

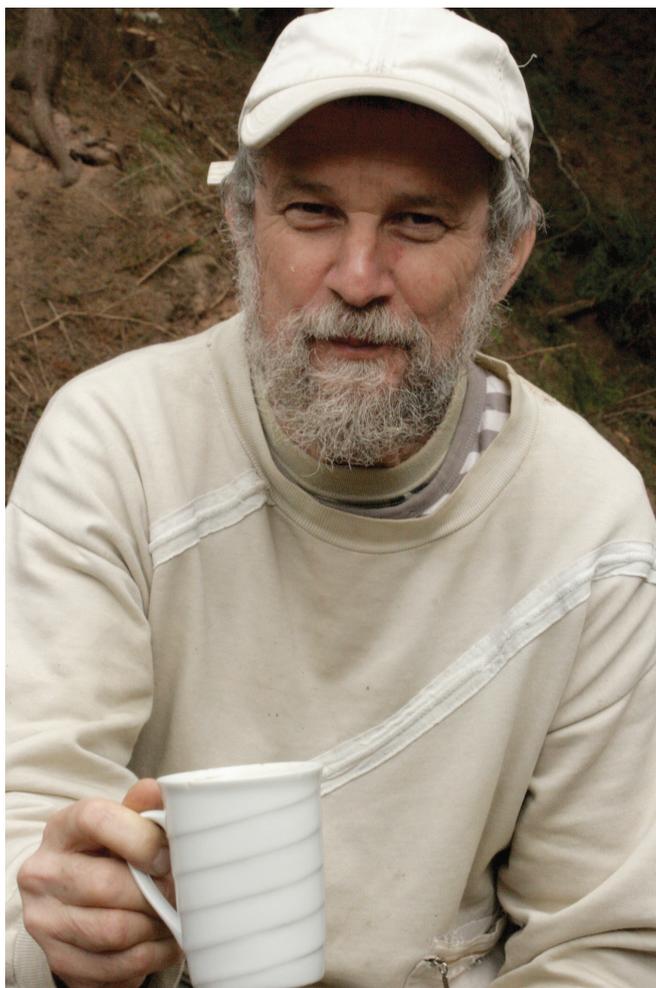
## RNDr. Vojtěch Turek, CSc. 70th birthday

Every palaeontologist who visits collections of various museums, here and abroad, to study type material and other sorts of specimens, knows very well how many hurdles must be overcome before access to the material is granted. The researcher is happy if it is possible to agree on a date amenable to both sides, in order to have a chance to study the material at all. If the material is then accessible, so much the better, and the peak of joy is when instruments like microscopes and cameras are available for use. All such concerns may safely be put aside when the researcher visits the National Museum and makes arrangements in advance with RNDr. Vojtěch Turek, CSc. The agreed-upon dates will be staffed by museum workers, and they will happily answer all questions. The material will be prepared for examination, and the necessary instruments will be available for use. Besides the obligatory, “Would you like another cup of coffee?”, researchers may avail themselves of three different delivered hot meals, which may be carried directly to the researcher’s work table. At least that has been my experience upon visiting Vojtěch Turek in the National Museum in Prague. I still see in Vojta the slender, curly-haired student, whom I first met in 1967 at the Faculty of Science of the Charles University in Prague. I was a complete novice in geological studies, since I had originally planned on studying zoology, while Vojta was already at home in palaeontology. He could lecture with complete confidence on the rich fauna of the Barrandian area, as well as its stratigraphy. Among the students in the first year of geology, there were only the two of us interested in palaeontology, and so we soon became good friends. As time went on, we not only coordinated our various exams, but also occasional field trips, and we have continued in the same spirit for ongoing fifty years.

