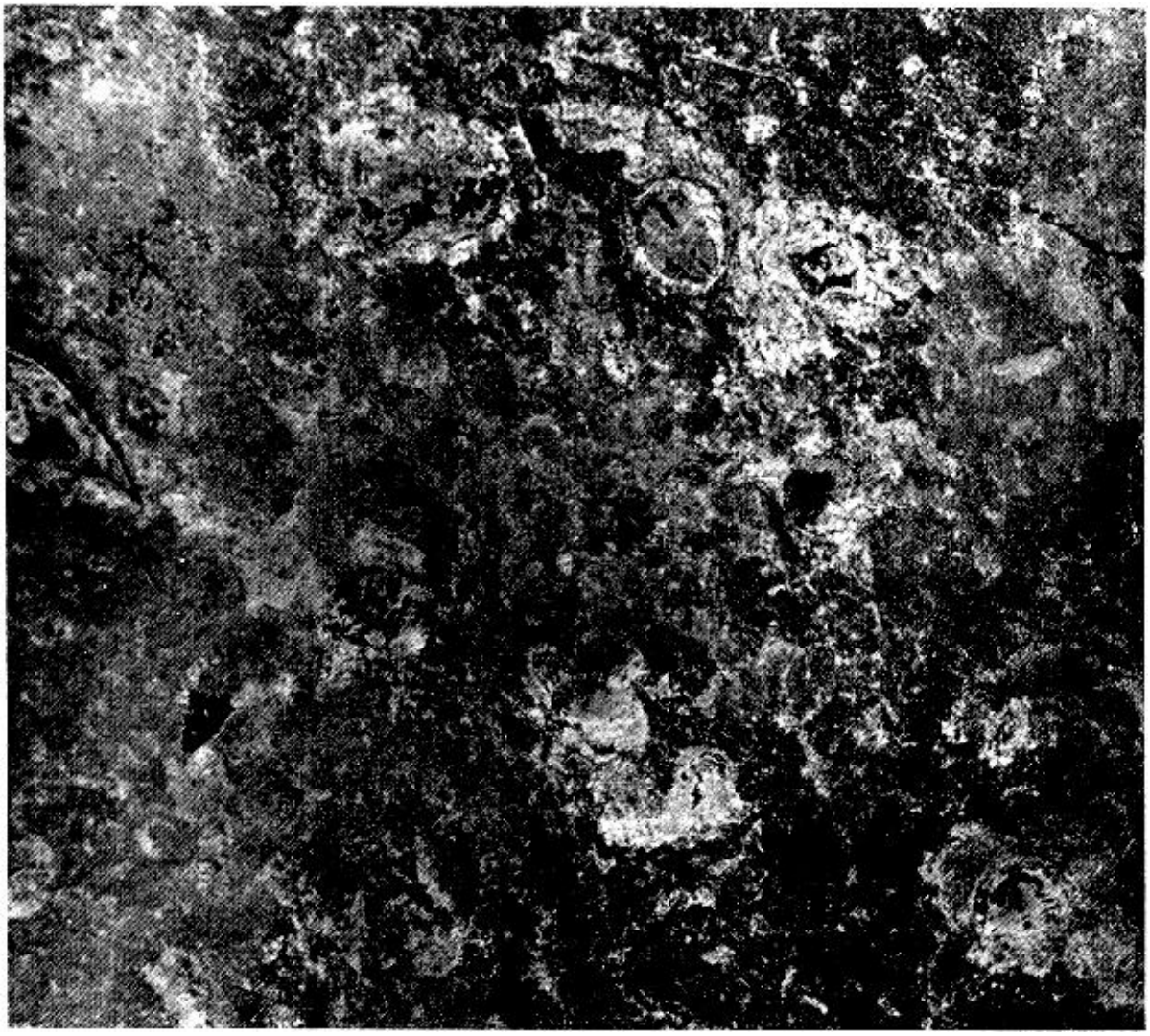

Figure 4. Enlargement of instep portion of footprint of Figure 1, showing several small fossil Trilobites. Photo by Enno Drown.

lope Springs. While there we found another sandal print. Dr. Burdick continued, and on Monday, August 19, he informed me by letter that he had found a second child's footprint.

In addition to my discovery and that of Dr. Burdick, a friend of mine, George Silver, digging alone in this location discovered more footprints of a human or human beings also shod in sandals. His specimen which he showed me (I also showed this specimen to Dr. Melvin Cook) had two footprints, one about a half inch above and on top of the other. Finally, Dean Bitter, teacher in the public schools of Salt Lake City, discovered other footprints of human beings wearing sandals much like those found by George Silver and me. Both Dr. Cook and I have seen his specimens found at Antelope Springs some distance from the site of my discovery.

