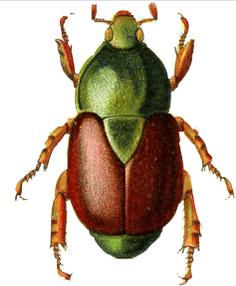


SCARABS



Si feteo, eius mos adveho

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BACK ISSUES

Available At These Sites:

Coleopterists Society
www.coleopsoc.org/nwslttrs.shtml

University of Nebraska
www-museum.unl.edu/research/entomology/Scarabs-Newsletter.htm

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Photo Courtesy of Ian Swift

Frank T. Hovore 1945-2006

Frank T. Hovore

By Rich Cunningham

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As most of you know by now, Frank Hovore passed away on September 22, 2006, while on a collecting trip to Ecuador. Frank's memorial service was held on October 7, 2006, at the Robinson Ranch Golf Course in Santa Clarita, California. The site was fitting as Frank was instrumental in the planning of this beautiful facility, keeping conservation of both the biological and geological factors at the heart of the development. Approximately 250 friends, colleagues and family members attended the memorial in honor of Frank.

During the ceremony, emotions were somewhat likened to a roller coaster ride, at times laughing and at other times misty as the hard realization of what was lost with his passing became ingrained in all of us. As the service progressed, it was evident that Frank was much more than a brilliant scientist working with New World Cerambycidae and *Pleocoma*. He had many other sides, touching and helping the lives of others that were not in the realm of entomology.

Most of us know of Frank's entomological endeavors, but here are a few other accomplishments: Frank was a former director of Los Angeles county's Natural areas, including Placerita Nature Center where he worked for 35 years in its development of programs,

displays and docents. He created the center's educational program which reaches about 19,000 school children a year. Frank was a scientific advisor on several films, including *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and recently David Attenborough's 2005 documentary series, *Life in the Undergrowth*. On both projects, he was an adviser and was sent to Central and South America to collect specimens for the films.

After retiring from the county, Frank began a biological consulting firm that provided planning for parks, plant and animal surveys, environmental education and habitat conservation plans. His knowledge of California ecology, plants and animals would be difficult to surpass.

For those of us who were lucky enough to be in the field with him, he was a great collecting partner. His gift of "gab" on every subject known to man made those miles on road trips go quickly. Frank's wit and sense of humor put even us skeptical collectors quickly at ease with him on a trip.

For those of us who knew him personally, and as things generally went, Frank had the intellect and drive to pretty much live life on his own terms. Very few of us

can leave life on our own terms. In Frank's case, although we are sure that he would have wanted to get in a lot more collecting trips, he probably left life on as close to his terms as possible. He died in the place that he loved the best, doing the thing that he loved the best. Ciao (or "Chow," as he often signed his emails) and good bye Frank, you will be missed.



Barney and "Paco" at Montecristi, Ecuador, February, 2006. Photo by Ian Swift.

At the summit of the Ecuadorian Andes, 12,000 feet elevation, before descending down into the Amazon Basin, March, 2006.

The Last BeetleBash

By Rich Cunningham

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This spring, Frank Hovore hosted yearly, and what was to be his last, BeetleBash. In true Frank fashion, the party was a great deal of fun, with food, drink, camaraderie and catching up on what everyone was working on, where and how their collecting ventures were or will be. As is with all of the gatherings it was fun to meet interesting people with common interests, such as killing chitin and then bragging about it.