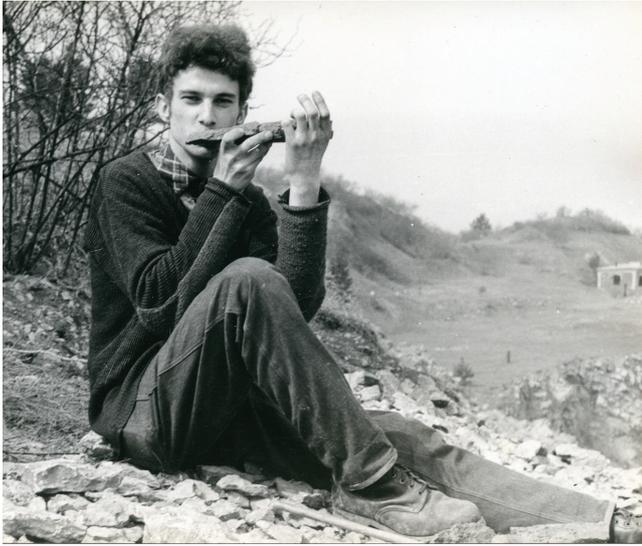
Vojtěch Turek was born on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1949 in Prague. The mysteries of fossils claimed his attention at an early age. In his own words, he was not yet ten years old when he held his first fossil in his hands, the Silurian bivalve *Cardiolinka*, from a construction site for a new swimming pool in Prague-Podolí. After learning that the age of the bivalve fossil was counted in hundreds of millions of years, he fell in love with discovering fossil life, and decided on a career as a palaeontologist. The first important locality for him was the tailing heap in Prague-Braník, where the excavated material from the pool construction site was dumped, and where he spent all his free time, along with his friend Vladimír Kratina. They gradually expanded their collecting activities to the Braník cliff-face, and to the richest site available to them at the time, the Kosoř gorge.

Vojta began to acquaint himself with the National Museum collections at a tender age. In 1960, he began to regularly visit the Museum’s palaeontological exposition. He focused on Early Palaeozoic fossils in the exhibition hall Barrandium, where he could compare his own discoveries with those on exhibit. A year later he became acquainted with RNDr. Radvan Horný, CSc. who had just transferred from the Czech Geological Survey to the National Museum. R. Horný provided the young Vojta with invaluable scientific advice, as well as his first batch of scientific literature. Another exceptional source of advice was RNDr. Jiří Kříž, CSc. of the Czech Geological Survey, who helped Vojta to develop his knowledge of the geology and fauna of the Barrandian area, and introduced him to palaeontological field work. Both of these two experts had an enormous influence on the young student, and were an important factor in Vojta’s ability to continue on to advanced studies at the gymnasium. It was despite initial opposition to the idea from his father who from practical reasons wished for his son to first learn craft skills. During his studies at the gymnasium, Vojta continued to expand his interest in palaeontology, and on R. Horný’s recommendation, focused his initial efforts on nautiloid cephalopods, a rather neglected group up until then. He subsequently entered the program of palaeontology at the Charles University as an already well-versed researcher in the field, and with a definite focus of interest on cephalopods.

In 1967, he made contact with Prof. Rousseau H. Flower from Socorro, New Mexico, USA, one of the world’s leading cephalopod specialists. In 1968 and 1969, professor Flower arranged repeated internships for his promising young student with his employer, the Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro (USA), with the intent of passing on his professional experience to Vojta, along with an offer to complete a joint revision of cephalopods of the Barrandian area. Unfortunately, the Russian occupation of our country in 1968, along with an escape from the occupied country by Vojta’s oldest brother put an end to any possibilities of post-doc studies outside Czech borders. As later became evident, reinstatement of the “old order” had several more unfortunate effects on any attempts to travel anywhere to “the west”. During his studies at the Faculty of Science of the Charles University, Vojta often took part in summer volunteer sessions, when he helped work on the reinstallation of the Barrandium Hall of the National Museum. He expanded his collaboration with Radvan Horný and Jiří Kříž during detailed field



**RNDr. Vojtěch Turek, CSc. in 2015**  
(photo by S. Štamberg)



**Text-fig. 1. Vojta Turek, student at the Faculty of Science of the Charles University, blowing an silurian orthoceras fossil at the Kosov quarry. Photo J. Kukulová, 1970.**

Charles University, he went on numerous excursions and field trips with I. Chlupáč, as part of the International Subcommittee on Devonian Stratigraphy. Vojta and Ivo's friendship was a boon to me as well, and I had a wonderful opportunity to take part in an excursion to the Barrandian area, visit a significant locality in the Moravian Devonian and collect fossils in the Palaeozoic of the Železné hory Mts. Ivo maintained a warm relationship with the Museum, and donated to it the most valuable portion of his collection. He also collaborated on museum exhibitions, and had a major interest in seeing the National Museum be a highly acclaimed scientific institution. During their numerous joint field trips, Ivo gave Vojta a tremendous amount of valuable advice, passed on his knowledge and donated his literature. As Vojta says, Ivo's zeal for geology and palaeontology, his diligence, perseverance, orderliness, precision and simultaneously his humility and sense of humour were the characteristics that Vojta prized in him the most. Their relationship was truly that of friends, and during my visits to the Museum, when Vojta regularly informed me of Ivo's worsening health, up until his death in 2002, I felt how painful this loss was for Vojta.

