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Mistaken Point (Ediacaran, Canada): The World's First Precambrian World Heritage Site

Thomas, Richard¹ and Narbonne, Guy M.²

1. Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve, NL Parks and Natural Areas Division

2. Queens University, Dept Geol Sci & Geol Eng, Kingston, ON, Canada

Mistaken Point is a globally significant Ediacaran fossil site located within Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve on the southeastern tip of the island of Newfoundland in eastern Canada. The soft-bodied creatures lived on the deep-sea floor, and were buried and preserved in exceptional detail by influxes of volcanic ash – each layer of ash creating an “Ediacaran Pompeii”. Mistaken Point fossils range in age from 580 to 560 million years, and constitute an outstanding record of a critical milestone in the history of life on Earth, “when life got big” after almost three billion years of microbe-dominated evolution. Mistaken Point contains the world’s oldest-known examples of large, architecturally complex organisms, including soft-bodied, stem-group animals. Ecologically, Mistaken Point contains the oldest and most diverse examples of Ediacaran deep-sea communities in the world thus preserving rare insights into the ecology of these ancestral animals and the early colonization of the deep-sea floor. Other attributes contributing to the nominated property’s Outstanding Universal Value include the world’s first examples of metazoan locomotion, exceptional potential for radiometric dating of the assemblages, and evidence for the role of ancient oxygen levels in the regional and global appearance of complex multicellular life.