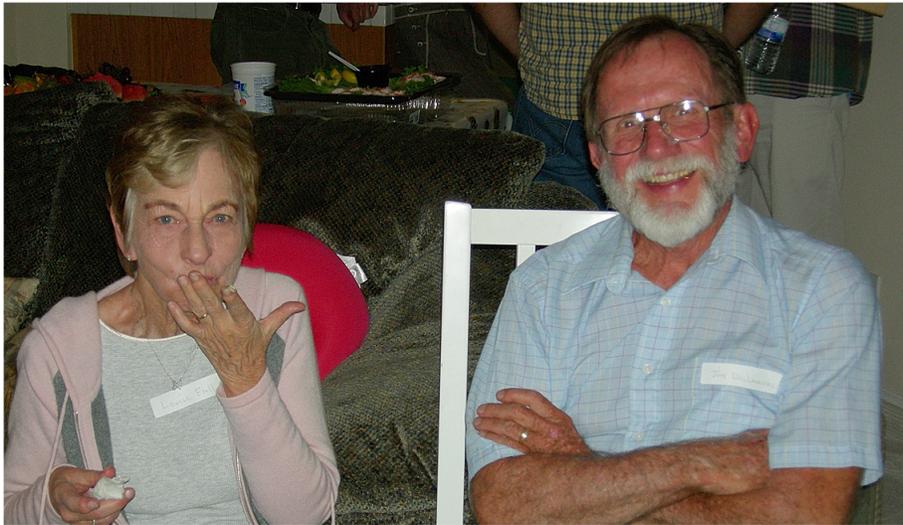
One of the major highlights of the party was Frank's acting debut on a BBC documentary *Life in the Undergrowth* by David Attenborough. It had a scene where Frank, the magnificent hunter, stalked, found and talked about the cerambycid *Titanus giganteus* while in French Guiana. Frank was a pretty happy guy, especially considering that the BBC paid his way down and back.

Frank then showed a clip of a trip to Ecuador that starred a "brown" or smelly Editor Barney baiting his traps with the good stuff and then showed what he had collected in his traps. Frank's narration of the clip was hilarious, showing Frank's quick wit, sense of humor and how fast he could think and speak. His "derived" English accent was a perfect imitation of Attenborough. We will all miss that.

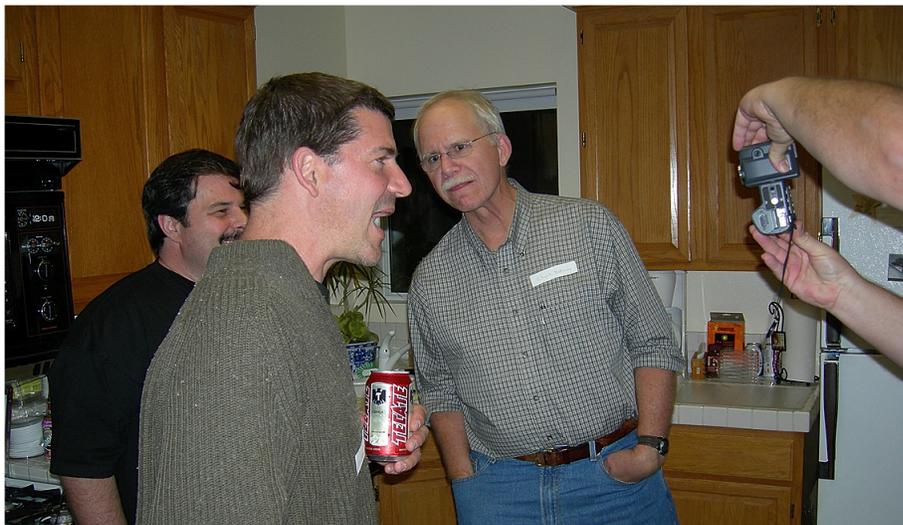
We hope that someone down here in Southern California will step up, open up their home, refrigerator and bug room to continue the opportunity for the beetle enthusiasts to gather and share experiences.

*The original Tres
Hermanos de Caca:
Editors Rich, Barney
and Billy-Bob*





Louise Fall, President of BioQuip Products, who will be celebrating their 60th year in business, and Jim des Lauriers.



Keve Ribardo, Jacques Rifkind (Cleridae) and Chuck Bellamy, The Godfather of Buprestidae.



