

IOUEA: A CRETACEOUS COUP

SUSAN THORPE

Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England

Dmitri Borgmann, in "Vowel Patterns" in his book Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965), muses on the finding of what would be the 'ultimate triumph', a 5-letter word constructed from one each of the five vowels A, E, I, O and U. If you turn to page 638 of The Encyclopedia of Paleontology (Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, 1979), edited by Rhodes W. Fairbridge and David Jablonski, you will find IOUEA, the name of a Cretaceous fossil sponge genus! This discovery came about whilst I was searching for AEIOU animal words for a future **Word Ways** article. My first reaction was a silent 'Eureka' (being in the library at the time), swiftly followed by the fear that it might be a spelling misprint (already having met a few of those!). But no, all is well - it is also in Nomenclatur Zoologicus (Zoological Society of London, 1966), edited by Marcia A. Edwards and A. Tindell Hopwood, on page 133 of Volume VI (1946-55).

A short item on IOUEA, including details of its classification, can also be found in Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology (Geological Society of America and University of Kansas Press, Lawrence 1955), edited by R. C. Moore - see page E61 in Part E, Archaeocyatha and Porifera. It seems that we are indebted to a certain Dr. M. W. de Laubenfels who changed the name of a particular fossil sponge called PHALANGIUM (Schrammen, 1910), obligingly renaming it IOUEA!

How are we to pronounce this gem, bearing in mind that the -EA ending of zoological names is normally pronounced as in EAR without the R, rather than E-A as in the alphabet? Investigating Webster's Third, it appears that, when a word begins IO-, invariably the I and O are included in the same syllable. On this evidence, we are left with a choice of 2- and 3-syllable words (such as IO-UEA, IOU-EA, or IO-U-EA). I would opt for IO-UEA, but perhaps only Dr. de Laubenfels will ever know. Appropriately, IO in Latin means 'hurrah', 'oh' or 'ah'!

The 5-vowel arrangement IOUEA appears as part of two all-vowel words. In "Vowel Concentrations" in Language on Vacation, Dmitri Borgmann mentions AIOUEA, a genus of plants of the laurel family, and OIOUEAE, a trope of the Gregorian Lesser Doxology, consisting of the vowels in 'World Without End, Amen'. A suitable finishing point!