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Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

First the housekeeping, then the fun stuff. The nominating committee is considering nominees for the four offices on the Executive Board and for several positions on the Board. This is serious work, as you all know, because the Executive Board does most of the work for our organization. Now is the time for people interested in the Friends' work to volunteer to run for any of these posts. The basic requirements are interest in Loren Eiseley's work, the ability to attend monthly Board meetings, and a willingness to perform a variety of tasks from folding and addressing newsletters to creating and organizing programs. Please let us know if you would like to serve. If you have a Friend you feel would do a good job but who is too shy or modest to volunteer, send us the name and we will ask. We're not shy.

We are planning the Spring Fling. Traditionally this is a potluck picnic in the home and extensive backyard of Marian and Bertrand Schultz, and we are invited back this year. The date is Saturday, April 30, beginning at noon. Friends will provide service, so plan to bring your favorite picnic food and enjoy sampling other Friend's favorites as well. Our program will be short selections from Eiseley's writings chosen, prepared, and read by a panel of Friends. Friends attending the picnic are encouraged to bring their own selections, under three minutes in reading time, to share. The purpose of our organization is to encourage the reading and enjoyment of Eiseley's work, yet rarely do we as a group have the opportunity to share what we enjoy. We expect this program to provide such an opportunity.

Another really nice chance to expose a new audience to Eiseley and his work has come our way. Jim Gulick of the Lincoln City Libraries asked for a program from us on that very topic for the Nebraska writers series given monthly at the Bennett Martin Public Library. On Feb. 25th, Naomi Brill and John Janovy gave a joint program. Naomi provided a brief biography of Eiseley, and John, as a scientist who writes about science for a general audience, explained how and why Eiseley's writings are important. It was an excellent educational experience for those who attended.

In closing let me encourage you again to volunteer for the Executive Board. What better way is there to put to work your interest in Loren Eiseley?

Sincerely,

Sherrill Daniels

TWO VOICES FROM THE PRAIRIE SCHOONER: INSIDE!

"Lowry Wimberly, founder and editor of the Prairie Schooner, first met Loren Eiseley, a University of Nebraska undergraduate, in 1927 when he published the young poet in the third issue of the Schooner. Fascinated by "Doc's" distrust of the twentieth century, Loren became a fixture in Wimberly's Andrews Hall office, where they took turns haranguing one another on the foul state of the human condition."

At the same time, Mabel Langdon, who became Loren's wife in 1928, was working as Curator of American Art Collections at the University of Nebraska that were housed in Morrill Hall, the State Museum out of which Eiseley's field expeditions originated. She also was a poet, and her poems appeared in those early issues of the Schooner as well.

The following poems by Loren Eiseley and Mabel Langdon were first published in the 1928 issues of the Prairie Schooner.

* (Quotation is from "Loren Eiseley and Lowry Wimberly: Companions in Alienation," by Gale Christianson. XX Heritage of the Great Plains (Summer 1987):21-27.)

"We have joined the caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."

TWILIGHT MUSING

MABEL LANGDON

When I am old, I'll sit within my room,
Stately, dressed in a gown of softest rose,
My white hair waved, low-knotted at my neck,
My hands kept soft and lovely through the years.
Wax tapers in their silver candlesticks
Will send faint shadows dancing on the walls
And I shall think, without regret, of youth,
And smile at youth's strange fancies. I shall know
That I am lovely — that have kept myself
Beautiful (Oh, I'll still be vain, I know)
And muse, with pitying thought, of other women
Less wise than I . . . who lived . . . and woke to know
Some blackened morning that their charm was spent.

Then I shall softly blow my candles out
And quickly go to bed and wrap myself
In covers of soft silk — and I shall lie
So deep in sleep that I shall never know —
Girl with brown hair and youth so dear to her —
If you stand quietly without my door
And whisper of your love — and pity me.

THE CATHEDRAL

MABEL LANGDON

Candles
Glow and flicker . . .
A small breeze stirs the dead
Air heavy with incense . . . Nothing
Stirs me.

Promise
Of rest and peace
Steals from the organ . . . Oh —
I have heard promises as sweet
Before.