James Hogue and Ian Swift (Cerambycidae and Pleocoma).

Jeff Huether (Cerambycidae and Meloidae), Ron "Chainsaw" Alten, your Friendly Foreign Automotive Mechanic (any beetle that is rare) and Tim Ramey (Cerambycid curatorius meticullatis).



Pat Sullivan and Bill (Billy Bob) Warner, by far, the largest, most flamboyant and grandiose of the Editors.



Doug Yanega (Hymenoptera) and Larry Bezark (Cerambycidae)

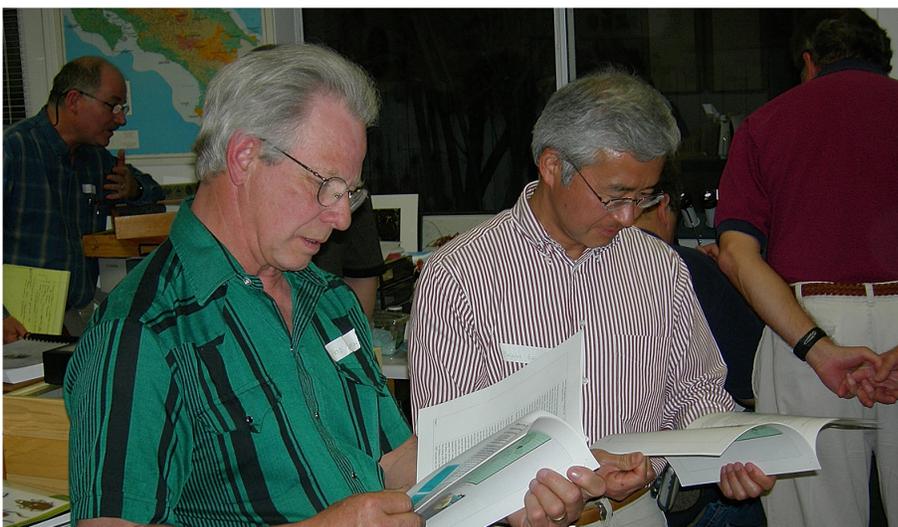




*“Who stole my Crayons?
asks Dave Hawks, (of
Plusio..no, wait..Chrysina,
fame, and DNA analysis
of the scarabs)*



*Sandy Streit with her
entire Honeymoon
Entourage: Dick
Penrose, Ian Swift and
our host Paco (all of
Cerambycidae fame).*



*Fred Skillman and Bryan
Eya (both Cerambycidae)
checking out Scarabs 16*

*Editor Rich, Dave Hawks
and Dave Carlson (all
scarab enthusiasts).*



*Charlie O'Brien
(Cuculionidae) discussing
his injured right hand.*



*Bob Duff (scarabs and
founder of the Duffing
technique) with Tom
Shohaira.*



Collecting Rain Beetles

By Barney D. Streit

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As a final testament to “Mr. Pleocoma,” (Frank Hovore) it seems appropriate to at last re-visit the collecting experiences of those of us in Southern California in the 1960’s and 1970’s. What follows may elicit a snicker here and there, but in those days, very little was known of the habits of this group. We were desperate to learn more... and we would do anything to augment our knowledge.

Before we begin our tale, let me talk of what we know about this group, in general terms, for those of you unfamiliar with them. *Pleocoma* range from extreme southern Washington to extreme northern Baja California. The grubs are root feeders, and are said to feed 8-12 years before pupating. The adult beetles emerge in the fall during and just after rainstorms. Adults do not feed. Indeed, they have no mouthparts. The males are strong flyers and fly to the burrows of the females. Males will fly in the daytime, or at night, but for the most part they are crepuscular. They are strongly attracted to lights. The females emit a pheromone which smells like Lemon Pledge, and cannot fly. They simply break the surface of the ground, turn around, and dig back in. The males will mate either on the surface, or in the burrow.

