

# Ferenc Legányi – the polyhistor hermit



Ferenc Legányi was born in Budapest in 1884, but he lived in Eger in most of his life – from the age of 14. The Legányi family bought a farmlying between the south side of the Nagy-Eged hill and the Kis-Eged (Small-Eged), where plenty of agricultural developments were brought into practice. They started to build up terraces into the hillside and planted vineyards and orchards. Meanwhile enormous amount of soil and stones were moved manually. Ferenc Legányi became interested in archeology because of the emerging fossils.

He made up his huge, own collection from the 40 million year-old fossilized fish and leaf remains turning up from a ditch on the south side of the Kis-Eged also raising the interest of the experts of the Hungarian National Institute of Archaeology. From that point on he was in contact with the well-known experts in the country and his interest turned also towards other territories of the Bükk. The ditch – from where his collection was revealed – cannot be found any more as it was filled up during agricultural activities and the stream running across their yard under the Eged has been directed back to the valley of the Osztoros stream this way avoiding the Kis-Eged.

Even a small fish pond was established on the stream. Later the yard was sold at an auction, and the building itself became the property of Egervin, the winery of Eger, having already been closed



down by now. The ruins has become fully weedy, the streams are diverted elsewhere, the orchards and vineyards are completely devastated. However, the vineyards have been recultivated since the 2000s, only the ancient almond trees blooming each and every spring keep the memories of the once prosperous estate.

## ENGAGED TO SCIENCE IN HARD TIMES AS WELL

In the beginning of the 1920s a rock road was planned to be built together with Eger in order to connect the city with the vineyards of Eged hill. Based on the initial agreement the expenses would have been shared equally between the city of Eger and the Legányi family. The construction progressed rather slowly, and by the time the road had been finished, the Legányi family engrossed huge bank loans, but finally managed to pay the workers. However, the city did not keep its word and never paid its share, so the estate of the indebted family was sold at an auction. Only a cart and two horses were left from the estate, and the family moved in a house in Eger in Diófakút Street.

*„És mire elkészül az út,  
magam sem hittem volna tán  
már foghatunk és menni kell,  
két ló maradt a vész után.”*

he wrote this poem in his diary

From then on he earned his living by transportation and as a sump-man. This time he started

to be interested in the clay field of the Wind brick factory, where he discovered many new fossilized species. The sediment of the shallow sea having waved here 25-22 million years ago, preserved numerous skeletons of different creatures, like echinus, corals, comb shells and tower snails. Based on his researches this period of the geological era was named „the layer of Eger” in literature.

He donated his collection to museums, to the Institute of Archaeology, to the Museum of Natural History and to the Hungarian National Museum. In the II. World War and in 1956 these collections and the host institutes got damaged at a great extent, moreover a significant part of them was totally destroyed. Ferenc Legányi himself could not bear the stress of the war either: while cartage his hands got frozen, so from that time on from early autumn until late spring he wore sheepskin gloves and never shook hands any more. That is how he became the eccentric hermit, who the kids stared at tremulously, as he wore gloves day and night, he had shabby clothes, big boots and a big skep on his back, walking continuously back and forth in the Bükk collecting stones. His outcast was highly intensified due to his ancestry as he became politically incorrect in the newly formed communist system.



## HAPPY YEARS

1951 brought the change in the life of the outcast scientist: due to the constant support of the academic life, the political system became merciful to him and he was employed as a research associate in the István Dobó Castle Museum. From that time he could start to concentrate merely on his research: he kept visiting the Bükk, dissecting and ordering his collection. In addition to that he collected severe archeologic evidences, as well as he was interested in ethnography: he noted down many folk-songs, collected also ethnographical relics, copied local historical documents – this way developing the collection of the Castle Museum.

He discovered many new deposits on the north-west side of the Bükk in these years, from where the plenty of new species were described. His ‘Godchildren’ as Legányi referred to them usually, will perpetuate the memory of him forever. Altogether 16 cetosauri were named after him. His lifework develops the collections of the country’s renowned museums.



**‘He left behind a geological hammer, a manuscript of 1300 pages and 80 thousand fossils’** (Ferenc Ilosvai, 1989) – when he died after long sickness in the spring of 1964 in a nursing home in Lesencetomaj.

He rests in peace in Kisasszony Cemetery, his headstone is a more than 10 million years old fossilized trunk.



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