

## EARLIEST FISHES

The earliest fish [based on the fossil record, 'cause that is how we roll] evolved at least 518 million years ago in the Cambrian Period (Morris and Caron 2014).

Hmmm, that is unless you are a believer in Special Creation, in which case you believe that these fish were created much more recently than that [perhaps last Thursday?], and in which case you are reading the wrong book, a book that will only cause you pain and emotional distress. Sensitive as we are to the suffering of any sentient being, we suggest that you step away from this volume...smartly now...and get thee hither 3 aisles to your left, down by that fire extinguisher on the far wall, where you will find the Theology Section.

Where were we?

Oh, yes, right now it appears that fishes first evolved at least about 518 million years ago. We remind you that science has a nasty way of...well...marching on, and for all we know that date will change as more facts become known. However, at least as we sit here in our cold and lonely garret, our fingerless gloves pecking away on our Typing Machine, listening only to the sound of squabbling gulls and the distant rumble of the sea smashing into the bow of a superyacht owned, through a series of Byzantine shell corporations, either by a vegan sausage maker in Toowoomba, Australia, or by a Russian oligarch, the Cambrian period is what we have.

And what was this fish like? Well, it is called *Metaspriggina walcotti* [no common name as far as we can tell, but please do talk among yourselves, and see what you come up with]. And it did not look much like your typical modern-day fish...at all. Rather, it looked kind of worm-like.... likely with a primitive version of googly eyes. However, *M. walcotti* was definitely not a worm, having a number of characteristics typical of vertebrates, including (from our friends Morris and Caron 2014) "a notochord, a pair of prominent camera-type eyes, paired nasal sacs, possible cranium and arcualia [endoskeletal elements in which vertebrae form], W-shaped myomeres [muscle fibers typically found in fishes and other chordates], and a post-anal tail." The animal also had seven pairs of external gill arches (similar to modern jawed fishes), and perhaps anterior gill bars [likely the ultimate origin of jaws].

We should also mention that *M. walcotti* lived at the same time that the trilobites really took over the marine seafloor and, assuming for a moment that this fish was self-aware, it probably spent a great deal of its time mumbling something like "Is it just me or are there just a shit load of trilobites around here?"

