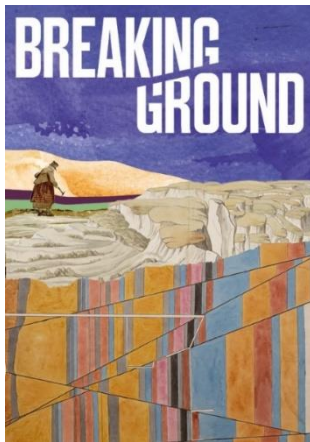


Volunteer Role Description: 'Breaking Ground' Exhibition Object Handling



About the Role

The Museum of Natural History's current exhibition, '[Breaking Ground](#)', uses the Museum's collections and the archives of William and Mary Buckland to chart major developments in early-19th century palaeontology. This includes the discovery of new and unexpected fossils and the first scientific description of a dinosaur.

As with previous exhibitions, we would like to recruit a team of friendly volunteers to offer object handling as an additional, alternative route into the exhibition. Potential themes include:

- **The first 'dinosaurs'**: how did comparing modern bird and reptile bones with mysterious new fossils help 19th century scientists to conceive the idea of 'dinosaurs'? (This year marks the 200th anniversary of William Buckland presenting the fossils of *Megalosaurus*, the first dinosaur to be named and scientifically described.)
- **'Trace' versus 'body' fossils**: what is the difference between trace and body fossils, and what can they tell us about prehistoric animals? (This will include a focus on Mary Anning's work with Buckland on unravelling the mystery of bezoar stones, now known as coprolites.)
- **Kirkdale Cave**: what did the unexpected discovery of lion, hippo, and hyaena fossils in a Yorkshire cave reveal about the area's distant geological past? (Buckland's analysis suggested that the cave was a hyaenas' den dating back many more thousands of years than was previously considered possible, according to the Bible.)



Volunteers will use a variety of fossils, bones, casts, illustrations, maps, and models to engage visitors with topics such as: what are fossils and how do we know; how can fossils help us to analyse the environment thousands, or even millions, of years ago; who were some of the people involved in palaeontology in the 1800s; and how did their work help to lay the foundations for palaeontology today?

The team will be coordinated by Ellie Grillo and Leanne Melbourne from the Public Engagement Team. They will also be the main contacts for the role, but front-of-house Visitor Services staff will provide practical support on the day.

Timing

We would like to offer free, drop-in, volunteer-led sessions **1.30 - 3.30 pm on the second and fourth Saturday of each month, Jan - Sep 2025**. These sessions will follow on from our related 'Out of the Deep' (Jurassic Seas) object handling sessions earlier in the day.

Depending on the size of the team and people's availability, we anticipate volunteers helping in pairs at 3 - 6 sessions during this time. There may also be opportunities to help at extra, one-off events, which will be advertised as and when. For all sessions, volunteers will need to allow some additional time before and after to set up and pack away.

Who are we looking for?

This role is about having interesting conversations with all sorts of visitors: using questions and different senses to help them learn more and/or share knowledge they already have. We are looking for volunteers who want visitors to have the best possible experience at the Museum, whilst also demonstrating a sense of responsibility for the objects they are using. Our ideal volunteers would be:

- **welcoming, engaging, and keen to practise (science) communication skills with a variety of people**, from young children to knowledgeable adults, and tourists to regular visitors, in a busy (potentially noisy) museum setting
- **enthusiasts more than experts**; we hope that all volunteers will enjoy learning something new and sharing their knowledge with others in an interactive and accessible way
- **confident managing small groups** of people around a table, as well as happy sitting at the table and soaking up the atmosphere during any quieter moments
- **flexible and considerate**: we anticipate pairs of volunteers working together to deliver each session, sometimes using the same objects to have simultaneous conversations with different visitors, sometimes taking turns... always supporting each other to ensure that everyone has the best possible experience
- **polite and helpful**: public-facing volunteers are often asked a variety of unrelated questions, which they may or may not know the answers to – but remember, Visitor Services staff are always nearby as back-up!

Why volunteers might enjoy this role

It's an opportunity to:

- connect with the Museum and meet other volunteers
- have fun interacting with the general public
- share or discover an interest in palaeontology, zoology, geology, and/or 19th century natural and social history
- develop and practise (science) communication skills
- gain experience of learning through objects
- potentially contribute to the Museum's social media – if you would like to share something about your volunteering

Training

Ellie and Leanne have pencilled in potential training sessions on the following dates – volunteers would only need to attend one:

- Mon 2nd Dec, 12 noon - 1.30 pm
- Tue 3rd Dec, 4 - 5.30 pm (possibly 4.30 - 6 pm if that works better)
- Fri 6th Dec, 12 noon - 1.30 pm
- Sat 7th Dec, 12.30 - 2 pm

The training session will include information about the different themes and handling objects, as well as techniques for engaging visitors with the objects. Volunteers will receive all of the information they need to get started but will be encouraged to do their own research and further explore the exhibition in their own time.

Other information

- This activity will happen in the Museum's Main Court, which has step-free access via a lift, and volunteers may choose to sit or stand. Because of the glass roof, the Court does get hot when the temperature outside is hot. Volunteers are encouraged to bring a bottle of water with them, or they can ask Visitor Services staff for a drink.
- This role is open to volunteers aged 18+.
- Volunteers can claim travel expenses up to £5 per volunteering session.
- Volunteers new to onsite GLAM volunteering will need to be registered on the Volunteer Service mailing list (MyImpactPage.com), and the Volunteer Service will need to have received two references and done an ID check before volunteers can start in this role. The role does not require any additional checks.

Next Steps

If you would like to get involved, then please email Caroline at volunteering@glam.ox.ac.uk by **9 am on Monday 25th November**. **In your email, please indicate:**

- which of the potential training sessions you could attend; if you aren't free for any, please still apply and we'll accommodate other times if possible, although we will prioritise people who *can* attend the most popular times given above
- your general availability to help Jan - Sep 2025

Please also send us a short (no more than a minute and a half-ish) video or voice note, telling us about a time when you felt excited about science, and why (this can be any aspect of science – not just palaeontology). The recording can be very basic – no fancy effects required! – but if you are unable or unsure about how to do this, then please get in touch with Caroline beforehand, and she can support you. We are trialling asking everyone for a video / voice note in lieu of arranging in-person 'auditions' due to limited time and the expectation that this will likely be a popular role.

Caroline will send emails on to Ellie and Leanne on the 25th, and someone will be in touch soon after to confirm who is being offered a space on the team.