

From:  
*Mysteries of the Unexplained*  
Reader's Digest Association, Inc.,  
Pleasantville, New York/Montreal, 1982

## LIVING ANIMALS, LOCKED IN STONE

**During excavations** being made for the Hartlepool waterworks in Durham, England, in 1865, workmen inadvertently freed a living toad from a block of magnesian limestone 25 feet below ground level.

The cavity [in which the toad had been contained] was no larger than its body, and presented the appearance of being a cast of it. The toad's eyes shone with unusual brilliancy, and it was full of vivacity on its liberation. It appeared, when first discovered, desirous to perform the process of respiration, but evidently experienced some difficulty, and the only sign of success consisted of a "barking" noise, which it continues invariably to make at present on being touched. The toad is in the possession of Mr. S. Horner, the president of the Natural History Society, and continues in as lively a state as when found. On a minute examination its mouth is found to be completely closed, and the barking noise it makes proceeds from its nostrils. The claws of its fore feet are turned inwards, and its hind ones are of extraordinary length and unlike the present English toad.... The toad, when first released, was of a pale colour and not readily distinguished from the stone, but shortly after its colour grew darker until it became a fine olive brown.

A local clergyman and geologist, the Reverend Robert Taylor, expressed the opinion that the toad was 6,000 years old. At the last report (1865) the creature was to be given a place of honor in the Hartlepool Museum, its "primary habitation"—the rock—being provided for accommodation should it so desire. (*The Leeds Mercury*, April 8, 1865; as quoted in *The Zoologist*, 23:9630, 1865)

**A living toad** was liberated from a cavity near the center of a large rock by workmen digging for ore at Paswick, Derby, England, in 1852. They came upon the rock—actually a large lump of ore—at a depth of 12 feet below ground level and since it was too large for two men to lift, they began to break it up with their picks. The cavity in which they found the toad was nearly six inches in diameter, considerably larger than the animal itself, and was lined with crystals, perhaps of carbonate of lime. The toad died very soon after being exposed to air. (*The Zoologist*, 10:3632, 1852)

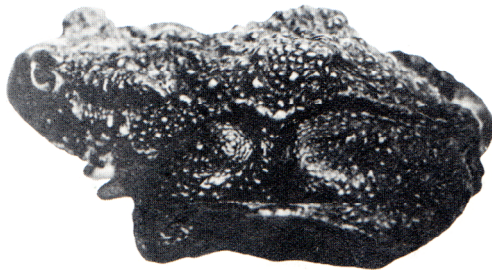
**When the ground was being prepared** for the London-Birmingham railway line in 1835, workers on the Coventry stretch had to deal with masses of red sandstone at a depth of about 4 1/2 feet, which they cleared with crowbars and gunpowder. As one block of this sandstone was being lifted and thrown toward a wagon, it fell and fractured. One of the broken pieces was thrown into the wagon, and in a cavity in one of the remaining pieces a living toad was found.

When the toad was first exposed to the air, its color was a bright brown, but within 10 minutes it had become almost black. It was quite plump' though smaller than most toads, but seemed "oppressed" and frequently gasped, having, or so it seemed, sustained a head injury. It was carefully replaced in its cavity and the cracked stone was sealed with clay, but the animal died four days later. (*Report of the Fifth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1835, p. 72)

**In a lecture** given at the University of Cambridge in 1818, Dr. Edward D. Clarke, a geologist, described some unusual newts he had found in a chalk quarry. He had been looking for fossils, he said, and was digging in the quarry at a depth of 270 feet when he came upon a number of fossilized sea urchins and newts. Three of the newts were very well preserved, and Dr. Clarke carefully dug them out of the rock and placed them on a sheet of paper in the sun. To his considerable surprise, the newts began to move.

Within a short time two of the animals were dead, but the third seemed so lively that Dr. Clarke placed it in a pond. Its response was to promptly escape from him and disappear.

