

THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF THE CRETACEOUS PERIOD IN WEST CENTRAL ARGENTINA.

Eduardo A. Musacchio and Patricia Vallati. APGSJ - UNPSJB.
Ciudad Universitaria, 9000 Comodoro Rivadavia. Argentina

The need of a tripartite division for the Cretaceous Period is analyzed in terms of the geological and paleontological changes registered in the continental biota that took place at the end of the Barremian and during the Aptian. In this sense, a wide distributed regional epeirogeny, the rising of the angiosperms, the first record of non marine ostracodes and the setting of new paleobiogeographic relationships, are now focused.

A place from Patagonia exhibiting the biostratigraphic changes in the continental environment at the beginning of the "middle" Cretaceous epoch, is now introduced as possible reference section. In the district of Bajada del Agrio, west central Argentina (Neuquén Basin) the sequence of regressive early Cretaceous marine deposits carrying Barremian ammonoids (Agrio Formation) is well exposed. They are transitionally covered by brackish sediments (Huitrín Formation). On turn, they are also conformably covered by Late Barremian to Aptian non-marine deposits. These are the recurrent fluvial Rincón sandstones and the lacustrine Ranquiles Formation. The latter carries with the most significant biostratigraphic changes. This sequence is unconformably overlain by the "*Dinosaurian Beds*" with palynomorphs of Albian?- Cenomanian age at its lower part.

The outstanding biostratigraphic markers are the first local record of angiosperm pollen of the *Afropollis*-assemblage, charophytes of the local Zone of *Flabellochara harrisi*, the first record of ostracod species, as well as the decay of some "Wealdean fauna" elements.