Fairly soon after Vojta began to work for the National Museum, preparations commenced for the palaeontological expedition "Maghreb", to the Palaeozoic and Mesozoic of Algeria. This also involved preparation of a travelling exhibition, on which Vojta worked, and he was supposed to go on the Maghreb expedition as well. His participation in the expedition was thwarted by a denied request for exemption from military service, and the renewed "old order" by the invasion of Warsaw pact troops. An extremely attractive chance to travel, this time to the east, presented itself in 1976, and again in 1978. As part of a cultural exchange agreement between Czechoslovakia and Mongolia, Vojta had the opportunity to travel with Marcela Bukovanská from the Mineralogical Department of the National Museum, as part of the Russian-Mongolian expedition the southeast, south west and central part of the Gobi desert. In 1978, he also had the opportunity to attach himself to a distinctly palaeontological expedition, and participate in dinosaur digs in the famous Nemegt Basin. Camping directly among freshly uncovered skeletons of tarbosaurus and oviraptors was a unique and unforgettable experience for a Czechoslovakian palaeontologist.

Through all of his scientific career, Vojtěch Turek has devoted himself to cephalopods of the Early Palaeozoic, especially nautiloid cephalopods and goniatites. For a number of years, he was the primary "bonanza" for acquiring material from the Kosov quarry in Beroun. There he began with systematic research on an *Orthoceras* bed in the uppermost layers of the Kopanina Formation, back when he was still a student at the Faculty of Science. The acquired material formed the basis for his dissertation. Later, his work shifted to the area of the Motol Formation, where he studied operculums of orthocerids, and busied himself with taphonomy, as well as matters of palaeoecology and biostratigraphy.

In 1981, Vojta formally ended his external postgraduate work at the Faculty of Science of the Charles University, but he did not get his CSc. title until two years later, when he finally received permission from the communist party to defend his dissertation. This delay was punishment for his refusal to join the party.

Vojtěch Turek initially devoted his research almost entirely to cephalopods. He described a number of new species and genera, and collaborated on research and publication not only with Ivo Chlupáč (revision of Devonian goniatites from the Barrandian area), but also with Rudolf Prokop and Jaroslav Marek. In the mid-1980s, Vojta added stratigraphically younger rocks to his field of interest, including entirely distinct fauna. During his field trips with palaeobotanist Karel Drábek in the open quarry Ovčín near Radnice, he accumulated unusually rich ichnofossil material. These traces left by Carboniferous amphibians, fishes and invertebrates fascinated Vojta to the point that he embarked on concentrated study of such fauna, and for a time, set aside his work on nautiloids. Similarly, about 20 years later, he tackled with the same intensity the collection and study of fossil traces from the Jan Šverma mine near Žacléř. Surface mining in the Jan Šverma mine at that time was uncovering a wonderfully rich layer with Carboniferous plants. During the research, done mostly by palaeobotanist Milan Libertín and assisted by Radek Labuťa, an original and unique trace fossils were discovered, but it eventually turned out that the traces formed a major part of the fossil

work in some localities in the Silurian *Orthoceras* limestones of the Barrandian area. Vojtěch Turek became an employee of the National Museum in the fall of 1971, a year before he finished his studies at the Faculty of Science of the Charles University in the field of palaeontology. In the National Museum, he met RNDr. Rudolf Prokop, CSc. a specialist on Palaeozoic echinoderms, and the palaeobotanist RNDr. František Holý, CSc. and a museum assistant Antonín Skalický, all of whom were able to bring some semblance of order to an often hectic atmosphere. In the National Museum, Vojta naturally worked in the city centre, where he crossed paths with numerous specialists who regularly visited the Museum to study the extensive collection of Palaeozoic fossils. At that time, the most common external researchers in the Museum were Vladimír Havlíček, Milan Šnajdr, Alois Příbyl, Jiří Vaněk, Jiří Kříž and Ladislav Marek. Among other palaeontologists, Vojta developed a close relationship with RNDr. Ivo Chlupáč, CSc. Meeting Ivo Chlupáč and the subsequent years-long collaboration had a huge impact on the direction of Vojta's continuing work and research. Vojta met Ivo Chlupáč during his study at the gymnasium in the 1960s. During his study at the Faculty of Science of the

