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FIELD GUIDE TO FOSSIL COLLECTING AT FOLKESTONE IN KENT

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The earliest rocks at Folkestone date from the Albian stage of the Early Cretaceous epoch, approximately 110 million years ago. These rocks were deposited within a shallow marine environment and due to their sandy composition are named the Lower Greensand, The Lower Greensand is eroded from the fragile cliffs east of Folkestone town, where they form a rocky beach extending around the headland at **Copt Point.**

Overlying the Lower Greensand is the dark-grey coloured Gault Clay and it's from this marine sediment that Folkestone earns its reputation for fossils and forms the focus of this guide. Copt Point and towards East Wear is the ideal location to find these fossils.

The Gault formation is best known for its beautifully preserved molluscs (coiled and uncoiled ammonites), bivalves and gastropods; bony fish remains, shark teeth and vertebrae; crab and lobster carapaces and for its extensive micro-fauna. Other commonly found fossils include belemnite guards, scaphopods (tusk shells), solitary corals, serpulid worms and goose-barnacle valves. Ammonites often have their shell preserved as an iridescent mother-of -pearl, beneath which is a black phosphatised clay internal cast.

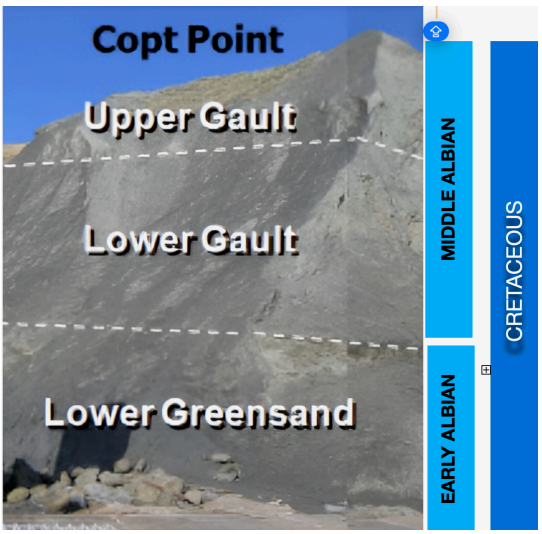
The fossils from Copt Point are often very fragile, so.ensue you bring plenty of kitchen towel or tissue paper and a sensible container to put them in, in order to survive the journey home. This is particularly true of the ammonites. Importantly, use the method described in this pamphlet for the preservation of your finds.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR FOSSILS

Copt Point is a headland mostly composed of large rocks and boulders from the Lower Greensand Formation that are strewn over the entire foreshore. Fossils are either free of matrix or found in nodules get trapped in between =the boulders, having dropped from the layer of Gault Clay from above. This is the best place to begin looking. The rocks are usually covered in sea weed and can be pretty slippery, so take care! The best time of year is undoubtedly after storms or when scouring conditions persist.

GEOLOGY

The rocks at Folkestone are from the Albion stage of the Lower Cretaceous (about 106 million years ago). During this time, southeast England was covered by a large, shallow inland sea, sometimes referred to as the ‘Gault Sea’. The sediments laid down in this sea – the Gault Clay – consists of dark bluish grey to pale grey soft and silty mudstones, which weather to yellow and brown clays (but can be gritty or sandy in other areas). The clays are generally either glauconitic or calcareous and are divided into 13 beds (labelled I to XIII). Phosphatic nodule beds occur at several horizons, notably in the middle of the formation. The Gault contains a rich marine fauna in which molluscs are the most common fossils.



Here are a good representative samples of the fossils that you are most likely to find at Folkestone..

Euhoplites truncatus

Euhoplites truncatus

Anahoplites, planus

Anahoplites davies

Hoplites maritimes

Anahoplites davies var. elegans

Euhoplites opalinus

Hoplites dentatus

Euhoplites proboscideus

Euhoplites trapezoidalis

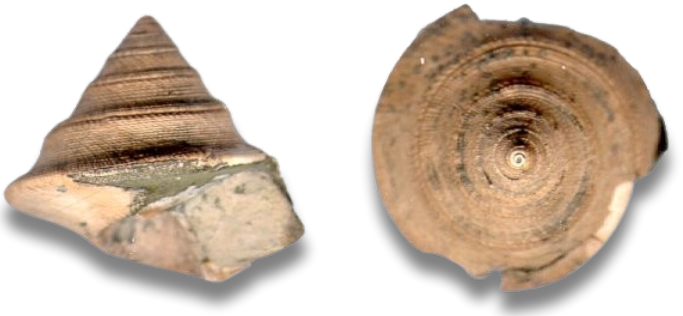
Dimorphoplites parkinsoni

Dipoloceroides spinulosum.