While I had previously been little concerned with the different explanations of the fossil record, my discovery of a shod, and therefore obviously modern, human footprint associated intimately with trilobites has converted me completely to the story of the Bible. That is, the Bible alone provides a possible explanation of this remarkable occurrence of trilobites and humans obviously alive and together at the same time. To me it seems clear that this particular fossil is in some way related to Noah's Flood, but just how I do not know.

Leland J. Davis, Consulting Geologist of Salt Lake City, kindly agreed to outline for me the geology and stratigraphy of the formations where the discoveries described above were made.

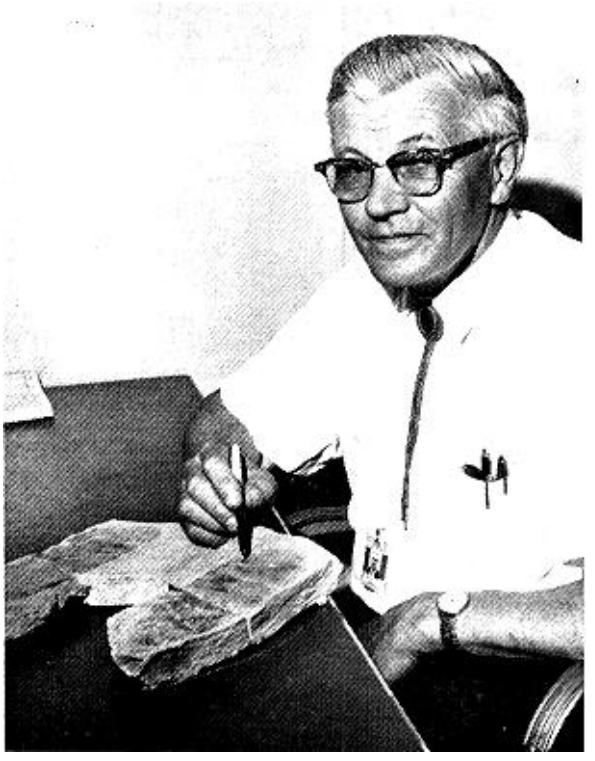

Figure 5. William J. Meister with "opened' two-inch thick slab of rock in which he found footprint containing fossil Trilobites. ***Deseret News*** **photograph.**

Following is the letter he wrote to me on August 30, 1968:

DAVIS AND DAVIS
CONSULTING GEOLOGISTS
2060 Ribbon Lane
Salt Lake City 17, Utah
CR 7-0106

August 30, 1968

Mr. W. J. Meister
4341 West 5015 South
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Sir:

At your request the following is a geologic and stratigraphic report on the Cambrian sequence and of the Trilobite fossil collecting area near Antelope Springs in West Central Utah. The area is located approximately 50 miles west of Delta, Utah.

General Geology

The Antelope Springs area is located in the Basin and Range Province. The House Range is the major structural feature in the area and is a typical northerly trending basin—range "block" consisting almost entirely of Cambrian strata. The dip of the strata is generally easterly. The steep west slopes of the House Range are traditionally conceived as a dissected fault scarp, together with its more gentle dipping eastern slope. In many places this eastern flank is characterized by dip slopes, and has lead to a general belief that the range has been elevated and tilted along a normal fault at its western base.

Increased evidence of Tertiary thrusting in the Great Basin should also be considered a possibility in this area.

Stratigraphy

(a) *Correlation*

Chart 1 is a columnar section of the Cambrian strata. Widespread continuity of strata units in the miogeosynclinal cordilleran region is a well known correlation of Cambrian strata that involve rock units (formations only). Wheeler (1948) has shown that biostratigraphic and lithologic correlations are rather closely parallel in the more calcareous (non-detrital) portions of the succession; while divergence between these two types of correlation (temporal transgression) is usually evident in the detrital units, especially those nearest the Cambrian base.

For example, the Burnt Canyon limestone is probably closely contemporaneous in both the

