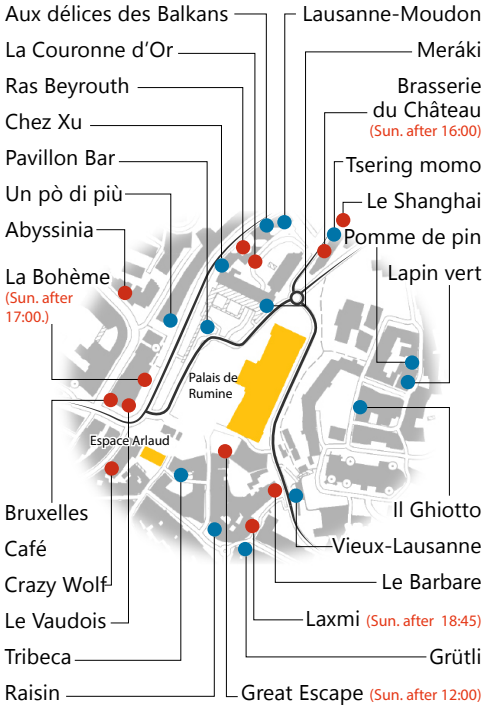
HALL PH. DE LA HARPE

1830-1882

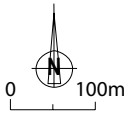
Philippe de la Harpe was a surgeon and a great palaeontologist. He was Director of the Museum from 1858 until 1864. He assembled a world renowned collection of nummulites (unicellular organisms with a shell), totaling more than 13,000 specimens when he died in 1882.

PUBS, COFFEE SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS IN THE VICINITY



- Open on Sundays

Inside the Rumine Palace :
Tables, drinks & coffe machine



Opening hours :
Tue-Sun 10.00 – 17.00
Monday Closed

canton de vaud

MUSEE CANTONAL DE GEOLOGIE

Lausanne - Palais de Rumine - Place de la Riponne
Téléphone 021 692 44 70 - www.unil.ch/mcg

04-2022

MUSEUM OF GEOLOGY

Since 1818

Hall of Palaeontology

English

MUSEE CANTONAL GEOLOGIE

Palais de Rumine Place de la Riponne Lausanne

THE MUSEUM HISTORY

The Musée cantonal de géologie saw the light of day in 1818 consequent to public endowments towards acquiring Henri Struve's mineral collection.

The creation of the museum encouraged other ardent enthusiasts to donate their important collections of fossils, rock and minerals to the Museum, among whom number renowned figures from the canton such as Jean de Charpentier, director of the Bex salt mines and the vaudois patriot Frédéric-César de la Harpe, former private tutor to the Tsar Alexander I, came to donate their impressive collections of minerals to the Museum.

From 1850 onwards, Philippe de la Harpe, Eugène Renevier and, later on Maurice Lugeon began putting together large paleontological collection and, most importantly, the great collection of regional geology. In 1874 the Cantonal Museum was reorganized thematically and the Museum of Geology was set up itself in the castle of the former bishop.

After its construction in 1906, the Rumine Palace housed the Museum and the university laboratories of geology and mineralogy. The synergy thus created by bringing together different academic departments was highly effective and led to considerable growth of the cantonal collections. The Museum became renowned for its teaching and research, thus drawing the greatest scientific minds of the time to Lausanne.

Since then, the Museum continues its tradition of vigorous research development in different fields of Earth sciences.

HALL PH. DE LA HARPE
Palaeontology

THE LE BRASSUS MAMMOTH

The story happened in 1969. One day in a gravel pit near Le Brassus (Jura mountains), a mechanical digger uncovered a strange cylinder which turned out to be a mammoth's tusk ! Three days later, a second tusk was discovered. The Museum of Geology sent a crew to the site. It took three weeks and a team of specialists to fully extricate the treasure. Each of the bone fragments was scraped and cleaned with a brush, covered with synthetic resin, then wrapped in gauze and protected in plaster for its journey to Lausanne.

This is one ot the very few nearly complete mammoth skeletons found in Europe. This is why he served as model to produce several casts for other museums. According to the latest carbon-14 dating methods, he lived 16,300 years ago. But how did he die? A thick layer of gravel that covered the skeleton is interpreted as a moraine landslide that buried him. A few dorsal vertebrae are missing, suggesting that the animal may have been partially eaten by carnivores (foxes or badgers) that dug into the gravel.

THE ONLY COMPLETE DINOSAUR SKELETON IN SWITZERLAND

In 1961, the children of a worker at the Frick quarry (40 km east of Basel) discovered the first bones of a ***Plateosaurus engelhardti.*** Many excavation campaigns took place afterwards, often as a matter of urgency, to prevent the bones from turning into bricks with the rest of the rock exploited for this purpose. In total, hundreds of fossil bones, belonging to about twenty plateosaurs, have been unearthed at Frick, but only two entire skeletons have been excavated to date. In 2006, remains of a ***Coelophysis,*** a small carnivorous dinosaur, were also discovered.

The plateosaur belongs to the Prosauropod group, close to the ancestors of big Sauropods, like the ***Diplodocus*** or the ***Brachiosaurus.*** Plateosaurs lived between -215 and -200 million years ago in central Europe, nowadays in Germany, Switzerland and France.

