



Plant Fossils: The History of Land Vegetation (Fossils Illustrated)

Christopher J. Cleal, Barry A. Thomas

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Plants have played a central role in the evolution of life on Earth and the colonisation of land, to the extent that without them we would not exist, yet even to scientists the history of land vegetation and plant fossils is not well-known. This book describes plants' origins and development, illustrated with a unique selection of plant portraits, many of which have never been seen before. The fossil record shows that plants first 'invaded' the land some 400 or more million years ago, as tiny leafless stems which only grew upright for a few centimeters and were restricted to lowlying, waterlogged habitats; from these unpromising beginnings, the whole of Earth's flora has evolved. Each of the major groups of plants is described in general order of appearance in the records, from the first giant clubmosses, horsetails and ferns, which contributed so much to the developing forests, through the seed plants to the angiosperms, the flowering plants, which dominate the landscapes of today. The authors conclude the book with an account of the scientists who have contributed to the development of the story, and hazard some predictions about the directions which future research may take. CHRISTOPHER J. CLEAL is Head of the Vegetational History Section at the National Museum and Gallery of Wales at Cardiff; BARRY A. THOMAS holds a personal chair in the Department of Geography at Lampeter. They have made lifetime studies of ancient flora.

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