For me, as well as others, attention

was first drawn to *Pleocoma* by a local collector named Jim Robertson. In the minutes of a 1967 meeting of the Lorquin Entomological Society, he cited the capture of two species of rain scarabs: *Pleocoma puncticollis* in Sepulvada Canyon in Los Angeles, and *P. australis* in the San Jacinto Mountains. But exactly what was a



The male (left) and female (right) of Pleocoma linsleyi Hovore.

rain scarab? The books and catalogs did not know where to place this group. Some placed *Pleocoma* in an uncertain status with *Acoma*, others placed it near the Geotrupidae.

It was all very mysterious. But what did they look like? *Pleocoma* from the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum were brought in to a Lorquin meeting. These specimens included several of the

large, ponderous females, which had been unearthed years ago at a construction site in Beverly Hills. Wow! These were just about the most awesome beetles ever. The huge, reddish, egg-shaped females were equaled by the intensely-hairy males with long legs, a head horn, and bifurcated clypeal process.

We knew the males of *puncticollis* came to the street lights at the junction of Mulholland Drive and the San Diego Freeway, and the males of *australis* came to the lights at Mountain Center. What about other species, and how do you get females, which do not fly? *Pleocoma badia* was known from Mount Wilson in the San Gabriel Mountains, but where exactly? It was thought that because the females did not fly, that rain scarabs existed in small "colonies" not more than 100-150 feet wide. How then, were we to find them?

Jim Robertson and Terry Taylor (now of Fort Davis, Texas) began the assault on *badia*. There was a dirt road from the town of Altadena to the astronomical observatory at the summit. This dirt road was constructed to cart the 100-inch mirror for the Hale Telescope to the summit. Though the Mount Wilson Observatory was founded in 1904, the Hale Telescope was not completed until 1917. In those days, there were trams running up and down the road, and one could pay a toll to travel to the summit and back. To this day, it is still called the Mount Wilson Toll Road.

Surely, somewhere on this road was where *badia* had been taken.

There is a locked Forest Service gate at its base, so one had to walk up. So, in the cold rain, Jim and Terry took turns pushing a wheelbarrow up this relentless incline in order to bring up a storage battery, converter and black light. They set up the light at Henniger Flats where there is a ranger station. This is an hour-and-a-half walk if one is not pushing a wheelbarrow. Alas, no beetles were captured. Unknown to them, *badia* could be found only another 15 minutes up the road...

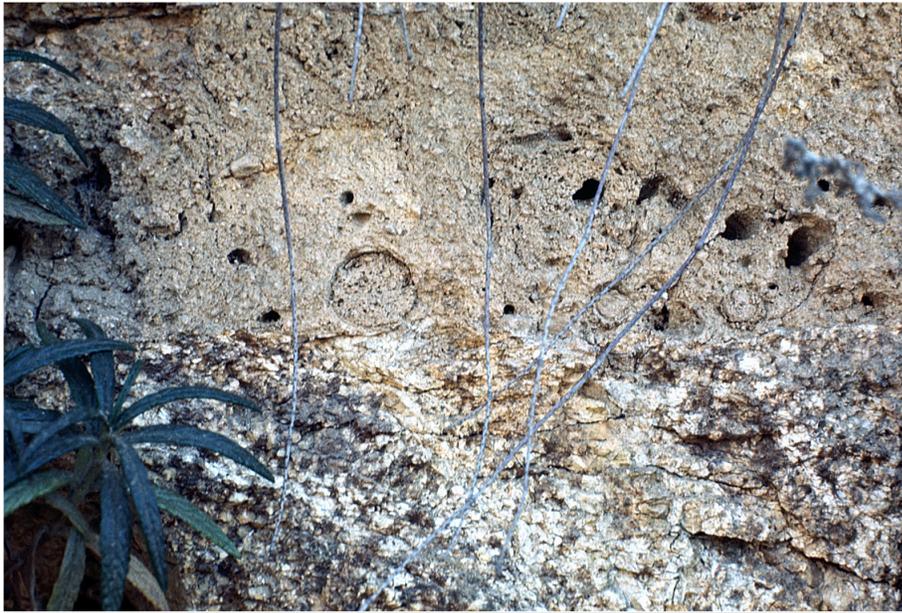
Next year, paydirt was struck, as not only males were captured, but also a few females. Reports came back that they were found only under a single oak tree. It seemed like the rest of us would have no chance of finding this exact spot. Undaunted, Frank Hovore walked the road in clear weather with Bob Duff and duffed out 5 males and 5 females in a wide stretch of roadcut. Maybe these neat bugs were not so rare after all...

