

FOSSIL HUNTING Hobby, or obsessive compulsive disorder?

I see a man kneeling on a deserted beach, his gaze fixed to the ground. It is 6 a.m.; the rain has long since penetrated his outer garments. The shipping forecast has estimated a north easterly 4 to 5 but its stronger. Fluid from his eyes and nose stream in a horizontal fashion as he picks something up and appears to examine it very closely.

Irrational behaviour you may think. But when does an interest become an obsession? Or is it just a little of both. Let us take a brief look.

An obsession is an intrusive repetitive thought, which comes into the mind against his/her will. These intrusions can often have a detrimental affect on the smooth running of the household and harmony with ones spouse. Compulsions are repetitive actions carried out time and time again to reduce anxiety by those 'fossil thoughts'. Rituals (even though they are often recognised by close family members as being irrational) are still carried out despite attempts to persuade them otherwise. These rituals often include the preparation and presentation of all specimens but can in more extreme cases involve cataloguing. To the on-looker this can be an exhaustive experience. Common thoughts often concern the 'state of the tide' and ritualistic, actions (quite strangely) often increase at the onset of a full moon. To resist performing these rituals would be futile and only result in mood swings, severe anxiety and considerable discomfort. Obsessions and compulsions are maintained by a cycle of fearful thoughts, anxiety, rituals and relief.

FEARFUL THOUGHTS

Often triggered by the knowledge that your D.I.Y checklist is growing, a visit to the in-laws (on a low spring tide) is imminent and your chances of getting to the beach this weekend are as likely as a long hot summer.

ANXIETY

This very unpleasant sensation often includes restlessness and the inability to concentrate. Anxiety inevitably leads to those strong ritualistic tendencies or in layman's term's to play with your fossils'.

RITUALS

Satisfied that prep work, presentation and cataloguing have reached varying degrees of correctness (or disorder) now to the correct packing of that rucksack. Rituals can be very difficult to 'get right' and often lead to more rituals e.g., fossil licking or blowing.

Now, back to that rucksack to make sure you've packed absolutely everything.

RELIEF

On the beach, on my *knees*, all anxiety relieved as I look closely at the fossil in the palm of my hand and grin into a strong north easterly wind.

For me, my hobby is obsessive and compulsive but to call it a disorder, NO FEAR!

Tony Vale