According to Dr. Clarke, the rejuvenated newts were unlike any of those living locally at the time and belonged to an extinct species previously unknown to science. (*The Unexplained: Mysteries of Mind Space & Time*, Vol. 1, Issue 8)



*Above is a photograph of the live toad Mr. Clarke of Rugby found embedded in a coal. Frogs can hibernate in a casing of mud for months, but could they survive long enough for the mud to metamorphose into rock?*

**An hour and a half** after stoking his fire, Mr. W. J. Clarke, of Rugby, England, reached over to poke the coals. As he broke open one coal, he saw something move and snatched it out of the fireplace. It proved to be a living toad and it survived for five weeks. It had no mouth and was almost transparent. Photographs of this marvel were offered for sale to the public by the London Stereoscopic Company. (*The English Mechanic and World of Science*, 73:260, May 10, 1901)

**In the late 16th century** Ambroise Paré, Henry III's surgeon, saw "a huge toad, full of life" emerge from a large stone just split by workmen near his house at Meudon, France. (*The Unexplained: Mysteries of Mind Space & Time*, Vol. 1, Issue 8)

**An astonished toad** was liberated from its snug cavity in a 14-pound nodule of flint by a workman's pickax at Blois, France, in 1851. Upon finding the wind in its nostrils for the first time in no one knows how long, the toad jumped out of its hole and began to crawl rapidly away. His escape was thwarted by the workmen, however, who put him back in the flint and sent their find to the local Society of Sciences for their study. At the society's headquarters, the toad, within his flint, was placed in a basement in a bed of moss. If the top of the flint was removed in darkness, the toad would lie quietly where he was, but if the room was light he climbed out and tried to run away. If he was placed on the edge of the flint, he would crawl into the hole of his own accord, gathering his legs under his body and taking particular care of a foot that had been

slightly hurt when he was first removed from the flint. The cavity fitted his body like a glove, except for a small area above the back, and his mouth rested on a small ledge which had produced a permanent indentation in his jawbone. (*The Zoologist*, 9:3265-66, 1851)

SIDEBAR:

### **Toads in the Coal: An Occasional Hell?**

There are three ways, broadly speaking, to account for the numerous reports of living creatures recovered from cavities in solid rock thousands of years old. The most decisive way is to declare (as one Captain Buckland did when a toad supposedly released from a lump of coal in a Welsh mine was exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1862) that such things are “a gross imposition”—the work of fools and bunglers whose words and eyes are not to be trusted.

A less impetuous explanation maintains that although the stone in which these creatures are found may appear to be solid, it actually contains fissures through which water, air, and perhaps even nutrients may enter. In the case of limestone, these fissures may become sealed by seeping carbonate of lime, the chemical from which stalactites and stalagmites are formed. To the untrained eye, the new deposits would not be distinguishable from the old rock, and the limestone would seem to be a solid, uniform mass.

The third account of such things is the most interesting but is not verifiable by any ordinary means. It can be illustrated by a story from Tibet.

In the later part of the 19th century a venerable lama named Situ Pema Wangyal Rinpoche was making a journey to Lhasa in the company of several friends. One day, much to the alarm of his companions, he fell into an unusually wrathful mood and that evening insisted on making camp on a barren plain where neither firewood nor water could be found. The next morning, still in a bad humor, he obliged the party to leave the route for Lhasa and to set out in a northerly direction that led, so far as his companions knew, to nowhere in particular. Since they held him in considerable esteem, however, they followed him without question.

After several hours they came to an enormous outcrop of rock, which, Situ Rinpoche announced, it was their task to break open. Since they had no tools but their wooden staffs, they fared poorly in this task, and—already alarmed by their leader’s behavior—they withdrew some 50 to 60 feet to confer, leaving Situ Rinpoche standing by the rock.

Whereupon the lama took his staff and struck the rock a single blow. It shattered and revealed within a large, repulsive-looking creature somewhat like a salamander, its scaly black skin stuck to the rock, panting for breath. Situ Rinpoche gently lifted the animal out of the rock and set it down on the ground in front of him. He then sat down and began to perform a certain yoga on the animal’s behalf.

In Tibetan this yoga is called *pho-wa* and is usually described as involving a transfer of consciousness. It is performed by lamas for the benefit of the dying.

After a while a narrow column of rainbow-colored light rose from the creature’s head, and it died. Funeral rites were performed, and soon afterward the body was burned.

Afterward Situ Rinpoche explained that he had liberated the animal, which in a previous life had had a connection with him, from one of the occasional Hells. In the Buddhist description of other realms of existence, these occasional Hells lie outside the main circles of Hell and are sometimes encountered in this world. Very often, they are instanced by the enclosure of a living creature in solid rock.