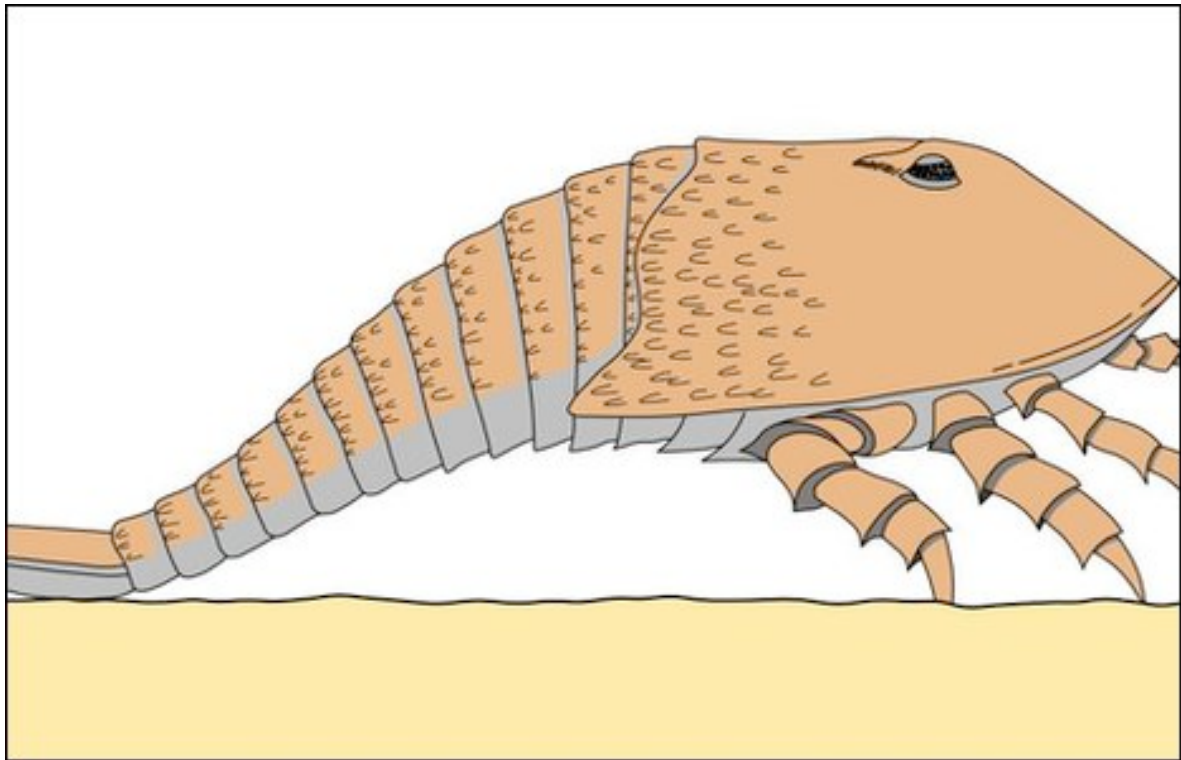


'Gigantic' scorpion fossil found

20 April 2010

A cast is being made of tracks left by a two-metre long ancient animal in north east Fife.



The animal was about two metres long and one metre wide

The tracks were made by a giant six-legged water scorpion called Hibbertopterus as it crawled over damp sand about 330 million years ago.

It is the largest known walking trackway of a eurypterid or any invertebrate animal.

The tracks were discovered by Dr Martin Whyte from the University of Sheffield while he was out walking.

Scottish Natural Heritage, which is funding the project, described the find as unique and internationally important because the creature was gigantic.

It said the fossil would be moulded in silicone so that more people could see and research it.

Richard Batchelor from Geoheritage Fife, said: "The trackway is in a precarious situation, having been exposed for years to weathering.

"The rock in which it occurs is in danger of falling off altogether.

"Removing it and housing it in a museum would be prohibitively costly but moulding it in silicone rubber and making copies for educational and research purposes means that we can still see and research this huge creature's tracks in years to come."

The animal, which is related to modern-day scorpions and horseshoe crabs, was about two metres long and about one metre wide.



The groove was made by the tail of the animal as it dragged over the sand

'Geological treasures'

The trackway, which is preserved in sandstone, consists of three rows of crescent shaped footprints on each side of a central groove.

The groove was made by the tail of the animal as it dragged over the sand.

This contrasts previous fossil evidence which suggested that the creatures lived in the water for most, if not all of the time.

SNH geologist Colin MacFadyen said: "Helping to conserve this important find is vital for our understanding of this period in evolution.

"Such finds as this highlight that all over Scotland there are no doubt other geological treasures awaiting discovery."

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/8632427.stm

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