AS OLD AS ITS TEETH !

Although the mammoth's teeth were replaced six times during its lifetime, only one tooth was visible at a time in each half of its upper or lower jaw. While the first molar, already visible at birth was not bigger than a human one, the last molar was much longer – around 30 cm – and weighed 4 kilograms. By the time this tooth got worn down to the root, the now considerably elderly, venerable mammoth would starve to death. One can therefore determine the age of the mammoth by examining its teeth.

AN OUT DATED DISPLAY CABINET

This early 20th-century display cabinet shows us how museums were more concerned about presenting as many exhibits in as little space as possible.

AMBER

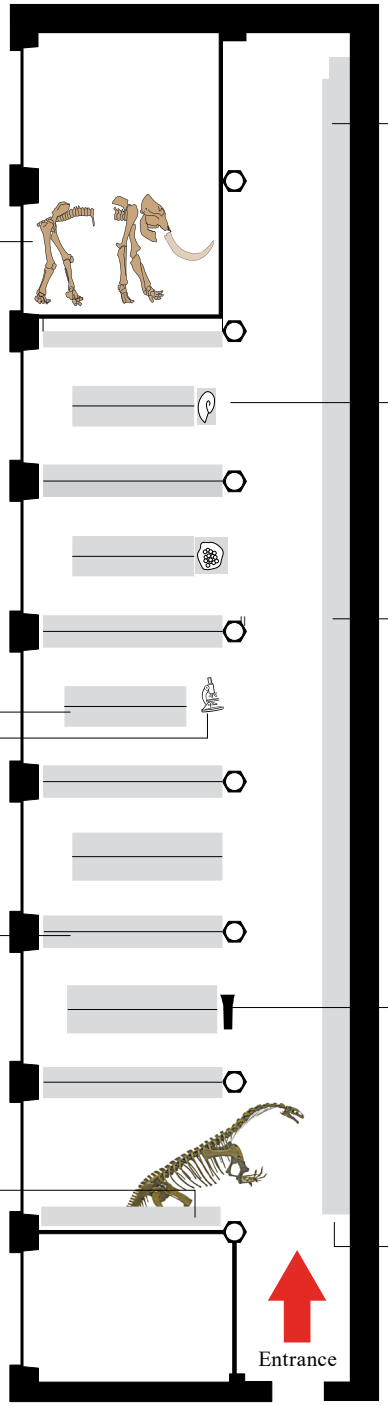
Amber is a mainly coniferous fossil resin. The sticky pitch which runs down the trees is a deadly trap for insects. The exoskeletons have been perfectly preserved, emptied of live tissue except for some dried up remnants. Hair and antennae remain intact. These mummies entombed in amber reveal the very last moments of their lives.

LAUSANNE IN THE TIME OF PALM TREES

23 million years ago, Lausanne appeared tropical, much like the Ganges delta today : wet marsh land and humid heat. In 1854, fossil remains of turtles, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, as well as palm, cinnamon, fig and laurel trees, were uncovered during the excavation of the Tunnel, just 200 m away from the Museum.

THE DINOSAUR OF THE CANTON OF VAUD

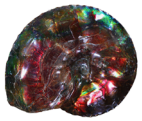
The only dinosaur remains in the Canton to date is a small 200 million years old tooth, which was found beneath the Tour d'Aï mountains. It was wedged between the ribs and vertebrae of a marine reptile reputed to be carnivorous. Had he made the remains of this dinosaur one of his last meals?



FISHES

The Monte Bolca site in the Alpone valley, 50 km from Verona, has been under study since the 16th century and is well known worldwide for its incredibly conserved 50 million year old fossils. Most of them with bones still intact and sometimes even with their internal organs and skin preserved.

100 MILLION YEAR OLD IRIDESCENCE



The radiant glow of mother of pearl found on various mollusc shells is usually destroyed during fossilization. Ammolite found in some ammonites, is a kind of exceptionally well preserved nacre, whose iridescence was even accentuated during the fossilization process. Its very bright colours, associated with aesthetic patterns, led it to be classified as a gemstone.

THE DODO : AN EXCEPTIONALLY RARE BIRD !

A complete dodo skeleton is to be found only in few important, renowned museums around the world. This bird from Mauritius, as fat as a swan, disappeared just a few centuries ago. On display in Lausanne for more than a 100 years, the nearly whole skeleton, recently completed by a few casts, has rejuvenated into a sprightly, strutting bird with an impish sparkle in its eyes.

THE GIANT FROM THE CANTON OF VALAIS

Coal mines were re-exploited during the two world wars to feed the nation's needs. This huge anthracite block from the Valais went on a propaganda tour across the country, in an attempt to reassure the population of its inexaustible ressources. It stopped off at the Comptoir Suisse in Lausanne in 1942 and a part of it is now exhibited in the Museum.

HIS MAJESTY - T. REX

Or rather its legendary skull on display. A ferocious carnivore, capable of swallowing 150 kilos at one go, it lived mainly in North America between - 70 and - 65 million years B.C.