After that, many sorties were made not only up the toll road, but down it. One could drive the Angeles Crest Highway to the observatory, then walk down the toll road to the *Pleocoma*. In one instance, Jim "Snail-Yey" Saulnier, Don Frack and Dennis "Fish Face" Sherridan walked down at 3 AM in a cold rain. They reached the spot just before dawn, in time to set up a blacklight to catch the crepuscular flight of the males. One key ingredient was missing however: each thought one of the others had brought the battery! So there they were: wet, cold, tired, and beetle-less.

I myself made several walks up that road, which took one hour and forty-five minutes each direction. One memorable trip was with my father George. We knew we were in the right locality when we found plugs of compacted dirt from ancient burrows in the roadcut. The substrate was primarily

decomposed granite, but the burrows were in the clay bands running through the granite.

Dead females could also be seen in the roadcut, where they had died, in their burrows, after ovipositing, until their solace was disturbed by the road workers.



Old rain beetle plugs in the clay bands running through the decomposing granite.



An ancient Pleocoma linsleyi female in a dark clay band in the Tehachapi Mountains of California.

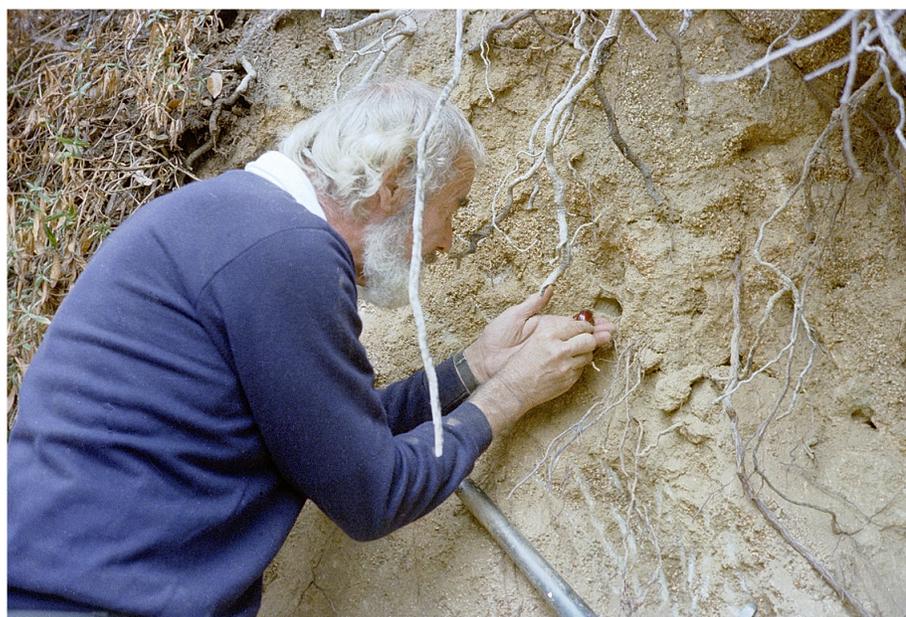
A younger Barney sitting on a ramp of clay that was chiseled out of the roadcut using hand picks!