In black
She comes to kneel
With eyes tear-misted still . . .
In anguish, thanking God for his
Great blessings.

The priest
In sumptuous robes
Extols the blessings of
Poverty. Tired faces lift to
Listen.

Service
Ends. The poor rise
To leave the cathedral
And seek their hovels — the blessings of
The poor.

SPIDERS

LOREN C. EISELEY

Spiders
Are poisonous, hairy, secretive.
Spiders are old —
They watch from dark corners while wills are made.
They weave grey webs for flies, and wait . . .
Tiles drop from the roof —
Leaves turn mouldy under the black, slanting rain —
People die . . .
And the spiders inherit everything.

Spiders are antiquarians —
Fond of living among ghosts and haunted ruins.
The black jade pillars totter in the halls of Marduk;
Stones fall from the archways,
At night grey sand
Whines by the lampless windows.
The god lies shattered,
His green-jewelled eyes are gone;
The sockets are hacked and empty as a skull.
Upon his face a squat tarantula is creeping . . .
A bland yellow noon
Smiles at a black tarantula
Creeping on the skull of a god!

Spiders are ghouls —
They live secret lives in graveyards.
A red spear of light
Pierces the stained vault-window
And makes a warm pool on a black coffin in a niche.
A lean spider droops on a thread from above,
Falls into the light and changes color . . .
A crimson spider
Sprawling on an ebony coffin
Mumbles a fly in his toothless mouth.

Spiders . . .
Time is a spider
The world is a fly
Caught in the invisible, stranded web of space.
It sways and turns aimlessly
In the winds blowing up from the void.
Slowly it desiccates . . . crumbles . . .
The stars weave over it.
It hangs . . .
Forgotten.

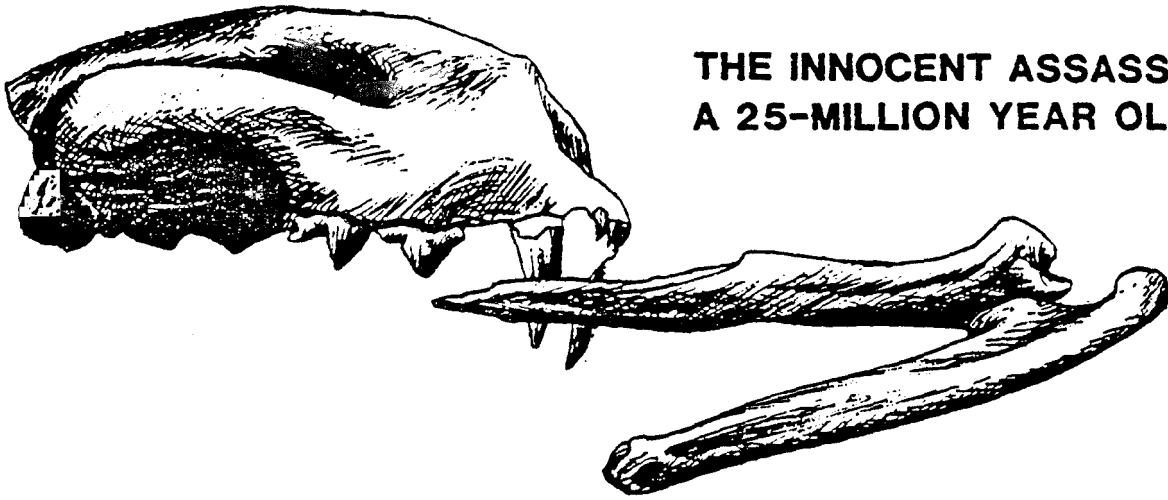
THE LAST GOLD PENNY

LOREN C. EISELEY

I shall be treasure to the ancient earth
The secret worm, the slow blind roots acrawl
When I come homing to my place of birth —
The dust that waits beyond the heart's last wall.
Within the muted dark the crumbling brain
Shall strew in riot all my hoarded gold —
Neither loved faces nor the wan night rain
Nor bells in twilight, shall escape the mold.

