

# CORALS

## at the Falls of the Ohio



figure 1.  
*Siphonophrentis elongata*

The fossil beds at the Falls of the Ohio, located between Louisville, Kentucky and Clarksville, Indiana, are world-renowned. First described by European settlers paddling down the Ohio River over 250 years ago, the abundance of corals is still striking today. Are these fossil corals related those living in today’s oceans? In a word, “no.”

Modern (scleractinian) corals first appear in the fossil record in the Early Triassic period, about 241 million years ago. The corals from the Falls of the Ohio are much older, about 387 million years old! Some varieties superficially resemble living corals, because they lived in a similar habitat - shallow, warm, tropical seas.

Two orders of coral dominated the Devonian seas: rugosa and tabulata. Both became extinct at or near the end of the Permian period, about 240 million years ago. Both orders appeared in the early Ordovician period and their diversity peaked during the Devonian.

## DNR

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
**Division of State Parks and Reservoirs**  
 Interpretive Services  
 Falls of the Ohio State Park

*Compressiphyllum davisana* (Miller)  
*Craterophyllum adnascens* (Greene)  
*Craterophyllum* (?) *latiradium* (Hall)  
 “*Craterophyllum*” *magnificum* (Billings)  
*Cyathocylindricum gemmatum* (Hall)  
*Cyathocylindricum opulens* Oliver  
*Cylindrophyllum gradatum* (Greene)  
*Cystiphyllodes americanum* (Edwards & Haime)  
*Cystiphyllodes crassatum* (Greene)  
*Cystiphyllodes hispidum* (Davis)  
*Cystiphyllodes infundibuliformis* (Greene) **(figure 3)**  
*Cystiphyllodes limbatum* (Davis)  
*Cystiphyllodes nanum* (Hall)  
*Cystiphyllodes plicatum* (Davis)  
*Cystiphyllodes pustulatum* (Hall)  
*Cystiphyllodes quadrangulare* (Hall)  
*Cystiphyllodes tenuiradium* (Hall)  
*Diplochone greenei* (Miller)  
 “*Disphyllum*” *synaptophylloides* Stumm  
*Edaphophyllum bifurcatum* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis concava* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis* ? *curvata* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis* ? *cyathiformis* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis duplicata* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis* ? *foliata* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis inflata* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis simplex* (Hall)  
*Enallophrentis trisutura* (Hall)  
*Eridophyllum apertum* (Hall) **(figure 4)**  
*Eridophyllum archaici* (Billings)  
*Eridophyllum coagulatum* (Davis)  
*Eridophyllum seriale* Edwards & Haime  
*Eridophyllum tumidulum* (Hall)  
*Hadrophyllum orbigny* Edwards & Haime  
*Hallia strigata* (Greene)  
*Heliophyllum agassizi* Greene  
*Heliophyllum alternatum* Hall  
 ? *Heliophyllum coalitum* (Rominger)  
*Heliophyllum denticulatum* Hall  
*Heliophyllum ethelanum* (Davis)  
*Heliophyllum gurleyi* Greene  
*Heliophyllum halli* Edwards & Haime  
*Heliophyllum incrassatum* Hall  
*Heliophyllum infundibulum* Hall  
*Heliophyllum ingens* (Davis)  
*Heliophyllum insigne* (Davis)  
*Heliophyllum latericrescens* Hall  
*Heliophyllum pocillum* (Davis)?  
*Heliophyllum tenuiseptatum* Billings  
*Heliophyllum venatum* Hall  
*Heliophyllum verticale* Hall  
*Heliophyllum yandelli* (Rominger)  
 “*Heterophrentis*” *annulata* (Hall)  
*Heterophrentis* is not a valid genus.  
 “*Heterophrentis*” *colletti* (Hall)  
 “*Heterophrentis*” *irregularis* (Hall)  
 “*Heterophrentis*” *rafinesqui*  
 (Edwards & Haime)  
 “*Heterophrentis*” *subcompressa* (Hall)  
*Homalophyllum fusiformis* (Hall)  
*Homalophyllum herzeri* (Hall)  
*Homalophyllum unguum* (Rominger)

