

# IMPORTANT NEW FOSSILS AT THE MUSEUM

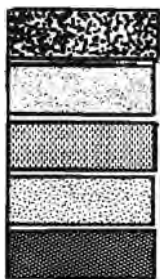
B.S. Rubidge

The rocks of the Karoo are internationally known for the wealth of fossil reptiles which have been found in them. Most of these fossils come from rocks which are geologically known as the Beaufort Group. However, up until recently, no fossil reptiles had ever been found in the older rocks of the underlying Ecca Group. The Palaeontology Department at the National Museum has now embarked on a project to discover and study more of these Ecca fossils and to date at least 35 fossils from the Ecca are housed at the National Museum.

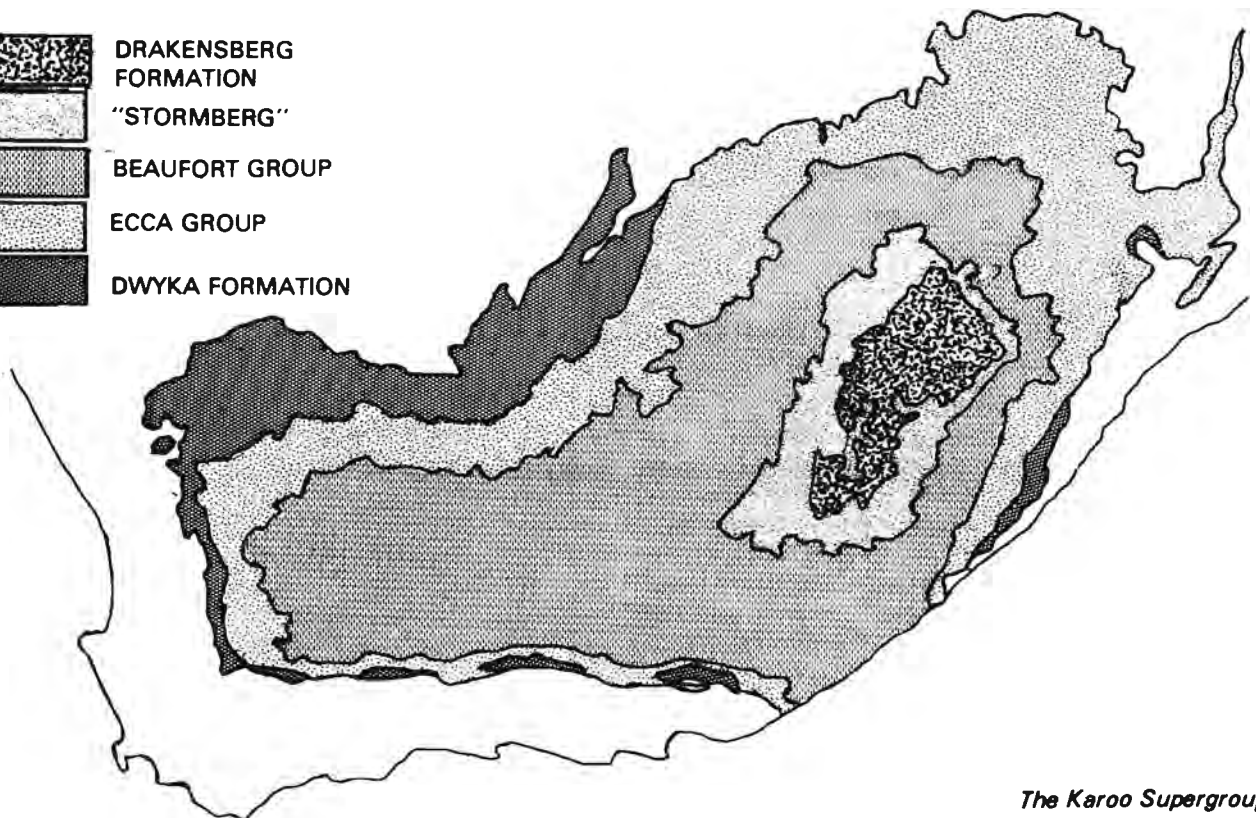
Amongst the most exciting new discoveries are two dinocephalian skulls. These were impressively large and strongly built reptiles which once roamed the Karoo almost 250 million years ago. The head alone of one of these animals is almost a metre in length.



*Dinocephalian skull in early stage of preparation.*



**DRAKENSBERG  
FORMATION**  
"STORMBERG"  
**BEAUFORT GROUP**  
**ECCA GROUP**  
**DWYKA FORMATION**



*The Karoo Supergroup.*



*Technicians carefully chipping away the rock surrounding the skulls.*



*Advanced stage of preparation - One of the dinocephalian skulls showing teeth.*

Dinocephalians are known from rocks of the lower Beaufort Group and because they are relatively scarce, it is a stimulating challenge to a palaeontologist to find a well preserved skull of one of these huge beasts. These two dinocephalians from the Ecca Group are thus finds of extreme importance as they are not only reasonably well preserved, but also the oldest

dinocephalians yet discovered in South Africa. At this stage it is not yet certain if they are the same species as have been found in the Beaufort Group. This will only be clear in about two years when all the rock surrounding the skulls has been chipped away so that these precious extinct monsters can be studied.

