

# **THE TERRITORY**

## **Changes in the Land: The Natural History Inheritance of the Western Reserve**

### **The 500 Million Year Old Foundation**

**Joseph Hannibal**

The foundation of the Western Reserve consists of a thick sequence of sedimentary rock, preserving a record of vastly different environments from that of today. This rock was laid down as sediment from about 500 million years ago until about 300 million years ago. The resulting surface and subsurface rocks have been exploited for various products including sandstone, natural gas, coal, and salt. And exposures of the upper layers of this rock provide much valued scenic features, many of which are now preserved in parks. The greatest treasures found in these ancient rocks, however, are their fossils, which, together with analysis of the rock layers themselves, provide us with an increasingly detailed picture of the ancient seas and landscapes that once existed in what is now the Western Reserve. The most fascinating of these rock layers are the Upper Devonian shales which are exposed along streams and roadcuts across the northern part of the Western Reserve. These rocks have long yielded remains of ancient fish, crustaceans, and plants, some resembling modern forms, others being quite different. These organisms lived on or offshore of a shallow, continental sea that laid on the flank of a great land mass encompassing parts of what are now North America and Europe.