

GLA 81: Evolution Garden, NHM RIGS

Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea TQ 190 792

Ownership: Natural History Museum

The Evolution Garden arguably contains the largest number of different rock types on display in one place in Greater London. It extends the gallery space within the museum to the exterior. The majority of the rocks are placed to follow a Timeline Wall beginning in the Archaen and finishing with the Anthropocene. Pre-Cambrian rocks line the ramp from the tunnel from South Kensington Underground Station in a ravine; thereafter, the Phanerozoic is marked out roughly in scale, with 1 m = 5 million years.

The Timeline continues through the gardens, parallel to Exhibition Road, lined by boulders representing the different geological eras. In all, 26 different rock types have been accumulated, all but two from the UK. The 2 foreigners are both from Iceland: red scoria, marking the end Permian extinction and columnar basalt marking the opening of the Atlantic and the beginning of 'Tropical London'. Not unsurprisingly, UK rocks from the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland and Staffa in Scotland were unavailable.

Other boulders are scattered through the gardens, some with smooth surfaces to provide benches, others just marking the edge of planted areas. Of particular interest is the sarsen stone that has lain, un-noticed behind a railing in the previous east garden. Researches found that it originated from the underlying Kempton Park Gravel and was discovered when the foundations for the adjacent Victoria and Albert Museum were being excavated.

The terrazzo flooring to the walk ways has key events marked along the route of the Timeline and the embedded gravel is appropriate to the time period, as is the gravel that borders the terrazzo.

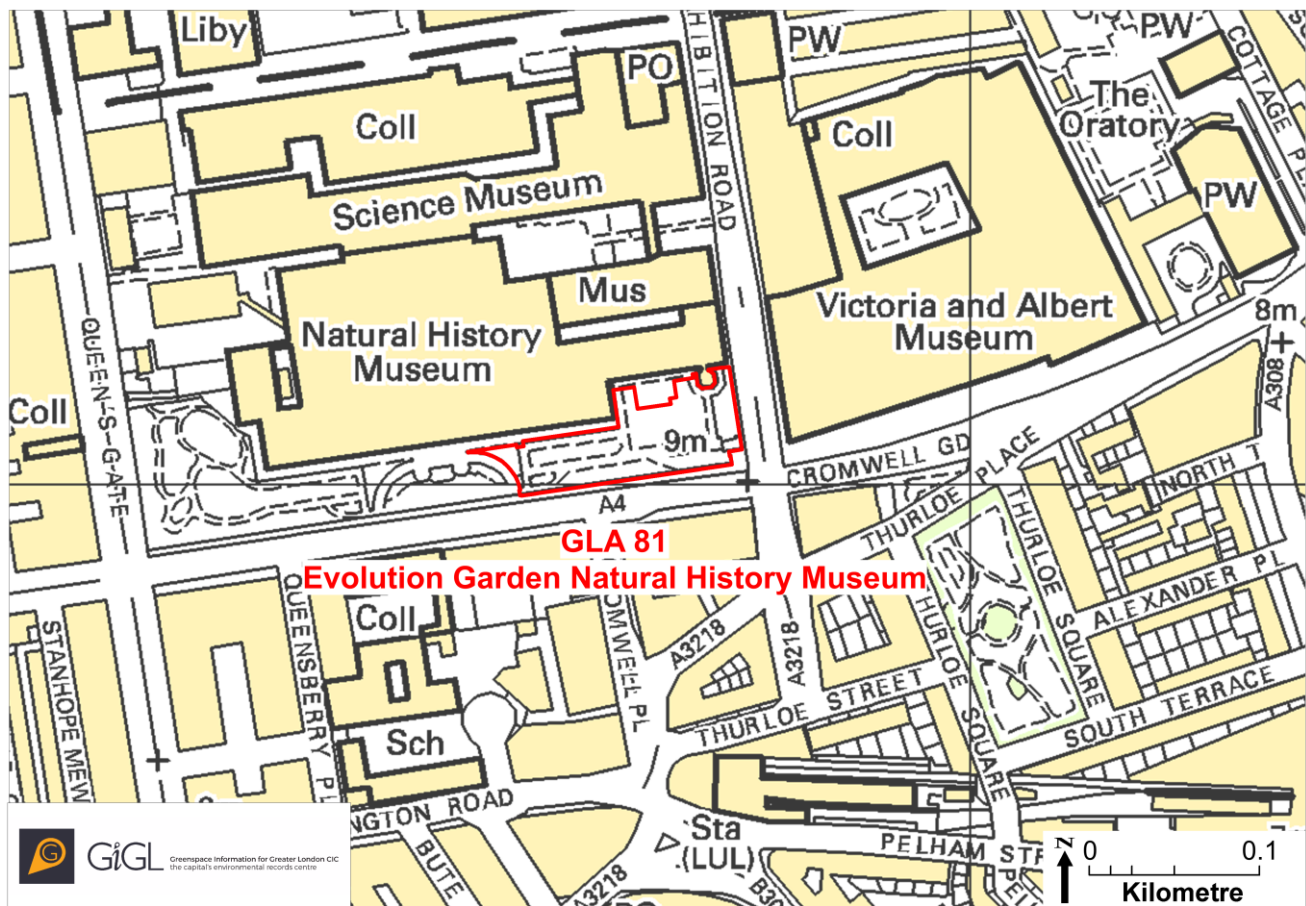
The Evolution Garden also features the evolution of animals and plants. All of the animals and some of the plants have small explanatory panels. The first animals that are encountered are at the end of the 'ravine', attached to the Cambrian Penrhyn slate. These are models of some of the earliest animals with hard parts, known from the c. 505 million year old Burgess Shale in Canada. Further along, the large arthropod, *Arthropleura* is modelled, with an extremely large version embedded in the terrazzo. The highlight comes within the Mesozoic with a new cast of the much loved Dippy that used to reside in the Main Hall. The original cast was a gift from Andrew Carnegie to King Edward VII in 1905 but was removed in 2017 when the Main Hall was renovated to become the Hintze Hall, now dominated by the vast skeleton of the blue whale, known as Hope. The displays were redone to reflect some of the most endangered species. It is probable that many visitors, especially the younger ones, will be pleased to see the return of the Diplodocus, now slightly updated in its stance and named Fern by local school children. There is also a cast of a small dinosaur, *Hypsilophodon* and cleverly, the shapes of footprints of both animals are inlaid in the terrazzo. A model of the tiny early Cretaceous mammal, *Megazostrodon rudnerae* is close by. Inlaid into blocks of Portland Roach are images depicting the evolution of flight ending with the bat in the Cenozoic section. There are actual fossils as well. These can be seen particularly in the Silurian Wenlock Limestone, Early Carboniferous crinoidal Mondale Stone from the Peak District and the Portland Roach. Large ammonites from the Lias of Lyme Regis and Portland Stone are included as well as dinosaur footprints from the Early Cretaceous Wealden. The largest of the actual fossils is the Carboniferous tree from the Craigleath Sandstone that has remained in its original position in the east garden. Purbeck fossil tree fragments are also included.