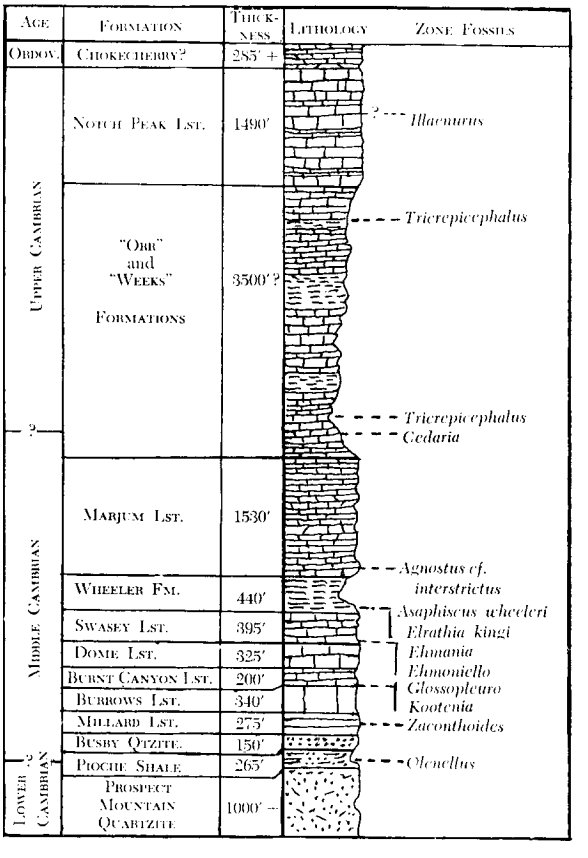

Chart 1. House Range Cambrian Columnar Section.

ROCKHOUND FINDS PUZZLING FOSSIL

Reprinted from NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS
July 14, 1968

SALT LAKE CITY (UPI) –An amateur rockhound William Meister, has found what appears to be a human sandal print with a trilobite, an extinct marine animal, imbedded in the fossilized footprint.

James Madsen, curator of the Museum of Earth Science at the University of Utah, said "there's something of a problem there," since trilobites and humans are separated by millions of years.

Trilobites, a class of arthropods with shells, were among the first marine invertebrates living in the Cambrian period of the Paleozoic era. Man, however, did not become dominant until the most recent geological period.

Puzzling Fossil

Meister, chief draftsman at the Hercules, Inc., Bacchus plant west of Salt Lake City, found the puzzling fossil in June while digging at Antelope Springs near Delta, Utah, an area known for its abundance of trilobite fossils.

During the weekend encampment with his family, Meister sliced open a chunk of shale and found what appears to be a sandal print with three readily discernible trilobites, as though a human had stepped on them and the print was fossilized.

The sandal print, about the same size as an average man's shoe, is shaped like a right shoe and rounded on the outside edge of the heel, as is the case in normal wear of a shoe.

Theory Offered

Dr. Jesse Jennings of the University of Utah's anthropology department theorized that the outline, which appears to be a sandal print, may be the outline of a very large trilobite, which had been crushed and fossilized along with the smaller trilobites.

Madson was inclined to believe the find was the product of a natural occurrence. He said he has a piece of sandstone dated 170 million years old with what appears to be a human footprint and a chunk of limestone from the ocean floor with a shape similar to the fossil remains of an elephant's tooth. Madsen said he is convinced both were merely natural occurrences and not actual impressions.

The 64-year-old Meister retires next year and plans to devote full time to digging in the remote Antelope Springs shale.

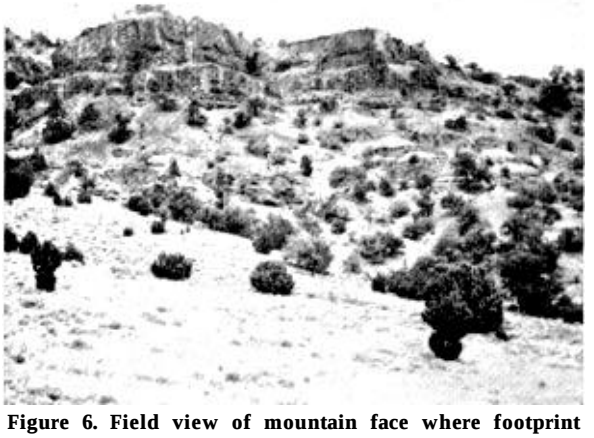

Figure 6. Field view of mountain face where footprint containing fossil Trilobites was found by William J. Meister.

House Range and at Pioche, Nevada; whereas the Pioche shale appears to have begun its accumulation considerably earlier at Pioche than in the House Range area mentioned. This indicates a near shore environment existed in the Antelope Springs area during the deposition of the Cambrian strata.

(b) Wheeler Formation

The Wheeler is exposed in the Wheeler Amphitheatre east of Antelope Springs on the east slope of the House Range. This area is famous for its fossil trilobites (especially *Elrathia* and *Agnostis)* and phosphatic brachiopods. The Wheeler consists of dull sooty-gray, fine-grained, thin, fissile, shaly limestones and calcareous shales. This formation is a valley and slope-maker with platy shale ledges wherever found in the House Range.

Very truly yours,
LELAND J. DAVIS
Consulting Geologist

LJD / b

References

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