As can be seen from the above photo, it takes a lot of pick swings aimed at very, very hard, compacted clay to locate just a few females. Hand picks were the only tool to use. Large picks lacked the subtlety required to expose the rain beetle burrows without ruining the beetle. However, we were young and these incredible beetles were so neat and rare!

The photo below shows my father at that magic moment when the buried treasure is extracted. Frank always moaned that other entomologists had no idea of the amount of work that went into collecting these rarities. It took a highly desirable beetle for us to let go of a rain beetle in a trade.

George Streit extracting a female Pleocomma badia from her burrow.



Another was a trip on August 29, 1973 with my friend Louise Landolfo, an elegant, intelligent lady who has gone on to better things. Petite though she was, she swung a mean pickaxe. We were able to duff out teneral beetles, and found the newly-emerged females to be yellowish in color, as opposed to the normal deep reddish brown they acquire with age. So, we learned when the adults emerged from their pupal state.

Meanwhile, Frank was in Central California collecting males **and** females of rarities such as *blasidelli*, *rickseckeri*, *lucia*, *hirticollis vandykei* and *staff*, as well as the more common *tularensis*, *fimbriata* and *behrensi*. Frank singlehandedly converted species that were nearly mythical in rarity to “collectible.”

In 1986, a pre-dawn walk was made in September, after a wisp of a rain. I wanted to know if a small amount of precipitation that early in the rainy season (which normally starts in mid-October) could effect an emergence. I took two males at blacklight at dawn - a lot of effort for two specimens and very little information. The common thread to be garnered from these anecdotes is that we worked very hard for these specimens. We put up with treacherous, slippery, dark, rock-strewn roads, poison oak, boot-eating mud, bone-chilling rain, sleet and snow, and, worst of all, each other.



*Louise Landolfo keeping a close eye on the ever-so-dangerous *Pleocoma badia* female.*



A closeup of a female pupa and a teneral adult female.



*Edwin "ER" Leach
with Barney,
1970.*

Early on, I was the beneficiary of correspondence with E. R. (Edwin) Leach, of Piedmont, California. He was a mining engineer by profession, and had an amazing collection of *Pleocomma* and other scarabs from central California and Oregon, as well as the tropics. I was able to meet him in person when he was 91. I still have his hand-written letters.

Through Mr. Leach I also met Manual Marquis of Castro Valley, California. He repaired appliances for a living, and was very handy with tools. He constructed his own cabinets, drawers and unit trays. Manny's collection was beautifully curated. An avid collector of rain beetles, he passed away not long after I met him.

For every scarab enthusiast, the first female rain beetle you collect will forever be etched into your memory. It might happen while digging into an embankment,



Manual Marquis, 1970.

chipping a fragment of hard clay off to reveal a large, round, smooth-walled burrow with the female backing away. For me, it was at Mountain Center, when I was fortunate enough to be there in a rain when the females were breaking the surface. It was so easy - one only had to dig them out of an inch or so of dirt.

