

Enigmatic earliest life-form on Earth eaten to extinction by its successors

Strange and largely immobile organisms made of tubes were the first complex life on Earth. Appearing 579 million years ago, they thrived on the seafloor for some 37 million years, then vanished – [becoming a curiosity](#) we know only from faint impressions in the sandstone fossil record.

What made them die out? New fossil evidence from Namibia suggests that the Ediacarans, as these creatures are known, had their world turned upside by an [explosion of life forms](#) at the beginning of the Cambrian period 541 million years ago. Some of these may have evolved to eat their enigmatic predecessors and to bioengineer the environment in ways that left little hope for the passive Ediacarans.

The disappearance of the Ediacarans from the fossil record has long troubled biologists. Leading theories are a catastrophic mass extinction, that Ediacarans got eaten or had their habitat destroyed by newly evolved animals, or no longer left fossils because of a change in ocean conditions.

[Simon Darroch](#) of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., who has been studying Ediacarans, and his team took their search to southern Namibia, where outcrops stretching over a large area expose fossils covering the crucial few million years when the Ediacarans disappeared and the new animals of the Cambrian appeared.

The deposits showed a vastly increased number of trace fossils from Cambrian animals, showing they had already evolved and were breaking up sediment and disturbing the Ediacaran environment.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [The first complex life on Earth got eaten to extinction](#)