record of the area, documenting life in the Carboniferous basin. During one subsequent excursion, in which I had the opportunity to participate (although I had the strictly selfish interest of finding at least a scale of an actinopterygian fish), our car was overloaded with ichnofossil finds. Vojta devoted five publications to ichnofossils, and thoroughly documented vertebrate fossil traces from the Radnice Basin.

The extensive knowledge that Vojta acquired on early Palaeozoic fauna and the wide overview over fauna from stratigraphically younger rocks was excellent preparation for the offer he received in 1986 from the publisher Artia, to write *La grande encyclopedie des fossiles*. Creation of such a work required assistance from his colleagues, like Jaroslav Marek, who wrote chapters focused on mollusks (except for cephalopods), and Josef Beneš, who worked on vertebrates. Publication of the volume was a resounding success, receiving an award from the publisher Artia, and during the years 1988 – 2009, was printed in six languages and sixteen editions.

A substantial part of the work of a museum curator is care for the institution's collections – promotion, determination, conservation and making them available to the public. This sort of work occupied most of Vojta's time as a Museum employee during the years 1991 – 2003, when he was the head of the Department of Palaeontology of the National Museum. While the Barrandeum Hall had undergone a complete reinstallation in 1967, other exhibitions had remained somewhat neglected, and the Quaternary exhibition was mostly symbolic, consisting of one skeleton of a woolly rhinoceros. In the years 1991 – 1993, mostly through efforts of the department staff, with minimal financial support, these other exhibitions were reinstalled and modernized. Simultaneously, short-term exhibitions were built and displayed, in which Vojta assisted, or even was the author. He not only enriched the experience of visitors to the National Museum with these numerous exhibitions, but he also assisted with exhibitions in the Bohemian Karst Museum in Beroun. Especially satisfying for me was that I could collaborate with Vojta on exhibitions in our institution, The East Bohemian Museum in Hradec Králové.

Promotion of palaeontology and disseminating the newest information on extinct life is a significant part of Vojtěch Turek's profession. Another noteworthy project of his, the assembly of a new reconstruction of Palaeozoic biotopes of the Barrandian area, took form during preparation of the exhibition of robotic dinosaurs in the National Museum (from the American company Dinamation) in the year 1994. It was then he met artist Jan Sovák, working at the time in Canada. In subsequent years, along with R. Horný, R. Prokop and J. Sovák, he built numerous reconstructions, which eventually became parts of numerous exhibition projects, and primarily, part of a joint publication, *Ztracená moře uprostřed Evropy* (Vanished seas in the centre of Europe), published in 2003. The book received the Hlávka Foundation award that same year. A large part of Vojta's efforts for the popularization of palaeontology in recent years has been work on scripts and shooting the documentary, *Along the Path of Trilobite Hunters* (Skyfilm 2012), and directing 3D animation of life in Bohemian Silurian and Devonian oceans, created by M. Lysec. The films have been shown in several exhibition projects, and are planned to become a permanent part of the new palaeontological exposition of the National



**Text-fig. 2.** Vojta Turek with his colleague Ivo Chlupáč in Švarcava Valley in 1970. Archive of Department of Palaeontology, National Museum.



**Text-fig. 3.** Vojta Turek with the author after a hard day in Natural History Museum collections in London, 2009. Archive S. Štamberg.



**Text-fig. 4.** Production of the book titled “Ztracená moře uprostřed Evropy”. Vojta Turek with palaeoartist Jan Sovák above a scene with Kopynina Formation faunal community. Photo R. Horný, 1997.



