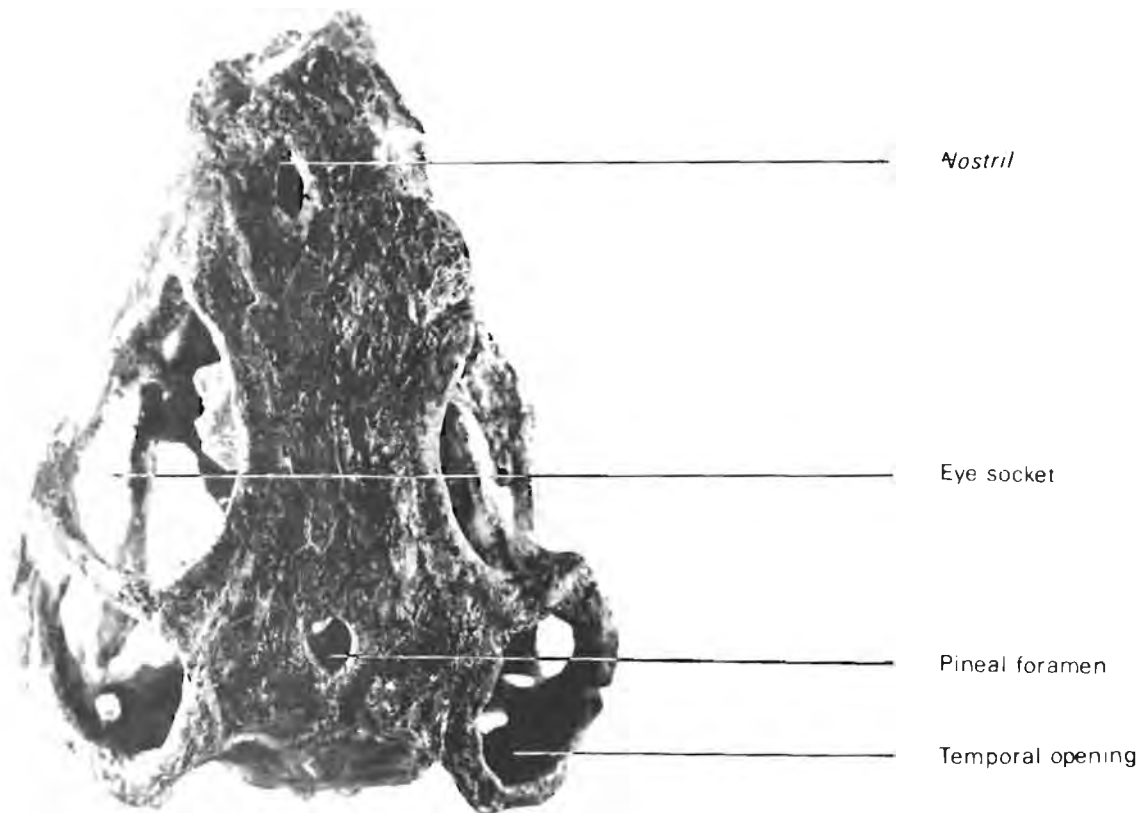


AN EXCITING, OVER 240 MILLION YEAR OLD, FOSSIL DISCOVERY FOR MUSEUM

B.S. Rubidge



Dorsal view of new dromasaur skull.

On the final day of a rather mundane fossil collecting trip undertaken to the Prince Albert district in the Southern Karoo during 1985, Mr. John Nyaphuli, technical assistant at the Palaeontology Department of the National Museum, picked up a small (± 5 cm long) unassuming nodule with a tiny fragment of bone exposed at the one end. Closer on the spot examination with a magnifying glass revealed a small, about 1 mm long, tooth protruding from the exposed fossilized bone. Obviously a skull had been discovered, but on the meagre evidence presented, there was no knowing how much of it was preserved.

Back in the laboratory at Bloemfontein, after four months of painstakingly picking and chipping away at the rock with fine dental tools, a

beautiful, almost perfect skull is beginning to emerge. The obvious question now is, "what was this little animal?".

At this stage this little fossil appears to be dromasaur, an extremely poorly known family of reptiles presumed to be plant-eating and of which only four specimens, representing three different genera, have been reported so far. All of these specimens are preserved as natural moulds in the rock. That is, all the bone had already been weathered out from the rock before the fossil was discovered, and all that remains is an imprint of the bone. With this new discovery, the museum is now fortunate to have the first complete skull of a dromasaur. Not only is it the most complete dromasaur skull known, but it is certainly the oldest yet discovered. 