*Iowaphyllum knotti* (Davis)  
*Kionelasma coarticum* (Hall)  
*Kionelasma?* *conspicuum* (Hall)  
*Kionelasma mammiferum* (Hall)  
*Odontophyllum convergens* (Hall)  
*Prismatophyllum bella* (Davis)  
*Prismatophyllum conjunctum* (Davis)  
*Prismatophyllum ovoideum* (Davis)  
*Prismatophyllum prisma* Lang & Smith **(figure 5)**  
*Prismatophyllum truncata* Stewart  
*Scenophyllum* (?) *coniferum* (Greene)  
*Scenophyllum conigerum* (Rominger)  
*Schlotheimophyllum typicum* (Davis)  
*Schlotheimophyllum versiforme* (Hall)  
*Siphonophrentis elongata* (Rafinesque & Clifford) **(figure 2)**  
*Siphonophrentis yandelli* (Edwards & Haime)  
 “*Skoliophyllum*” *squamosum* (Nicholson) [Probably new genus]  
*Stauromatidium trigemma* (Davis)  
*Stereolasma* (?) *exile* (Davis)  
*Stereolasma gallicalcar* (Davis)  
*Stereolasma parvulum* (Davis)  
*Stereolasma rectum* (Hall)  
*Tabulophyllum?* *bellicinctum* Greene  
*Tabulophyllum?* *greeni* (Davis)  
*Tabulophyllum?* *perplicatum* (Hall)  
*Tabulophyllum?* *sinuosum* Hall  
*Tabulophyllum?* *tripinnatum* (Hall)  
*Tabulophyllum zaphrentiforme* Davis  
*Triplophyllum terebrata* (Hall)  
*Zaphrentis phrygia* Rafinesque & Clifford

## Tabulate Corals

*Alveolites asperus* (Rominger)  
*Alveolites constans* Davis  
*Alveolites expatiatius* (Rominger)  
*Alveolites goldfussi* Billings  
*Alveolites minimus* Davis  
*Alveolites mordax* Davis  
*Alveolites squamosus* Billings  
*Alveolites winchellana* (Miller)  
*Antholites speciosus* Davis  
*Aulocystis auloporoidea* (Davis)  
*Aulocystis fascicularis* (Davis)  
*Aulocystis frutescens* (Davis)  
*Aulocystis* (?) *incrusters* (Davis)  
*Aulocystis jacksoni* (Grabau)  
*Aulocystis nobilis* (Billings)  
*Aulocystis* (?) *procumbens* Davis  
*Aulocystis transitorius* Stumm  
*Aulopora culmula* Davis  
*Aulopora edithana* Davis  
*Aulopora tubiporoidea* (Yandell & Shumard)  
*Bractea arbor* (Davis)  
*Bractea frutex* (Davis)  
*Bractea impedita* (Davis)  
*Chonostegites clappi* Edwards & Haime  
*Chonostegites tabulatus* (Edwards & Haime)  
*Cladopora acupicta* Davis  
*Cladopora bifurca* Davis  
*Cladopora* (?) *gracilis* Davis  
*Cladopora gulielmi* Davis  
*Cladopora* (?) *imbricata* Rominger

*Cladopora labiosa* (Billings) [often confused with *Alveolites winchellana* (Miller)]  
*Cladopora* (?) *robusta* Rominger  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *amplissima* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *arbuscula* (Hall)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *bacula* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *convexa* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *cymosa* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *emmonsi* (Rominger)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *eximia* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *epidermata* (Rominger)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *ocellata* (Davis)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *radiciformis* (Rominger)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *ramosa* (Rominger)  
*Favosites* “*Emmonsia*” *tuberosa* (Rominger)  
*Favosites argus* Hall  
*Favosites biloculi* Hall  
*Favosites clausus* Rominger  
*Favosites clelandi* Davis  
*Favosites goldfussi* d’Orbigny  
*Favosites hamiltoniae* Hall  
*Favosites mundus* Davis  
*Favosites patellatus* Stumm  
*Favosites pirum* Davis  
*Favosites placentus* Rominger  
*Favosites proximatus* Stumm  
*Favosites quercus* Davis  
*Favosites ramulosus* Davis  
*Favosites rotundituba* Davis  
*Favosites turbinatus* Billings  
*Lecfedites canadensis* (Billings)  
*Platyaxum foliatum* Davis  
*Platyaxum frondosum* (Nicholson)  
*Platyaxum orthosoleniskum* (Werner)  
*Platyaxum undosum* Davis  
*Pleurodictyum cornu* Stumm  
*Pleurodictyum cylindricum* (Michelin)  
*Pleurodictyum insigne* (Rominger)  
*Pleurodictyum maximum* (Troost)  
*Pleurodictyum michelinoides* (Davis)  
*Pleurodictyum papillosa* (Davis)  
*Pleurodictyum planum* (Davis)  
*Pleurodictyum spiculata* (Greene)  
*Pleurodictyum wardi* Greene  
*Romingeria commutata* Beecher  
*Romingeria fasciculata* Davis  
*Romingeria umbellifera* (Billings)  
*Romingeria uva* Davis  
*Romingeria vannula* Davis  
*Striatopora* (?) *alba* Davis  
*Striatopora bellistriata* Greene  
*Striatopora cavernosa* Rominger  
*Syringopora hisingeri* Billings  
*Syringopora perelegans* Billings  
*Thamnopora distans* (Nicholson)  
*Thamnopora limitaris* (Rominger) **[Figure 8]**  
*Thamnoptychia alternans* (Rominger)  
*Thamnoptychia tuberculata* (Stumm)  
*Thamnoptychia vermiculosa* (Leseur)

