

Fossils

Fossils are preserved remains of animals and plants that lived millions of years ago made in sedimentary rock. Usually when something dies it is eaten or decays and therefore disappears. However, when an animal or plant dies it can get covered over with mud or sand, it can stay there and over a long time, become a fossil.

Dinosaurs

Fossils are essential to understanding about life a long time ago. Without them we would not even know that dinosaurs existed! People who study fossils are called palaeontologists and these are the people who have found out what we now know about dinosaurs. However, this only started 200 years ago, so we've only known about dinosaurs for 200 years!



Did you know?

- 'Sue' is the nickname given to most complete and best preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex specimen ever found.
- The word 'fossil' comes from an old word 'fossilis', meaning 'dug up'.
- Fossils are only found in sedimentary rock.
- The fossils in the pictures are called ammonites. It is the town symbol for Whitby in North Yorkshire. Whitby is good for fossil hunting and long ago, people thought that the ammonites were snakes turned to stone by St. Hilda!

How a Fossil is Made

When a plant or animal dies, their body sinks into mud or is buried by sand. This usually happens on the sea bed. Being buried preserves it from rotting or being eaten by other animals. Whilst it is underground, water and minerals seep into the bones and where the bones and body used to be and make a hard shape. This is squashed under more layers of sand, mud and eventually rock over many, many millions of years. Much later, palaeontologists or fossil hunters may find it as the rock in which it is encased becomes unearthed.

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Questions About Fossils

1. What does a palaeontologist study?

2. What is the nickname of the best preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton?

3. Why do you think fossils are never found in igneous rock?

4. Why do you think that the people of Whitby thought that the ammonites were snakes turned to stone by St. Hilda?

5. Why have we only got fossils to find out about dinosaurs?

6. What does the Latin word 'fossilis' mean?

7. How come the fossilised animals or plants haven't been eaten by other animals?

8. Why did the author use an exclamation mark at the end of the Fossil Facts section?

9. Why aren't there any fossils of cats that lived twenty years ago?

10. In the 'How a Fossil is Made' section, what does the word 'seep' mean?
