

Prehistoric Past Revealed: The Four Billion Year History of Life on Earth, 2003, 176 pages, Douglas Palmer, 0520241053, 9780520241053, University of California Press, 2003

Life on earth is now known to be an astonishing four billion years old. Yet as recently as two hundred years or so ago, much of world believed that all life was created in just six days. Over the past two centuries, the testimony of rocks has slowly revealed the Earth's deep prehistory and now scarcely a week passes without an important new discovery adding to our understanding of life's beginning and evolution. Written for a very wide audience, with an approachable text and many photographs and illustrations, Prehistoric Past Revealed tells the story of these discoveries. The book gives an overview history of life on Earth, including the most up-to-date research and discoveries from around the world, as it covers a wide range of fascinating topics--the fossil record, dinosaurs, extinction events, our earliest human ancestors, global environments, climate change--in a highly accessible format. Using timelines, diagrams, sidebar discussions, and breaking down complex ideas into digestible topics, Palmer shows how it has been possible to recover the story of life from the petrified remains of shells and bones scattered through rock strata. He takes us from the present day gradually back into the "terra incognita" of the deep past with its extinct life forms, tracing human ancestry back by centering his discussion around internationally famous fossil sites. Each site reveals another episode in the history of life, as Palmer tells how the environment and life of the time have been reconstructed from its rocks and fossil remains. As it reveals the inner secrets of the Earth, Prehistoric Past Revealed also shows how these discoveries have irrevocably changed our worldview. Life on earth is now known to be an astonishing four billion years old. Yet as recently as two hundred years or so ago, much of world believed that all life was created in just six days. Over the past two centuries, the testimony of rocks has slowly revealed the Earth's deep prehistory and now scarcely a week passes without an important new discovery adding to our understanding of life's beginning and evolution. Written for a very wide audience, with an approachable text and many photographs and illustrations, Prehistoric Past Revealed tells the story of these discoveries. The book gives an overview history of life on Earth, including the most up-to-date research and discoveries from around the world, as it covers a wide range of fascinating topics--the fossil record, dinosaurs, extinction events, our earliest human ancestors, global environments, climate change--in a highly accessible format. Using timelines, diagrams, sidebar discussions, and breaking down complex ideas into digestible topics, Palmer shows how it has been possible to recover the story of life from the petrified remains of shells and bones scattered through rock strata. He takes us from the present day gradually back into the "terra incognita" of the deep past with its extinct life forms, tracing human ancestry back by centering his discussion around internationally famous fossil sites. Each site reveals another episode in the history of life, as Palmer tells how the environment and life of the time have been reconstructed from its rocks and fossil remains. As it reveals the inner secrets of the Earth, Prehistoric Past Revealed also shows how these discoveries have irrevocably changed our worldview.

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