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## The Rugose Corals

Rugose corals get their name because the exterior of many forms have a wrinkly appearance. They are often called “horn corals” because their form may resemble the horn of a cow or goat. In fact, the largest horn coral (*Siphonophrentis elongata*, figure 1) was referred to as a “petrified buffalo horn” by settlers due to its shape.

Horn corals show a wide variation in form, although external form is not a distinguishing feature for identification. Most rugose corals have septae radiating from the center (like bicycle spokes) when observed in cross-section (figure 2).

*Cystiphyllodes* is characterized by dissepimentaria, bubble-like structures forming layers. Some have a both as internal structures (figure 3).

Looking closely at the overall shape and internal structure, one can appreciate the enormous variety of the 212 species that have been

recorded at the Falls of the Ohio. It is easy to understand why identifying new species is so difficult.

Further “complicating” factors - many rugose corals are not solitary, but colonial - and some may be either form!

Individual corallites in a colonial coral may grow nearly parallel to neighbors, but occasionally contact with them, such as *Eridophyllum* (figure 4).

If the rugose coral is massive and the individuals are in full contact with one another, it forms beautiful geometric patterns, like *Prismatophyllum prisma* (figure 5). The largest colonial rugose coral on the Indiana shore (directly below the Interpretive Center)



figure 2.  
*Coral septae*



figure 3.  
*Cystiphyllodes*



figure 4.  
*Eridophyllum*



figure 5.  
*Prismatophyllum*

is a *Prismatophyllum* colony 11 feet (3.3 m) across. A 30 foot (10 m) colony is reported on the Kentucky side!

## Tabulate Corals

Tabulate corals are always colonial. Their name is derived from a flat shelf (tabula) that separates individuals vertically in the colony. The individual corallites that make up the colony are typically 0.5 - 8 mm wide (figure 6). Despite the small individuals, these corals can be quite large. The most common coral is a form called *Favosites (Emmonsia)*. *Emmonsia* was given its own genus name, but some specialists consider it to be a sub-genus of *Favosites*. These corals vary from a few inches (or centimeters) to 15 feet (4.5 m) across. The larger colonies probably had hundreds of thousands (or millions) of small corallites living at one time.

The forms of tabulate corals reflect the environment. As in a modern reef, colonial corals can grow in mounds,

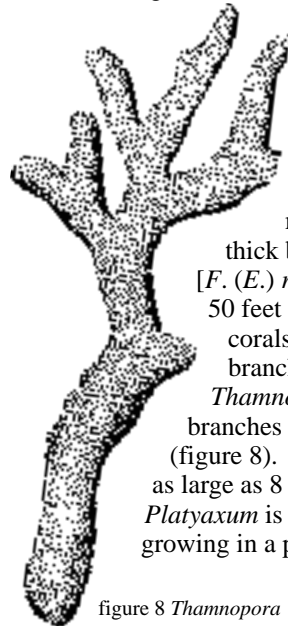


figure 8 *Thamnopora*

bushes, sheets and plates. The first two forms are dominant, typical of high energy conditions, where there is strong wave action and currents. *Favosites (Emmonsia)* grows in mounds (figure 7) and very thick branching forms. The largest [*F. (E.) ramosa*] form colonies over 50 feet (15 m) across with other corals filling in the space between branches. *Alveolites* and *Thamnopora* grow in bushes with branches from 1/4" to one inch thick (figure 8). The latter occurs in colonies as large as 8 feet (2.4 m) across.

*Platyaxum* is an uncommon coral, growing in a plate-like form.



figure 6. tabulae



figure 7.  
*Favosites (Emmonsia)*

Two other corals deserve particular mention because they are unlike other tabulate corals. *Syringopora* grows in mound or bush-like form consisting of curved, straight or gently undulating tubes (figure 9). *Aulocystis* is a dendroid (branching) coral with a tight bush-like form (figure 10).