Death drives hard bargains for one dusty bed —
Narrow, not over-soft. In vain I kneeled
And paid rich coin to rest my tired head —
He asks the last gold penny! Must I yield
Your voice, your memory for the earth to keep?
That is a high price for this bed of sleep!

THE CARAVAN



THE INNOCENT ASSASSINS: A 25-MILLION YEAR OLD CATFIGHT

A UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA STATE MUSEUM FEATURED EXHIBIT

This remarkable specimen consisting of the skull of an extinct cat-like animal with its elongate canine tooth piercing a leg bone of another cat, inspired Nebraska-born poet and scientist Loren Eiseley to compose a poem, "The Innocent Assassins," which begins:

*Once in the sun-fierce badlands of the west
in that strange country of volcanic ash and cones,
runneled by rains, cut into purgatorial shapes,
where nothing grows, no seeds spring, no beast moves,
we found a sabertooth, most ancient cat,
far down in all those cellars of dead time.
..... we dug
until the full length of the striking saber showed
beautiful as Toledo steel, and fine serrations still
present along the blade, a masterpiece of murderous art
..... This was no ordinary death . . . two beasts
had died in mortal combat, for the bone
had never been released; there was no chance
this cat had ever used its fangs again. . . .*

from **THE INNOCENT ASSASSINS**
by Loren Eiseley (Scribners, 1973)

AND, IN THE WORDS OF LOREN EISELEY, A BONE-DIGGERS APOLOGIA

References to his work as a fossil hunter for the University of Nebraska State Museum are scattered through the writings of Loren C. Eiseley (1907-1977). Eiseley was a member of the Morrill Paleontological Expedition (South Party) of 1932 which discovered the unique fossils on display in Morrill Hall. In the first chapter of his first book, The Immense Journey (Random House, 1957) he recollects finding a fossil skull in the depths of a slit-like ravine in the badlands of western Nebraska. In his rich prose, reminiscent of the best nature writing of Thoreau and Hudson, Eiseley vividly evokes for the reader a sense of vast stretches of evolutionary time, a dimension denied to us except by our descending into the rocks. In a later chapter of the same book (pp. 171-172) he describes an experience probably shared by most paleontologists at one time or another but which few scientists have the literary skill to convey: standing on a badlands hill "spined like a dinosaur's back" at sunset, his knapsack "heavy with the petrified bones of long-vanished

creatures," Eiseley witnessed a common enough phenomenon--a flight of birds headed south "with the undeviating relentlessness of a compass needle." The contrast between the intense activity of these "tiny living bullets" and the inert, moon-like stillness of the badlands landscape brought to his mind the paradox of the permanence of the chemical building blocks of life and the fleeting nature of individual creatures. "Fifty million years lay under my feet, fifty million years of bellowing monsters moving in a green world now gone so utterly that its very light was travelling on the farther edge of space. The chemicals of all that vanished age lay about me in the ground. Around me still lay the shearing molars of dead titanotheres, the delicate sabers of soft-stepping cats, the hollow sockets that had held the eyes of many a strange, outmoded beast." But, in a sense ". . . they were still here, or . . . the chemicals that made them were here about me in the ground. The carbon that had driven them ran blackly in the eroding stone. The stain of iron was in the clays. . . I . . . lifted up a fistfull of that ground . . . while that wild flight of southbound warblers hurtled over me into the oncoming dark. There went phosphorus, there went iron, there went carbon, there beat the calcium in those hurrying wings. Alone on a dead planet I watched that incredible miracle speeding past."

During his three summers as a collector for the Museum, Loren Eiseley participated in many important discoveries. On page 122 of The Night Country: Reflections of a Bone-Hunting Man (Scribners, 1971) he describes his emotions upon seeing a major new deposit of fossil mammal bones in Banner County, Nebraska:

"Maybe this won't mean anything to you. Maybe you don't understand this game, or why men follow it. But I saw it. I tell you I saw five million years of the planet's history lying there on that hillside with the yucca growing over it and the roots working through it. . . I saw the ivory from the tusks of elephants scattered like broken china that the rain has washed. I saw the splintered, mineralized enamel of huge unknown teeth. I paused over the bones of ferocious bear-dog carnivores. I saw protruding from an eroding gully, the jaw of a shovel-tusked amebelodont that has been gone twice a million years into the night of geologic time. I tell you I saw it with my own eyes and I knew, even as I looked at it, that I would never see anything like it again."

