BRYAN PATTERSON, 1909–1979

By William D. Turnbull

Bryan Patterson, a member of the Department of Geology staff from 1926 to 1955 and a distinguished member of the National Academy of Sciences, died December 1 in Boston. He was 70 years of age. Patterson's Field Museum career began at age 17 when he arrived from Malvern, England. His father, Col. J. H. Patterson (who shot the famed Tsavo man-eating lions on view in Hall 22), asked Stanley Field, then president of Field Museum, if the Museum could find some way to use the lad. Months later young Patterson appeared on the Museum's doorstep. Thus a remarkable career was launched.

For the next three years Patterson served as preparator for the Department of Geology, following this with five years as division assistant. For seven years he then served as assistant curator, and finally for fourteen years as curator, with time out during World War II for service in the U.S. Army. In 1955 Patterson left Field Museum to accept an Alexander Agassiz Professorship at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, a chair he held until 1970. He continued to serve Harvard for five more years as professor of comparative paleontology, and after that continued as professor emeritus. Throughout his Harvard tenure, Patterson retained affiliation with Field Museum as a research associate.

At Harvard Patterson continued research investigations that he had begun at Field Museum: Paleocene and Eocene faunas of the DeBeque Formation of Western Colorado; Early Creataceous and Eocene-Oligocene faunas of the Texas Trinity and Vieja Formations; and Mid and Late Tertiary faunas of South America. New endeavors at Harvard included explorations in East Africa. In 1971 he made worldwide headlines as leader of an expedition to Kenya, where his crew unearthed the jawbone of man's five million-year-old ancestor, *Australopithecus*. At the time it was the earliest such specimen known. Four years earlier he had made another *Australopithecus* discovery. The 1967 fragment pushed back the human evolutionary record to 2½ million years from the prior record of 1¾ million years set by Louis and Mary Leakey. Early in his Harvard tenure Patterson received his most coveted honor when he was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Bryan, or Pat, as he was known to Field Museum colleagues, was a phenomenon. He had an insatiable curiosity, a compulsion to read—no, to devour—the written word, and a *joie de vivre* that transformed almost every occasion into a once-in-a-lifetime experience. He commanded a wealth of knowledge within and beyond his field that was indeed remarkable, all the more because he was largely self-taught. His only formal graduate training consisted of selected courses taken at the University of Chicago during his early years at the Museum. He had a photographic mind, and as soon as he perceived a need to know something—say an embryological detail—he would pursue the search tenaciously.

The late James H. Quinn, former chief preparator of the Department of Geology, once pointed out to me that while Pat was a preparator his heart may have been with it, but his intellect went far and away beyond. In Quinn's words, "A few weeks after Pat's arrival, Elmer S. Riggs asked him to go to the Museum library to look up some obscure point or reference, and that was the end of the preparation. Pat discovered the library, put his nose in a book and never got it out again." (Riggs, then curator of fossil vertebrates, was Patterson's predecessor in that post.) I have always remembered that statement for, in addition to its revealing touch of envy, it shows that Pat's peers at the time recognized his great gift and accepted his scholarly ability long before the institution officially did so.

During Pat's early years at the Museum he financed his own field work, there being no funds available for that purpose for so inexperienced a hand. One such trip, perhaps his first, was to the nearby, now world-famous Mazon Creek Pennsylvanian locality (an hour's drive

Bryan Patterson as he appeared in cover photo of the April, 1968, Bulletin. *A practical joker who would carry out an elaborate scheme for the sheer fun of it, he is shown here holding an alleged "dancing worm" or "tully monster," which he supposedly had just bagged in the wilds of Kenya. The only known specimens of the creature* (Tullimonstrum gregarium) *are Coal Age fossils from Illinois. Not an attempt to hoodwink the reader, the photo supplemented a humorous article on Patterson's elaborate prank.*

southwest of Chicago). Pat spent his first vacation there in 1928, collecting plant, invertebrate, and vertebrate fossils. His collection—now dwarfed by the hundreds of thousands of specimens collected there since by curators George Langford, Eugene Richardson, Gordon Baird, and a host of amateurs— constituted the bulk of the Museum's early holdings from this locality.

