

The Cretaceous Moss Valley

About 100 million years ago the earth was in the middle of the Cretaceous period, but it was a very different earth than today. The super land mass had broken up and the continents were more or less the shape they are today. But it was a very different earth. Volcanoes, earthquakes were common place and it was hot and humid. The polar regions did not have ice sheets but were in fact covered by temperate forests and the UK was positively tropical. Much of the UK was in fact beneath the sea and had been for millions of years from which dead sea creatures built up thick deposits of limestone and in shallow areas vast swamps laid down dead and decaying vegetation. So today we have the limestone regions of the peak district and the coal deposits surrounding Sheffield. However, 100 million years ago the land was turbulent and earth quakes uplifted vast regions and at some stage the high ground of what is now Gleadless, Norton and Coal Aston would have emerged from the sea. The hills would have been more rugged with fast following rivers and cascading waterfalls but all would have been quickly covered by lush vegetation



The vegetation would have been tree ferns cycads, primitive pines, mosses, giant horse tails and the first flowering plants. Lilies and

magnolia trees appeared and flourished. It was a tropical climate with high temperatures, heavy rain fall, very humid conditions, great for rapid growth of plants. Could you believe that this was Long Wood.



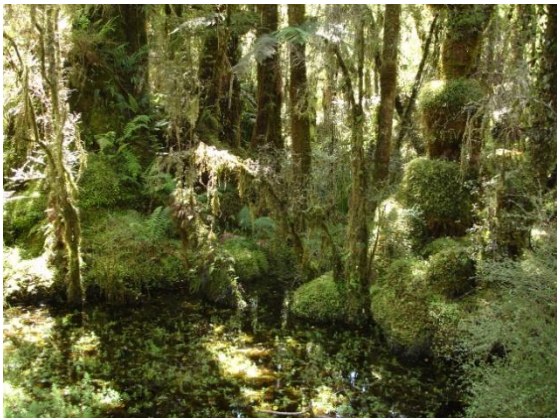
This may have been Newfield Spring Wood.



The fast flowing rivers would have inundated the lower Moss Valley turning it into a vast swamp. Imagine Ford looking like this:



Or Eckington March like this;



This was also the golden age of the dinosaurs albeit the first birds were evolving as were the first very small mammals. Imagine in the upper valley iguanodons crashing through the undergrowth, whilst on Dowey Lumb baby velociraptors frolicked trying in vain to catch a non flying archaeopteryx (feathered dinosaur). On Bridle Stile a Megalosaurus strolls past whilst in the lower valley Hadrosaurus (duck-billed dinosaur) wades in the swamp munching on horse tails and lilies with primitive crocodiles cruising the swamp in search of lunch. Overhead pterodactyls soar in search of carrion. It was obviously a very exciting place but is it all too fanciful?

In June of 2011 in the upper Moss valley I found this fossil.



This may have been a tree fern or perhaps a primitive pine similar to the one below;



So perhaps this picture if the Moss valley 100 million years ago is closer to the truth than it first appears.

Next time you are in the Moss valley keep your eyes open perhaps you may find a dinosaur fossil.

Keith Pascoe

