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that the gypsum itself should have survived. It is so soft and defenceless. The weathered rock crumbles in one's fingers, and the occasional veins of selenite--gypsum that has been dissolved by water and recrystallized--is smooth and clear as glass, yet one's thumbnail will scratch it. So soft, and yet three hundred million years have passed since that gypsum was first formed. It is difficult to picture the Minas area as it was in those days. At one time the shoreline of the Atlantic had been squeezed into long wrinkles, here thrust up as the South Mountain, there thrust down in a great bay that paralleled the sea. Then for fifty million years rain and frost and snow gnawed at the mountain-range and tore it down. The ridge was cut into sharp peaks, and the peaks became rounded hills, and the crumbled rock was washed by the rivers to form great swamps in the shallows of the inland sea. If we could board our time-machine and spend a holiday on that sea, we should notice first the extraordinary bleakness of the skyline where no trees soften the bare outlines of the hills. There is no North Mountain behind us, no red slope of Blomidon, for these are still far in the future. The rivers are nearly dry, for there has been no rain for months. When a thunderstorm comes, the water pours down the bare slopes where only mosses and lichens hold the surface, and the rivers belch out a yellow flood that smothers the corals far out into the shallow sea. The swamps are overflowed, there where Melanson will be, where the flats are dark with forests of *Lepidodendron*, horsetail-trees six inches thick and twenty feet high, and dead logs drift away on the flood and are scattered in a tangle along the muddy shore. Away from the river-mouth the sea is shining blue, for the bottom and even the shores are white with gypsum which bacteria are precipitating from the still water. The sea is not wholly landlocked, since here and there are signs of life, beds of shellfish which stand up like submarine islands, for any of their free-swimming larvae that sink to the bottom elsewhere are smothered in the sludge of gypsum. Ammonites in tightly curled ramshorn shells float at the surface, waving their tentacles, and at our approach sink gently towards the bottom. And occasionally slow fishes slide past, primitive fishes that, dying, leave horny scales in the mud while their soft skeletons dissolve into the sea.... For millions of years that sea remained, while the hills were smoothed away and trees of new type rose to dominance in the swamps and disappeared again. The shell-beds built up towers of limestone, while around them the persistent rain of gypsum, perhaps the yearly thickness of a hair, rose to a thousand feet in depth. The earth stirred after a long sleep, and the gypsum was heaved up from beneath the sea.... Today one may book a passage to the moon, but no one has yet offered us tours of the Carboniferous era when the gypsum was laid down. But there much of it remains, a feature of the Nova Scotian landscape. Around Windsor and Upper Musquodoboit quarries are hacking away the limestone hills which rise abruptly from the soft gypsum. In the limestone you may see the thickly clustered lampshells and occasionally the curl of an ammonite. And at Horton Bluff, where gypsum is replaced by shale, the mud of a forgotten river, the present beach, which is also that of ancient times, is rippled by the wavelets and



cracked by the sun of those days, and is printed at the former high-water mark by the overlapping shells of prehistoric trees. There, too, embedded in hard shale, are the sausage-like bodies of corals smothered by the floods of long ago. This article by John Erskine was first published in Journal of Education (1958) and reprinted by the Nova Scotia Museum in the excellent booklet. In Forest and Field with John Erskine, available from the Nova Scotia Government Bookstore, 1597 Hollis St., Box 637, Halifax, N. S. B3J 2T3. Illustrations are by W. B. Schofield." The photo was taken at The Quarry, St. Ann's, Victoria County, one of the many plaster areas in Cape Breton. ' FEATURING THE WHEN TRAVELLING IN THE SYDNEY AREA, BE SURE TO STAY AT HOME fdINIOUN 539-3700 Theatre Project WANDLYN INN FINE DINING AND WARM HOSPITALITY 100 KING'S ROAD, SYDNEY, NOVA SCOTIA 1-800-561-0000 (902) 539-3700 (48)