

# Geology or Archaeology?

## Only time will tell.

Amongst many geologists a lively debate is currently taking place. What will become of the mess with which the human race has scarred the face of the earth once Homo sapiens has become extinct? (Geologists seem almost nonchalantly to assume that mankind, having become too sapiens for his own good, will bring about his own demise and share the fate of the dodo and the dinosaur sooner or later. Sooner, most likely, once crazed dictators and religious fanatics get their hands on nuclear bombs, not to mention President Twitter and his restless fingers.)

Some geologists are suggesting that our empty cities, our silent roads and our industrial ruins will over (presumably) a considerable period of time decline and decay into a new geological layer, for which they have coined a new word, - **Anthropocene**, - the Age of Man. Future visitors to the Earth, whoever they might be and wherever they might come from, will be able to identify that we once inhabited this place from this geological legacy, just as today we can identify the age of the dinosaur from the fossil layer they have bequeathed to us.

Much of the debate at the moment centres on the argument about fixing the time we can say that this Age of Man began, i.e. what era is most likely to show up in the fossil record? Some favour the Classical period 2000 years or so ago; others the Industrial Revolution; even the 1960s has its advocates. Unfortunately there will be no one around to test which theory is eventually right.

And where does the archaeologist stand in this debate? The simple answer is that he inhabits a totally different time world than the geologist. For the trowel expert a couple of thousand years is the canvas on which he explores the past. For the geologist a million years is but the flicker of an eye lid. When our visitors from the planet Zog finally make it across 100 000 light years to land on earth, what they uncover will be archaeology, if they arrive within, say, 3000 years of man's extinction. Most surviving objects will still be "unfossilised" and open to a wide interpretation. We must bear in mind that it has taken the dinosaur some 66 million years to achieve the status of fossil. We shall just have to be patient.