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ACADEMY VOLUNTEER WINS NATIONAL PALEONTOLOGY AWARD

PHILADELPHIA — His friends used to think he was eccentric, crawling like Spiderman along a rocky sandstone road cut in north-central Pennsylvania, hauling dental tools and a jack hammer.

Now, says Norman Douglas Rowe of Renovo, "they've gotten over it," and are congratulating him on receiving the 2007 Harrell L. Strimple Award from The Paleontological Society, presented at the Geological Society of America's recent annual meeting in Denver, Colo. The honor is the society's highest award given to a non-professional for his or her contribution to paleontology.

SCI FACT

The Devonian Period, 417-354 million years ago, is called the "Age of Fishes." It is when limbed animals evolved from bony fish, and vascular plants emerged, including the first trees.

Rowe, 60, a Clinton County mechanical engineer and designer, was nominated for the award by The Academy of Natural Sciences' Curator of Vertebrate Zoology Dr. Ted Daeschler. Daeschler, a world-renowned paleontologist, and Rowe have been working together for nearly 15 years to unravel the mysteries of life through (literally) hard evidence they've extracted from a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation road cut called Red Hill, a few miles from Rowe's home.

One day in 1993, Rowe, by then a long-time amateur paleontologist, spotted Daeschler hammering away at the exposed layers of Red Hill's red sandstone in search of prehistoric fossils, and he stopped to chat. "He was a quick study, and before long I had every confidence in Doug working at the site on his own," said Daeschler, recalling early field trips together. "His patience, strength, eye for fossil material of all kinds, and his ability to understand the way the rock will fracture, make him an excellent collector."

Daeschler has been exploring the fascinating road cuts in the middle of Pennsylvania for nearly two decades. His work has revealed a wide range of unexpected fossil riches dating back to the Late Devonian Period, 370 to 365 million years ago, including some ancient fishes with fingerlike structures in the fins, as well as examples of some of the world's earliest limbed vertebrates, called tetrapods.

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Among the fossils Rowe discovered at the Red Hill site are an ancient tetrapod that now bears his name, *Densignathus rowei*; several new species of ancient fishes; rare fossil millipedes and other arthropods; and new species of fossil plants.. He has been acknowledged in more than a dozen scientific papers, and there are more to come based on other fossils he has helped collect. Rowe has been named an honorary research associate of the Academy.

Rowe said he enjoys the physical rigors of paleontological exploration at Red Hill and the chance to work alongside Academy experts and other fascinating people from around the world who are involved in the projects.

"Many road cuts add an element of daring and danger because of the sometimes very steep angle of the rock face," said Rowe. "The challenge has been how to get to the fossil layers, then figure out how to remove the fossils, and finally how to get your treasures and yourself back down to a safer level without damaging the fossils and with not too much damage to oneself. Along with the thrill of discovery and physical fitness, my horizons of time and place have been greatly expanded."

And Rowe's contributions to the Academy have expanded the research program.

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The Academy is located at 1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and weekends until 5 p.m. Admission is $10 for adults, $8 for children ages 3-12, seniors and college students with I.D., and free for children under 3. There is a $2 fee for "Butterflies!"

The Academy of Natural Sciences, the oldest natural science research museum In the Americas, is a world leader in biodiversity and environmental research. The mission of the Academy is the encouragement and cultivation of the sciences.