



Dr Rob Gess is a palaeontologist (fossil researcher) and Research Associate of the Albany Museum. He is South Africa's leading researcher on Devonian (420– 359 million year old) ecosystems and Early Vertebrates (ancient fish and early four legged creatures). His research is currently supported by grants from the Palaeontological Centre of Excellence in Palaeontology, based at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Geology Department of Rhodes University.

The Late Devonian Waterloo Farm lagerstätten (exceptional fossil site) outside Grahamstown, continues to be his main focus of research. His excavations at Waterloo Farm have revealed the most complete high latitude Famennian (latest Devonian) ecosystem in the world, including at least 20 taxa of Early Vertebrates representing most Devonian orders, the most complete Famennian flora in the world and both water and land living invertebrates. Exceptional preservation of much of the material allows unique glimpses of the normally unpreserved soft tissue remains of early animals.

Published results include the earliest terrestrial animal from Gondwana (the scorpion *Gondwanascorpio emzantsiensis*), the oldest lamprey in the world (*Priscomyzon riniensis*), the earliest fully reconstructable charophytes (the waterweeds *Hexachara* and *Octachara*) and the earliest high latitude trees (the pre gymnosperm *Archaeopteris notosaria*). He has also discovered and helped to describe Placoderms (extinct armour plated fish), Acanthodians (extinct spiny sharks) and chondrichthyans (sharks). He is currently describing/helping to describe Actinopterygians (ray-finned fish), Sarcopterygians (lobe finned fish and tetrapodomorphs) as well as a range of plant types.

Dr Gess is interested in understanding the changing nature of coastal and early land ecosystems of the Devonian and Early Carboniferous. He is therefore actively doing exploration and excavation in younger and older rocks of the Cape Supergroup.

Dr Gess' has a PhD in Early Vertebrate palaeontology, which was conducted under the dual mentorship of Professor Michael Coates, a world leader in Early Vertebrate studies at the University of Chicago and Professor Bruce Rubidge, Head of the Evolutionary Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand and Chair of the South African Centre of Excellence in Palaeontology.

He has a Masters degree in Zoology/Palaeoecology, conducted under the mentorship of palaeontologists Dr Norton Hiller and Dr Jaques van Heerden. He is also a university qualified secondary school biology, science and geography teacher. He majored in Geology and Zoology during his science degree at Rhodes University.