Such moments are rare, however. As Eiseley puts it, "Bone hunting is not really a very romantic occupation. One walks day after day along miles of frequently unrewarding outcrop. One grows browner, leaner, and tougher, it is true, but one is far from the bright lights. . ." and the sheer boredom sometimes involved in collecting the raw data of paleontology is evoked in Eiseley's reminiscences of two months he spent in 1933 digging Miocene rhinoceros bones near Bridgeport in Morrill County, Nebraska.

"There was an eroding hill in the vicinity, and on top of that hill, just below the sod cover, were the foot bones, hundreds of them, of some lost Tertiary species of American rhinoceros. It is useless to ask why we found only foot bones or why we gathered the mineralized things in such fantastic quantities. . . But there were the foot bones, and the orders had come down, so we dug carpals and metacarpals till we cursed like an army platoon that headquarters has forgotten." (The Unexpected Universe, Harcourt Brace and World, p. 220-221)

Neither Loren Eiseley nor the fossils he collected half a century ago during the Dust Bowl years are forgotten today. It seems likely that Eiseley's meditative essays on time, man and nature will be read by many generations to come and that the Museum's treasure-trove of fossils will continue to instruct, amaze, and delight inquiring minds of all ages.



Michael R. Voorhies
Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology

THE LARGE-HORNED BISON HUNTED BY PALEO-INDIANS

A UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA STATE MUSEUM FEATURED EXHIBIT

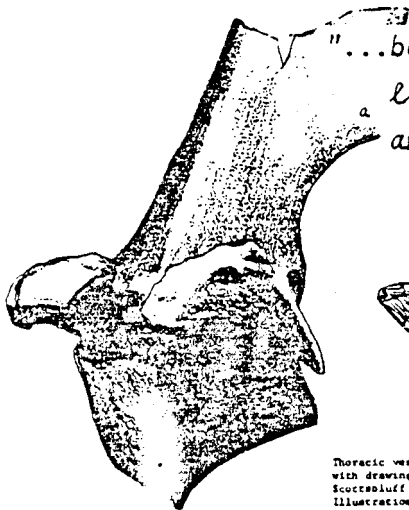
Michael R. Voorhies
Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology

THE LARGE-HORNED BISON IS ONE OF THE "HEAVY HEADED BEASTS OF THE GONE TIME" celebrated in the writings of Lincoln-born author LOREN EISELEY who participated in the excavation and interpretation of the Scottsbluff Bison Quarry. In 1932 this site yielded one of the earliest documented associations of man-made stone tools with skeletons of big-horned bison in Nebraska.

A TRIBUTE TO LOREN C. EISELEY

We are highlighting the exhibit of the Large-Horned Bison as a tribute to Loren C. Eiseley (1907-1977) in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of his birth. In addition to being a distinguished anthropologist, Eiseley was well known as a naturalist, essayist, and poet who explored, in his many widely-read books, the relationship of mankind to the natural world. The emotional and intellectual impact of evolutionary ideas on modern man is a dominant thread in his writings.

As a University of Nebraska student during the early years of the Great Depression, Loren Eiseley worked for three summers as a fossil collector for the Museum. In May, 1932, a bone bed located by Mr. Ray Swanson of Scottsbluff was reported to the Museum's South Party, Morrill Paleontological Expeditions, which was then working in western Nebraska. Eiseley, along with Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Schultz, investigated the deeply buried site, located on a creekbank near the base of Signal Butte southwest of Scottsbluff. Realizing the potential importance of the discovery, the field party excavated the bonebed (described as "a solid mass of skulls, jaws, and bones" 2-4 feet thick extending some 30 feet along the creekbank). Eight stone artifacts were found along with the bones of several dozen bison, some of which



Thoracic vertebra of large-horned bison with drawing of a Scottsbluff projectile point. Illustration by Mark E. Marcumson.