Planting in the garden is intended to replicate as much as possible the evolution of plants. Bordering Exhibition Road bare lumps of rock signify a time before any land plants existed. This is followed by a band of mosses representing the earliest land plants before the main part of the garden is reached, dominated by tree ferns and other ferns and horsetails. Flowering plants appear at the end of the Cretaceous period.

The large number of different rocks in the Evolution Garden makes it a magnet for geologists and the added evolutionary messages will send a message to the wider public.

Access

Public access, no booking, no charge. The gardens are open daily from 9.30 am (half an hour before NHM opens). No admittance after 5pm. Access is recommended via the ramp up from South Kensington Underground Station to get the full effect of the Timeline Walk. A new outdoor café, the Garden Kitchen and toilets are situated within the garden.



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Entrance ramp from the tunnel, from the Underground with examples of Pre-Cambrian rocks relating to the oldest periods of UK geological history



The Carboniferous tree in its original location, surrounded by the recent tree ferns



The end Permian Extinction marked by red scoria from Iceland alongside red Permian Corncockle Sandstone



The Mesozoic Era, the small dinosaur: *Hypsilophodon foxii*; the legs of its large relative, Fern, can just be seen in the background



Columnar basalt from Ireland to mark the beginning of Tropical London



Boulders from the Cenozoic era: a) sarsen stone found in the Kempton Park Gravel whilst building the V&A



b) Hertfordshire Pudding Stone rescued when constructing the A10 through Hertfordshire



Anthropocene gravel in the terrazzo pathway. Fragments of polished glass and also the human foot print

Photo credit: Diana Clements 2024