Slippery slope

Ellis L. Yochelson

Ichnos: An International Journal for Plant and Animal Traces. Editors S. George Pemberton and Robert W. Frey (dec.). *Harwood Academic*. 4/vol. \$300 (institutional), \$107 (personal).

DURING this generation, the study of traces of past organic activity has been developed to a fine art by some palaeontologists, and this new journal puts their best foot (or footprint) forward. About two-thirds of the printed pages are "Research Articles". "Short Communications" include brief papers, book reviews, discussions of techniques, memorials and a few other items. All the material is well edited and adequately illustrated. The age of specimens discussed ranges from Precambrian to present-day. It is interesting stuff for those who like burrows, borings, trails and other indications of the 'work of animals' and of plants. The science reported is just fine. Now having praised, I shall damn.

In physical appearance, the journal invites comparison to the *Journal of Paleontology*. Both are printed with two columns to a page in the large format that is becoming standard for many journals. Both are printed on coated stock and the photographic illustrations and line drawings of both are reproduced well. *Ichnos* has 54 lines to the column, *Journal of Paleontology* has 66, plus a few more characters per line. Centred headings are more prominent in *Ichnos*, with more white space above and below. In *Ichnos* all articles begin on a right-hand page. As a result, of the 330 pages in four issues of *Ichnos*, 28 are blank. In considering whether to purchase a journal, some people work out the price per page, and even per character. This empty space all adds up to the detriment of the journal.

It is understandable that each new discipline or subdiscipline in science wants to establish its own independence. But there are at least four long-established journals in palaeontology to which virtually all the material in *Ichnos* could have been submitted; none of

them has an exceptionally large backlog. A specialist journal weakens the more general journals in the field. It may be counterproductive in having the effect of isolating new subdisciplines from a wider audience. There are only about 5,000 palaeontologists and there is a limit to the number of journals that these individuals and libraries can support.

Profit is not a bad thing, but gross profit is. A few years ago, the American Association of Research Libraries issued a strong condemnation of commercial journals for price-gouging. To keep down costs, they urged scientists to pub-

Dinosaur tracks at Glen Rose, Texas. (The picture is reproduced from *Global Warming* by A. Revkin, American Museum of Natural History Environmental Defense Fund, £20.)

lish their own journals. Had the ichnologists followed this path, they would be receiving more support in this review.

Co-editors S. George Pemberton and the late Robert Frey worked hard for many years to establish a journal and they have produced a good-quality product. Unfortunately, the richest science libraries today will not take a new journal unless an old one is discontinued, and most are dropping journals. In this economic climate I cannot recommend that *Ichnos*, or any new commercial journal, regardless of its quality, be purchased by a library. □

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