**Text-fig. 5. Vojta Turek whitening a fossil with ammonium chloride in his studyroom in the historic main museum building at Wenceslas Square in Prague. Photo B. Ekrt, 2008.**

1 mm-sized shell – initial chamber – in limestone. Taxonomic and anatomic studies of extended groups of cephalopods would not be possible without careful analysis of type material. Even though the National Museum has an extraordinarily extensive collection of such mollusks, much important material of this sort is distributed among institutions all over the world. Fortunately, after the political changes in 1989, the prohibition against travelling out of the country to “the west” ceased to apply to Vojta, and so he was able to visit the long-desired collections of cephalopods at the Harvard University in the USA (the Shary collection), several times the Museum of Natural History in Stockholm and the Lund University (material from Gotland), Natural History Museum in Vienna (material from the Barrandian area), the Natural History Museum in London and University of Oxford (material from the Barrandian area and the Blake’s cephalopod collection) and the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels (de Koninck’s originals of Carboniferous nautiloids). Along with this came several collecting trips to the Silurian of the Carnic Alps, Cambrian and Silurian of southern Sweden, Ordovician of the island of Öland, Silurian of the island Gotland, Palaeozoic and Mesozoic of Morocco, Mesozoic of central and southeastern France, Mesozoic of Switzerland, Palaeozoic and Mesozoic of Mongolia, Palaeozoic of Lesser Caucasus, Mesozoic of the island Hokkaido, Mesozoic of Bavaria and Palaeozoic of the Andes in Argentina. And in turn, Vojta frequently passes on his own extensive knowledge while leading foreign scientific geological-palaeontological excursions around the Barrandian area (Dutch Geological Society – 1992, 1998, 2000, 2001; Belgian Geological Society Kring Thellus – 1994) and participates in scholarly directing of excursions to the Barrandian area, organized by the Czech Geological Survey in Prague. His participation in international conferences is equally prolific, when he



**Text-fig. 6. Vojta Turek hammering a fossil at Koněprusy-Voskop locality. Photo J. Sklenář, 2013.**

Museum, “Czech Windows into Prehistory”. For popularizing knowledge of fossils, new discoveries in palaeontology and their significance, we also have Vojta’s numerous popular-scientific articles in newspapers and magazines, around 30 in total, along with interviews provided to various radio and television programs, along with lectures for the public.

In his professional work, however, Vojta always returns from exhibitions, reworking expositions and the tiring work of moving the Museum’s collection, back to his beloved cephalopods. In recent years, he has published together with RNDr. Štěpán Manda, PhD a number of papers devoted to Silurian and Devonian cephalopods. The works cover not only taxonomic revisions, but mostly efforts dedicated to the ontogeny of cephalopods and their colour patterns. Fundamental works by these authors focused on the cephalopod family Sphooceratidae, and Silurian discocerids from the Barrandian area and the Swedish island of Gotland. During my visits to the Department of Palaeontology of the National Museum, I was often privileged to witness Vojta’s skills in fossil preparation. Especially during study of cephalopod ontogeny, Vojta prepares all his samples himself, and only a truly experienced person familiar with fossil preparations can appreciate how difficult it is to prepare a

1 mm-sized shell – initial chamber – in limestone. Taxonomic and anatomic studies of extended groups of cephalopods would not be possible without careful analysis of type material. Even though the National Museum has an extraordinarily extensive collection of such mollusks, much important material of this sort is distributed among institutions all over the world. Fortunately, after the political changes in 1989, the prohibition against travelling out of the country to “the west” ceased to apply to Vojta, and so he was able to visit the long-desired collections of cephalopods at the Harvard University in the USA (the Shary collection), several times the Museum of Natural History in Stockholm and the Lund University (material from Gotland), Natural History Museum in Vienna (material from the Barrandian area), the Natural History Museum in London and University of Oxford (material from the Barrandian area and the Blake’s cephalopod collection) and the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels (de Koninck’s originals of Carboniferous nautiloids). Along with this came several collecting trips to the Silurian of the Carnic Alps, Cambrian and Silurian of southern Sweden, Ordovician of the island of Öland, Silurian of the island Gotland, Palaeozoic and Mesozoic of Morocco, Mesozoic of central and southeastern France, Mesozoic of Switzerland, Palaeozoic and Mesozoic of Mongolia, Palaeozoic of Lesser Caucasus, Mesozoic of the island Hokkaido, Mesozoic of Bavaria and Palaeozoic of the Andes in Argentina. And in turn, Vojta frequently passes on his own extensive knowledge while leading foreign scientific geological-palaeontological excursions around the Barrandian area (Dutch Geological Society – 1992, 1998, 2000, 2001; Belgian Geological Society Kring Thellus – 1994) and participates in scholarly directing of excursions to the Barrandian area, organized by the Czech Geological Survey in Prague. His participation in international conferences is equally prolific, when he often reports the results of his research. Along with a number of such conferences organized in Prague, like the Murchison Symposium – international conference on the Silurian (Prague 1991) and the Paläontologische Gesellschaft (Prague 1993), it is certainly worth mentioning the International Congress in Moscow (1984), the Third Palaeontological Congress in London (2010), the International Palaeontological Congress in Mendoza (2014) and international specialized symposia Cephalopods – Present and Past: Lyon (1990), Vienna (1999), Lyon (2003), Sapporo (2007), Dijon (2011), Zurich (2014) and Fez (2018).

