

Foreword

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Prof. Dr. Volker Fahlbusch (University of Munich) and I first met in 1991 during the presentation of an almanac of the town of Mainburg (Lower Bavaria), for which he had written a chapter on the palaeontological excavations from 1959 to 1975 in the Sandelzhausen district. He enlightened me on the history and scientific importance of the palaeontological findings at Sandelzhausen and urged me in my capacity as mayor of Mainburg to ensure that the precious site would not be lost by being covered with buildings. The excavations at the site had been stopped since 1975 because of property issues. Prof. Fahlbusch was probably quite surprised when I told him that I also had a personal interest in protecting the excavation site. I had been infected by the spirit of this science since I had the opportunity to participate in the excavation of an almost complete fossil rhino skull at the Sandelzhausen site thanks to the late Dr. Gall (Munich), a volleyball rear gunner of mine and one of the scientists and excavation crew members during the digging campaign of 1959–1975.

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Prof. Fahlbusch invited me to visit him at the Institut für Paläontologie und historische Geologie in Munich. He presented to me all the wonderful vertebrate fossils found in Sandelzhausen, which were prepared and curated in the collection of the Bayerische Staatssammlung für Paläontologie und Geologie in Munich.

This was the point at which the idea sprouted to buy the aforesaid property in Sandelzhausen and place it at the disposal of further scientific excavations. Shortly thereafter, the town of Mainburg finally succeeded in buying this special property and an adjacent large area that was planned to become a building site for homes.

During the following years of excavations (1994–2002), I think that all our daily support—by the municipal council, the staff of the public construction services, the residents of Sandelzhausen and Mainburg, and by myself in my function as mayor—clearly evidenced that all of us were aware of the uniqueness and importance of this fossil site. When surprising new fossil-bearing deposits were discovered in an adjacent area of the excavation site, as a matter of course both municipal responsible persons and private owners retarded their plans for house building, so that these important fossils could also be excavated and saved.

Over the years close relationships and even sometimes friendships have arisen between all the aforementioned parties and excavation crew members and institutions. In order to express and celebrate these special relationships “the voles,” as the excavation crew members were nicknamed by the locals, organized annual barbecue parties in the excavation site, the so-called “Grubenfeste.” They were a little “thank you” to all the local people and municipal responsible persons for their encouragement. In this spirit it was symptomatic that the access road to the new residential estate in the adjacent area was named after the discoverer of the fossil site: Prof. Richard Dehm.

Furthermore, the officials of Mainburg appreciated the opening of a permanent exhibition on the fossils from Sandelzhausen in one of the halls in the museum of local history, prepared and provided by the scientific excavation team, since these exhibits and explanations informed the residents on the excavation results and sensitized them to the prehistory of their home region.

The completion and a special highlight of these years of cooperation was undoubtedly the Sandelzhausen Symposium held in 2005 in Mainburg, at which scientists from all over the world came together to compile and discuss all their results of tens of years of investigations concerning the fossil site of Sandelzhausen. Most of these results are presented in the present volume. In this context, we, the people of Mainburg, are very proud that some extinct genera and species of animals have been newly discovered in Sandelzhausen.

I wish to thank—also in the name of the residents of Mainburg—especially Prof. V. Fahlbusch, R. Liebreich, Prof. K. Heissig, and Dr. G. Rössner, but also the many

crew members who offered their manpower and competence during this excavation and those scientists who contributed to the examination and interpretation of the scientific results. All of them have not only contributed to science, but made Sandelzhausen and Mainburg an important and well-known place for vertebrate palaeontologists as well as for all those interested in the prehistoric fauna of our homeland 16 million years ago.

This special volume, together with earlier and following publications, will contribute to the celebrity and meaning of the locality of Sandelzhausen as one of the richest and most important vertebrate sites for the Early/Middle Miocene.

I am particularly sorry that Volker Fahlbusch, who made Sandelzhausen an essential part of his life's work, did not have the chance to see this volume published due to his sudden death quite recently.

With gratification and a certain elation,

Josef Egger

Then-mayor of the town of Mainburg (Lower Bavaria).