

Wes Wehr dedication¹

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Abstract: We dedicate this issue to the memory of Wesley C. Wehr, former Affiliate Curator of Paleobotany, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle, Washington. Wes' contributions to paleontology, particularly in the Okanagan Highlands of Washington State and British Columbia; his influence on a generation of paleontologists (particularly paleobotanists) working in and coming from this region; and his warm friendship that brought together members of the scientific and arts communities were deeply influential, and will be fondly remembered.

Résumé : Nous dédions ce numéro à la mémoire de Wesley C. Wehr, ancien conservateur affilié de paléobotanique au Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, à Seattle, Washington. La contribution de M. Wehr à la paléontologie, surtout des terres hautes de l'Okanagan en Colombie-Britannique et dans l'état de Washington, son influence sur une génération de paléontologues (surtout des paléobotanistes) provenant de ou travaillant dans cette région ainsi que son amitié chaleureuse qui rassemblait les membres des communautés scientifiques et artistiques ont eu une profonde influence et nous nous en souviendrons avec affection.

We dedicate this special issue on the Eocene Okanagan Highlands to the memory of Wesley C. Wehr, former Affiliate Curator of Paleobotany, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle, Washington, paleobotanist, artist, writer, and extraordinary friend. Although many of us knew Wes through his long history of contributions to paleontology — particularly of the Okanagan Highlands — his early training was in music. He studied music composition at the University of Washington, graduating with his BA in 1952 and MA in 1954. He began painting in 1960 and a career as an artist followed; his paintings and drawings continue to be featured in galleries and included in recent books on Northwest Art (e.g., Harmon and Raban 2001). Wes's life in the worlds of

science and art are chronicled in his memoirs (Wehr 2000, 2004).

His love of the natural world became focused on paleobotany in the 1970s through his correspondence with prominent paleobotanists, including Chester Arnold and Charles Miller, Jr., to whom he sent numerous specimens, and through his friendship with George Beck of Central Washington University in Ellensburg, with whom he shared an interest in the petrified woods of Ginkgo Petrified Forest near Vantage, Washington. In 1977, he visited the plant fossil site at Republic, Washington with a young fossil hunting friend Kirk Johnson (now Chief Curator, Denver Museum of Nature and Science). In a trench across the street from the city hall, they together discovered

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the unrecognized richness of what had been thought to be a minor flora. Wes was the scientific inspiration, and co-founder with City Councilman Bert Chadwick, of Stonerose Interpretive Center in Republic. Stonerose to this day is a model of fossil locality management for the benefit of paleontology, public education, and community enrichment.

In 1976, Wes became Affiliate Curator of Paleobotany at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, a post he maintained for the rest of his life. He authored or coauthored a series of papers on the fossil plants and insects of the Okanagan Highlands, beginning with a United States Geological Survey monograph on the Republic flora with paleobotanist Jack Wolfe in 1987 (Wolfe and Wehr 1987). Among his formal taxonomic papers were contributions on the diversification of several important temperate families, including the conifers (Schorn and Wehr 1986), Rosaceae (Wolfe and Wehr 1988; DeVore et al. 2004), Trochodendraceae (Pigg et al. 2001), Betulaceae (Pigg et al. 2003), and Hamamelidaceae (Radtke et al. in press), as well as overviews of the Okanagan floras (Wehr 1998; Stockey and Wehr 1996). Ten papers written for a general audience of fossil lovers were published in Washington Geology (see Bibliography). He is a coauthor, along with Melanie DeVore and Kathleen Pigg, of a contribution to this symposium (DeVore et al. 2005).

Wes had a particular talent for inspiring interested adults and children alike, who would crowd around him at a shale exposure, enthralled by his ability to communicate his excitement for the Eocene world, urging that they, too, might make a contribution to paleontology. In the evenings during fieldwork, he sat in cafe booths writing stacks of postcards to his large circle of friends, old and new. Wes took great pleasure in introducing, or arranging meetings between, people that he felt would benefit from knowing each other, initiating friendships among a wide array of artists, scientists, and avocational paleontologists.

Colleagues acknowledged Wes by naming a variety of fossil taxa for him: These include the ferns *Osmunda wehrii* (Miller 1982) and *Wessiea yakimaensis* (Pigg and Rothwell 2001); the maple samara *Acer wehri* (Wolfe and Tanai 1987); a winged seed of unknown affinities (the “winged stranger”) *Pteronepelys wehrii* (Manchester 1994) and, among insects, the brown lacewing *Cretomerobius wehri* (Makarkin et al. 2003). Perhaps most whimsical is the sapindaceous flower named for Wes and his paleobotanical colleague Jack Wolfe, *Wehrwolfea striata* (Erwin and Stockey 1990).

In November 2003, Wes was presented the Paleontological Society’s Harrell L. Strimple Award, recognizing his decades of service to paleontology. Two hundred or so of his closest friends enjoyed a reception in his honour at the Burke Museum.

Wes Wehr passed away suddenly on Monday, April, 12, 2004, five days before his 75th birthday. The party that he had arranged became a memorial, attended by over 200 people. He is warmly remembered by all of us.

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