Vojta’s perpetual energy probably stems from the fact that he was never an armchair palaeontologist, but gathered a major portion of his study material with his own hands on various field trips. An attractive quality of his is that he rarely needs much persuading, but quickly and actively joins in on even digs organized by his colleagues in the National Museum to Carboniferous localities, or by me to Permian-Carboniferous localities – areas covering subject matter quite far removed from his own research projects. During his field trips, both domestic and abroad, he never neglects to indulge in his other favourite hobby, visiting churches and

other historical monuments. Whether large cathedrals or tiny local village churches, he evaluates their architecture and inner ornamentation. In connection with this, I am reminded of our joint field trip in the 1970s to Otovice in Broumov. We set out with our tents and our children for a week-long “dig” to a locality with Permian fauna in Otovice, within sight of a local unit of the border police. We had barely gotten our tents out of the car when a border cop came running towards us and told us we had to leave, because we were in the forbidden border zone. During our ensuing careful negotiations with the cop, Vojta mentioned the local cultural memorial and in particular, the picturesque church in nearby Martinkovice and the wooden church in Broumov. Initially, I did not expect that this would evoke any sort of favourable reaction from a border cop, and might even exacerbate the situation, but the cop turned out to be an enlightened local patriot, and we were then able to dig our fossils the entire week in safety, ensured by the local unit of border police.

The never-ending activity by this tireless palaeontologist is probably also thanks to his life-long sporting activities. As far back as I can remember, beginning during his study at the Faculty of Science, he has been active in softball and canoeing. During such activities, he also met his future wife Magdalena, whom he wed in 1976. They raised two sons together, Martin and Vojtěch. Vojta lives with the family in their family home, inherited from his parents, and which he has remodeled over the years. More than 30 years ago, he longed to have a cottage for his family in an outdoor setting, away from Prague. I have a vivid memory of the time when Vojta showed the object offered for sale to me and our colleague, Milada Maňourová, with the suggestion that we purchase it together. When viewing the enormous object, with its many rooms, attached barn and property, thoroughly overgrown by vegetation, we cravenly turned down Vojta’s offer. But Vojta persevered, rescued the building from its overgrowth of weeds and vines, and to this day utilizes it for his family’s recreation. The “cottage” at the vicinity of Kuks has repeatedly been a base camp, allowing overnight lodging and regeneration of energy for palaeontological colleagues investigating localities in eastern Bohemia.

Seven decades checked off in a person’s life ledger may evoke the image of a sedate whitebeard, imprisoned by his preconceived notions and unable to deal with anything new. But such an image is in sharp contrast to the actuality of today’s guest of honour, one day researching in Silurian and Devonian cephalopods in his office in the National Museum, another day skiing in the Italian Dolomites, still another canoeing down a river. Among these activities he includes taking care of a granddaughter Josephine, riding a bike, and golfing with his wife Magdalena on various courses usually along the road between Prague and Kuks. I also have the feeling that he has left the aging to his fossils, while he himself remains untouched by time. For many years into the future, all of us who know Vojta wish for him continuing good health, many further successes in his professional research, and a happy family with additional grandchildren. We fervently hold the desire to continue meeting him for many years to come.



**Text-fig. 7. Semily locality, “In the Jizera riverbed”, together with colleagues from the National Museum. Photo L. Nývlt, 2016.**

Stanislav Štamberg