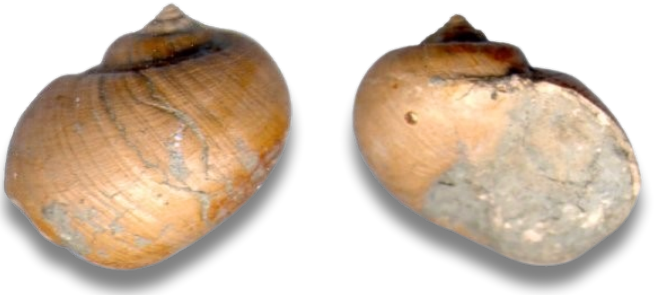
Hamites rotundus

Mortoniceras inflatum

Hamites intermedius



Semisolarium conoideum



Gyrodes gentii

Pseudoclaviscala clementina

Birostrina sulcata

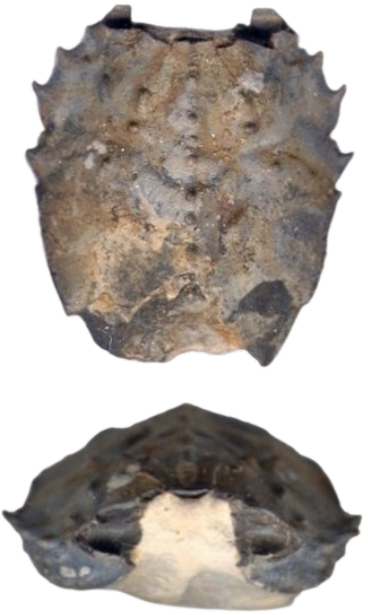
Inoceramus concentricus

Pectinucula pectinata

Lima sp.

Necrocarcinus labeschii

Fossil crabs are regularly found in the Gault Clay and are usually found in phosphatised nodules. Several species of crab are found here.



Notopocorystes stokesii

CLEANING & STORING YOUR FINDS

Cleaning & preservation

To preserve fossils from the Gault Clay, keep them dry in an airtight container, and for the hard fossils consider initially soaking them in water to remove salts and then air drying.

For fragile fossils, including ammonites with aragonite shells, **do not** attempt the conventional technique of desalination (i.e. the removal of sea salt). DO NOT soak in water.
Use a small paintbrush dipped in water to gently clean any remaining clay off of the shell.
Use a substance called Paraloid B-72 dissolved in acetone, which can be purchased ready mixed at Zoic-Palaeotech (https://www.zoicpalaeotech.co.uk/products/paraloid-b-72-20-wt-vol-in-acetone-15ml)
Using the strong solution, maybe 20-30%, allow the Paraloid to penetrate the shell and the clay.

Do not be tempted to use varnish your fossils as this can leave an unsightly surface coating when dry and will not preserve the fossil.

Storage

Storage is a matter of preference and small boxes of card or plastic are probably a good place to start (See https://earthlines.com**).** Most importantly, your specimens need a label. A fossil collection will be worthless if you do not, at least, record where you found the fossil, even if you don't know the fossil names - you can always name them at a later time. A simple label like this example will be useful.

Name: Euhoplites truncatus
Location: Copt Point, Folkestone, Kent
Geology: Gault Clay Formation
Age: Cretaceous, Middle Albian
Date found: January 2025

DISCLAIMER

This downloadable PDF is one of a series of general guides to fossil collecting localities and not an extensive manual for health and safety when visiting such sites.

Furthermore, because potential hazards may change over time, prior to undertaking any fossil collecting activities, you need to make yourself aware of any RISKS, DANGERS, HAZARDS and LEGAL IMPLICATIONS associated with visiting and collecting fossils at any particular site.

UK Fossils, authors or any associated parties cannot be held responsible for your failure to do so, nor any consequences thereof.

Enjoy your fossil collecting safely and responsibly.