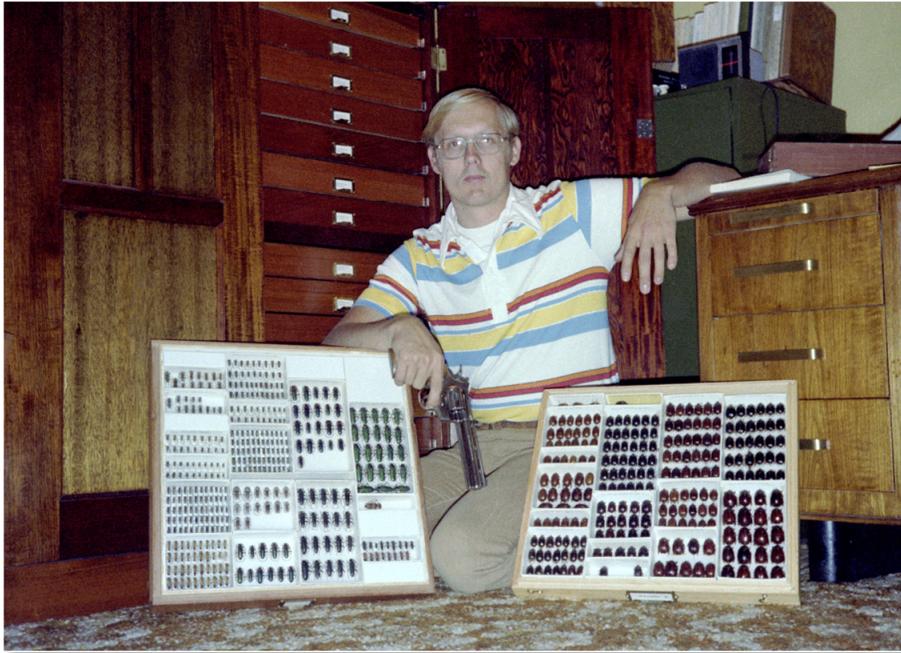
Dave Marqua (now of Fort Davis, Texas) discovered *Pleocoma* in the Glennville area of Kern County. What we didn't know at the time was that there were three new species there that emerged one after the other. Probably the coldest night I ever suffered through was in Posey, in a sleeping bag, on the floor of Terry Taylor's Ford van. George Walters (known primarily for his formidable buprestid collection) was shivering in the driver's seat while Terry was curled, like a wretched anchovy on ice, on a cot he had constructed in the van. It was sooooo cold that George actually crawled under the covers with Terry. For a tough ex-marine to do that in front of a witness, it had to be pretty darned cold!

To find the female of what was to become *Pleocoma marquai*, Frank and I duffed the roadcuts very hard. Frank finally took the first-known female in this fashion. We did not realize it, but we were in the Mount Wilson Toll Road mindset. Frank later discovered that the way to get the females of this species was not to dig blindly into roadcuts, but rather to locate burrows under the *Ceanothus* bushes, and dig them out.



Still, we found this no easy chore. The dirt was rock hard, the burrow went straight down for quite a ways, was full of loose dirt, and the female was at the end, where the burrow made a horizontal turn. The problem was that we did not know which way the burrow turned. It was so, so easy to zork a female after 45 minutes of difficult digging. We began by digging a large U-shaped trench around the burrow, about 12-15 inches deep. Then, and only then, you would break away the sides of the burrow, and whisk out the dirt plug that went all the way down to where the female was.

Frank poking around for rain beetles with Terry Taylor at Arnold, California, October, 1971.



A parting photo of Frank with a few of his favorite cerambycids, his beloved Colt 'Python,' and, of course, a drawer of Pleocoma—all meticulously curated.

Blowing In The Wind

by Scott McCleve

*Frank did not go gently into his last jungle.
What thoughts did he have—
Flying above the clouds on his last big shining bird,
Descending through curtains of storms
And rainbows, water on the wings and windows?
Carrying cancer, hauling a halting heart?*

*What rushes of excitement and anticipation
And wonder, when finally on the ground,
The fabled forest looming nearer,
The myriad leaves resolving into individual focus?*

*Any day can be your last—
We all mumble this to our doubting selves,
Creatures separated that last iota from all others
Untouched by chilly whiffs of mortality.*

*Frank chose the final fire,
The products of combustion:
Carbon dioxide and water, and those
Myriad anonymous molecules that made the man.
Up in smoke, scattered in good time.
Now circling the blue marble,
Descending everywhere, then ascending again—
You cannot keep a good man down.*

*Running with all the rivers to the sea,
Then steaming thither again: mountain and glacier,
The desert and the secret-misted Pleocoma haunts.
Alone and with cherished companions.
He will not leave these.*

*Take communion of him with every breath,
Every sip, every morsel. All the showers that
Catch you out of shelter are his habitat now.
Frank is blowin' in the wind.*