*"...beyond the low clouds and the snowfields,
lie the marks of the trenches where forty years ago we dug
and we found them, found
the Ice Age long-haired bison,
the deadly point buried still
in the massive vertebra."*

from "Flight 857" in
NOTES OF AN ALCHEMIST
by Loren Eiseley (Scribners, 1972)

were larger than modern bison, especially in horn size. Schultz and Eiseley published research papers on the Scottsbluff site in 1935 and 1936, emphasizing the significance of finding dart points and other tools along with the remains of very large bison.

THE SKELETON

The skeleton exhibited in Morrill Hall, assembled from among the many thousands of individual bones collected at the Scottsbluff Quarry, stands in mute testimony to the hunting skills of the early Americans. These people, usually called "Paleo-Indians," lacked bows and arrows but produced beautifully-flaked stone points and blades which must have been lethal in close-quarters hunting of large and dangerous prey.

THE DATING OF *Homo sapiens* IN THE NEW WORLD

Eiseley was an active combatant in the debates concerning the dating of *Homo sapiens*' arrival in the New World. Conservative archaeologists in the 1930's were convinced that humans arrived in North America at a very late date, probably too late to have seen any of the extinct Ice Age animals--mammoths, mastodons, camels, etc.--which are so common in the American fossil record of the late Ice Age. Eiseley, along with other young 'mavericks' were impressed by gradually-accumulating scraps of evidence that man had arrived earlier than the skeptics claimed. Eiseley wrote many papers during the 1930's and 40's supporting the emerging picture that early hunters had, indeed, penetrated into the High Plains early enough to hunt mammoths, sloths and big-horned bison.

Even though he was not a paleontologist, Eiseley was impressed by the importance of evidence provided by fossils in the debates over the chronology of early man. The fossil history of the bison especially intrigued him and he wrote numerous articles posing cogent questions which are still being researched and argued by paleontologists and anthropologists: How and when did the transition from earlier, larger bison to the smaller bison familiar today occur? How much individual and geographic variation occurs in fossil and modern bison populations? What effect did human hunting pressure have on bison size and shape? What was the role of man in the extinction of the large bison and other "big game" animals? Despite the passage of forty years since Loren Eiseley posed the questions, and the advent of ever more refined methods of dating, definitive answers still elude us.



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"THE BACK PAGE"

QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER

" One exists in a universe convincingly real, where the lines are sharply drawn in black and white. It is only later, if at all, that one realizes that the lines were never there in the first place. But they are necessary in every human culture, like a drill sergeant's commands, something not to be questioned."--pp 105 All the Strange Hours

"I have never been sure what nature is about. Sometimes I see it peering at me from the pigment spots on a snail's horns, or, many years later. I once heard it in the shape of a cat, address me upon ethics." p 82, All the Strange Hours

Eloise Dickerson Herrick of Lincoln who initiated our " Quotations to Remember " is a Charter Member of the Friends of Loren Eiseley, has served as Treasurer and is currently a Board Member, ready and willing to take on any and all tasks. If you would like to share your favorites with others, send them to us, and include something about yourself and Eiseley.

Comments and contributions
are welcome (250-500 words or less).
Send to:
Friends of Loren Eiseley
P.O. Box 80934
Lincoln, NE 68501-0934

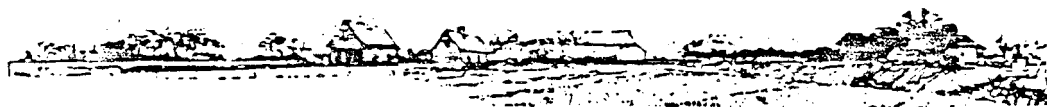
WELCOME TO THE FRIENDS
OF LOREN EISELEY!

A hearty welcome to all of
those who have recently
joined the Friends!

We know there is deep and sustained interest in Dr. Eiseley and his work. So please send your check to help us keep in touch with all Eiseley fans and increase awareness of his writings. Just \$5 keeps you on the mailing list for a year and includes a subscription to the new quarterly newsletter, The Caravan.

You can be a contributing member for \$25, a supporting member for \$50, and patron for \$100.

Dues were payable at the first of the year, so let us hear from you this summer, please!
We need your support.



THE CARAVAN