



Peddling prehistoric poop

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A Doylestown entrepreneur and his daughter are marketing dinosaur dung.

Our story starts with a simple souvenir.

Actually, it started about 66 million years ago, when dinosaurs did their business on the shores of the great lake that covered most of western North America.

Their feces got covered in clay and began to fossilize.

But we're interested in recent history.

Mike McGrail, a Doylestown entrepreneur, went to Saskatchewan earlier this year and wanted to bring back a gift for his 9-year-old daughter. He was in the Regina International Airport waiting for his flight home when he found it: Paleo-poop.

McGrail and his daughter, Morgan, both got excited about the excrement.

And soon Mike McGrail was on the phone with Scott Goddard, president of Regina-based Dinosask Enterprises (or "The Duke of Poop," as his friends call him), negotiating for the rights to sell the stuff in the States.

Now these dinosaur manure entrepreneurs are marketing Paleo-Poop to museums, for sale in their gift shops.

"Some are already selling coprolite," McGrail said, using the scientific term for fossilized feces. "There's already a line out there now. But they're smaller samples. And they're not verified by a professional geologist or paleontologist."

In other words, McGrail is saying, he and Goddard have got the good + er, stuff.

Goddard got into the business of peddling prehistoric poop several years ago, after friends took him to a Canadian excavation site in Assiniboia to look at the solid stool. Assiniboia is near Eastend, where "Scotty" the Tyrannosaurus Rex, was found in 1991; the area is rich with dinosaur fossils and feces.

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Mike McGrail and his 9-year-old daughter, Morgan, of Doylestown are selling Paleo-Poop. Paleo-Poop is just what it sounds like - poop that's more than 65 million years old. It's likely from dinosaurs or other large reptiles. Scott Goddard collects it from a site in Saskatchewan, has it's identity as old poop verified by a geologist, and sells it at little kiosks there. McGrail and his daughter are working with Goddard, trying to sell the Paleo-Poop through museums here in the U.S.07-25-09 Rick Kintzel/Staff Photographer [Buy Intelligence photos](#)

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"I did a little bit of research on it. I always thought there was some marketing value in it," he said. "People's reactions + it's really quite entertaining. Some people won't even go near it."

Goddard asked the Canadian government for permission to collect the coprolites.

"They originally said, 'No, that's a natural artifact. Nobody should be picking that up.' "

But then the Canadian bureaucrats changed their minds, and Goddard worked out a deal with the Royal Saskatchewan Museum.

From April to October, Goddard trolls the hills of Assiniboia with a garden trowel until he comes home with a sack of scat. He gives it all to the museum, which keeps the biggest and best samples for study, and gives him the rest. Goddard has been featured on Canadian television as well as on the Discovery Kids' show "Very Odd Jobs."

How does Goddard know his dinosaur droppings are the real deal?

Geologist and retired college professor Pier Binda has authenticated every sample.

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Binda, who has published several academic papers about coprolites and said he got promoted at the University of Regina because of the "poop papers," said the age of the rock in which the coprolites are found is well established as being slightly more than 66.5 million years.

The coprolites have iron oxides on the outside and the mineral siderite in the center. Binda said scientists who have studied the siderite have determined it's derived from methane.

The coprolites are valuable because they help scientists identify where the dinosaurs lived, Binda said. The biggest and best samples have bone and vegetable fragments that help scientists figure out what the dinosaurs ate and how they ate it.

Binda has not been paid for his work with Goddard, but he said Goddard has promised him a small sum if the business ever takes off.

After Binda authenticated the coprolites, Goddard boxed them up with toilet paper as packaging material and started selling them in kiosks along the Canadian border and in the Regina airport. Goddard declined to say how much he charges for the tough turds, saying that he and McGrail haven't set the American price yet; Canadian news stories have said they're sold for \$15 Canadian.

"Now I'm dealing with Canada customs about how I can get product down there for sale. That's taken a while, too, because they're not used to dealing with this," Goddard said, laughing.

McGrail and his daughter are designing new packaging and a Web site for the American market. McGrail thinks natural history museums will be the best venue for his dino doo-doo.

Coprolite samples were included in an exhibit the Academy of Natural Sciences had in 2007 called The Scoop on Poop.

Jason Poole, the Dinosaur Hall coordinator for the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, said there's a good chance McGrail's product is legitimate if it's coming from Canada. He said the academy occasionally carries products like Paleo-poop.

"We would definitely try to make sure anything we were carrying is what they said it was," Poole said, noting that the gift shop managers have brought things to him and other staff scientists for authentication.

"We really don't support the buying and selling of fossils that are scientifically important. Defining that can be sticky. So we're very careful about what we allow to be sold in the shop."

Mike and Morgan McGrail think that wherever Paleo-poop appears on shelves, it will sell, and kids will be their biggest customers.

"First off, they all love dinosaurs," Mike McGrail said. "This is a piece of history. It's very unusual to have something that's 66 million years old. I don't care whether it's a deposit from an animal or not."

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