

# THE VANISHING GIANT



■ **Carl Wieland**

**S**OME POPULAR BELIEFS are so strongly, if subconsciously, held that they need to be refuted over and over. One is the notion that fossils form when a creature is slowly buried by the 'sands of time'. Somehow, most people see fossilization as the longterm result of an average death.

This is why, for instance, people often assume that if there were kangaroos in the Middle East (we know from the history in the Bible that there were, even if only for a short time), then we should find their fossils there. Or at least in places between Mt Ararat and their current Australian home.

The answer is that fossilization is a rare, special event in today's world. In the normal course of events, animals that die



do *not* form fossils. Millions of kangaroos are killed on Australia's roads each year, but they are decidedly *not* in the first stages of fossil formation. They decompose.

This elephant carcass provides a dramatic illustration. The inset above shows it one day after death, the inset photo above

right was taken 7–8 days later.<sup>1</sup> Biological processes (mostly insect activity) have so ravaged its structure that it is clear that, shortly, all that will be left will be a few scattered bones.

These will also most likely succumb to the forces of erosion and destruction, unless they are buried by a local flood in sediment which then soon hardens to prevent further decay through oxygen and bacterial action.

Of course, not all decomposition is as spectacularly rapid as this example. But even allowing several more months for the process, the point is that under normal conditions today, virtually any specimen will decompose rather than fossilize.

So, when someone finds a relatively intact dinosaur skeleton, for instance, consider that it had to be buried quickly to form in the first place. Consider also that most such fossils are found in huge graveyards, often within layers of rock (such as the Dakota Sandstone in the USA) that cover hundreds of thousands of square km. Then ask yourself whether we see things like that happening on the Earth today.

The Bible's account of a massive global hydraulic cataclysm is a much more logical explanation for the existence of 'billions of dead things, laid down by water, all over the Earth'. ■

## Reference

1. *NERC News*, Natural Environment Research Council, p. 4, Spring 2002.