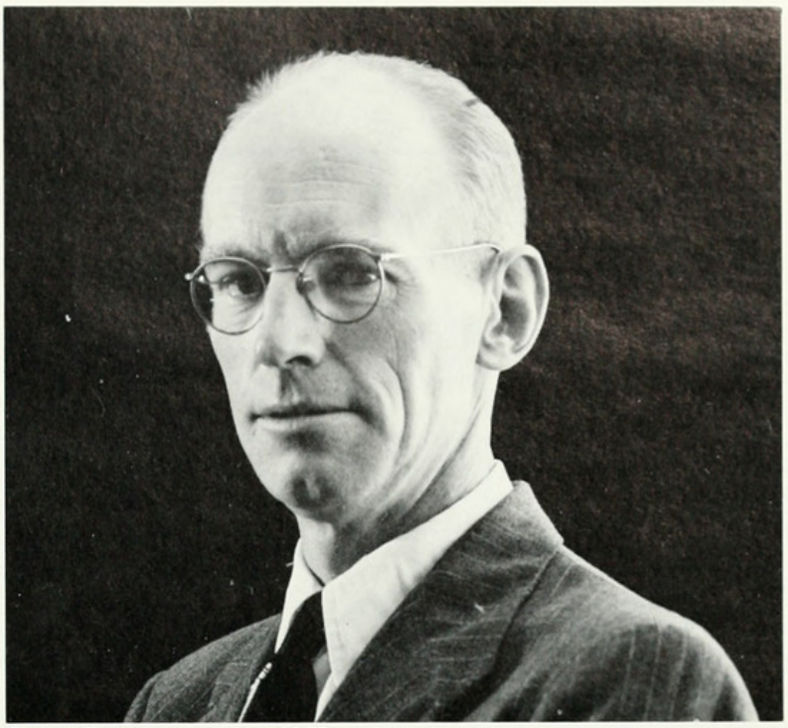
Several years later, still at his own expense, he began the first of his long-term serious research efforts. Accompanying Riggs to western Colorado, Pat began collecting from the latest Paleocene and Early Eocene deposits of the DeBeque Formation. The geology of the area was so poorly known that not until he began study of the materials was he able to demonstrate the presence of a Paleocene section distinct from the Eocene.

These positive results led to the Museum's support of six subsequent field seasons of work there. Considering the small number of personnel, the scarcity of specimens, and the difficulties of terrain during those field seasons, a remarkable collection was accumulated. It was well documented with good stratigraphic and locality information, at a level quite acceptable today, but exceptional for the time. This effort resulted in nine publications on the Paleocene forms. And there are a number of manuscripts in various stages of completion, some of which must be published in order that the wealth of information they contain can become part of the record.

There is no doubt that his years of work in Colorado shaped and molded Pat to a high degree. He became a master at this craft and was well started on the road to preeminence. In 1947 he and Quinn spent the summer field season in west Texas, in the Big Bend area of the Rio Grande country west of the Pecos, where they collected the first extensive series of specimens from the Latest Eocene-Earliest Oligocene sediments of largely volcanic origin.

Simultaneous with the western Colorado work Pat began study of a large series of materials already at hand, collected by Riggs in South America in the 1920s from Mid and Late Tertiary deposits, mainly in Argentina and Bolivia. This aspect of Patterson's work has produced an outpouring of publications that continues even today, and which also opened the way for studies and publications on fauna as varied as the Phororhacoid birds, marsupials, edentates, typotheres, astrapotheres, toxodonts, pyrotheres, and rodents. The most recent of these is a co-authored (with Albert E. Wood) monograph on South American rodent evolution. Pat and Larry G. Marshall, a Field Museum vertebrate paleontologist, have cooperated to bring into final form several of Pat's South American faunal and stratigraphic studies.

Patterson's major field work in Texas was recovering and studying the teeth of the Early Cretaceous mammals of the Trinity Formation of north Texas. En route to 1949 professional meetings in El Paso, some of his Field Museum colleagues stopped to check a locality near Forestberg, Texas, reported to have fossils of special interest that were eroding out of the earth in great abundance. The reports proved to be more than valid, and Pat was called to investigate the site further.



Bryan Patterson, about 1955

He spent several months the following season alone there, digging out and wet-sieving uncounted tons of Trinity sand matrix. He recovered well over 100 of the small teeth, representing not just tricodonts, but a number of other fauna as well. His report on one of these—primitive therians—appeared in *Fieldiana* (Field Museum's monograph series) in 1956, and has become a classic.

Patterson's Chicago years were a time not only in which he was molded into an acknowledged leader in his field, but also in which he most definitely helped to mold the Museum. In addition to the vast and important collections he made, his gifts to the Museum were many and varied; but his greatest gift was the intellectually stimulating effect of his enthusiams and dedication.

Although never trained to teach, Pat had a certain natural gift for it: he made his subject interesting by the manner of his presentation, and he enjoyed doing it. He gave of his time to serious students apparently ungrudgingly, whether or not they were formally enrolled.

Pat served the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology as its president in 1948–49. He was a member of the Society for the Study of Evolution, the Geological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and several other professional societies. The end of the Chicago years was marked by the honor of the Harvard appointment. Another honor bestowed upon him more recently resulted from his brief work in Central America, undertaken as a consequence of his interest in the faunal interrelationships and interchanges between North and South America. A museum in Estanzuela, Guatemala, is named in his honor, recognizing his work there.

Pat is survived by his wife, Bernice Caine Patterson, and a son, Alan.

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