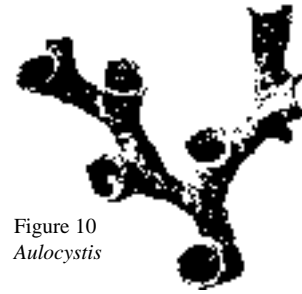


Figure 10  
*Aulocystis*



Figure 9  
*Syringopora*

## A Devonian coral garden

There are 212 species of corals known from the fossil beds at the Falls of the Ohio. Not all occur in the “coral beds;” some may be found in the slightly higher (younger) rock layers. Additional studies may reveal more or fewer species. It takes experience to identify corals with accuracy. The random orientation of many of the solitary rugose corals make identification even more difficult.

Look for evidence of Devonian hurricanes. Can you find inverted colonies? Corals should look like figure 7, as they grow toward the sun. Many corals radiate toward a center point, indicating they are upside-down (figure 11). Some of these colonies were more than 1000 pounds! Others are on their side. Many colonial corals show rhythmic banding, whether these are daily seasonal or lunar cycles are unknown. Horn corals that are “J” or “L” shaped are were also jostled by storms, and bent back towards sunlight (see figure 1).

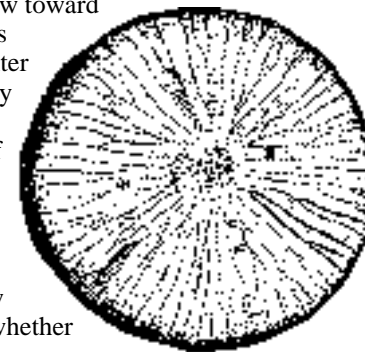


figure 11. Inverted coral

The coral beds are best exposed late summer through the fall. Visitors have the rare opportunity to walk on an ancient sea floor to get a good idea how corals were distributed if one could go back in time with snorkeling gear.

## References & Suggested Reading

\*Davis, W. J., 1885, *Kentucky Fossil Corals*, Kentucky Geological Survey.  
Greb, Stephen F., et al, 1993, *Fossil Beds of the Falls of the Ohio*, Kentucky Geological Survey.  
Oliver, W. A., Jr., 1976, *Devonian Noncystimorph Colonial Rugose Corals in the New York Area*, U. S. Geological Survey, Professional Paper 869.  
\*Stumm, E.C., 1964, *Silurian and Devonian corals of the Falls of the Ohio*: Geological Society of America Memoir 93.

\* Out of print, check public or university library.

## Names in Current Use (1997)

### Rugose Corals

*Acinophyllum mclareni* Fagerstrom  
*Acinophyllum stokesi* (Milne-Edwards & Haime)  
*Acrophyllum clarki* Davis  
*Acrophyllum conigerum* (Greene)  
*Acrophyllum ellipticum* Davis  
*Acrophyllum oneidaense* (Billings)  
*Aemulophyllum exiguum* (Billings)  
*Aemulophyllum exiguum elongatum* (Davis)  
*Amplexiphyllum cruciforme* (Hall)  
*Amplexiphyllum tenue* (Hall)  
*Aulacophyllum conigerum* Davis  
*Aulacophyllum mutabile* Davis  
*Aulacophyllum perlamellosum* (Hall)  
*Aulacophyllum pinnatum* Hall  
*Aulacophyllum sulcatum* (d'Orbigny)  
*Bethanyphyllum arcifossa* (Hall)  
*Bethanyphyllum depressum* (Hall)  
*Bethanyphyllum nanum* (Davis)  
*Bethanyphyllum pocillum* (Davis)  
*Bethanyphyllum prateriforme* (Hall)  
*Bethanyphyllum robustum* (Hall)  
*Bethanyphyllum validum* (Hall)  
*Bethanyphyllum vesiculatum* (Hall)  
*Blothrophyllum romingeri* Stumm  
*Blothrophyllum trisulcatum* (Hall)  
(Needs to be studied. Neither *Blothrophyllum* or *Tabulophyllum*)  
*Bordenia knappi* Hall  
*Breviphrentis halli* (Edwards & Haime)  
*Breviphrentis nitida* (Hall)  
*Breviphrentis ovalis* (Hall)  
*Breviphrentis (?) planima* (Hall) [further study needed]  
*Bucanophyllum ohioense* (Nicholson)  
*Cayugaea (?) subcylindricum* Stumm  
*Cladionophyllum cicatriciferum* (Davis)  
*Coleophyllum romingeri* (Hall)