

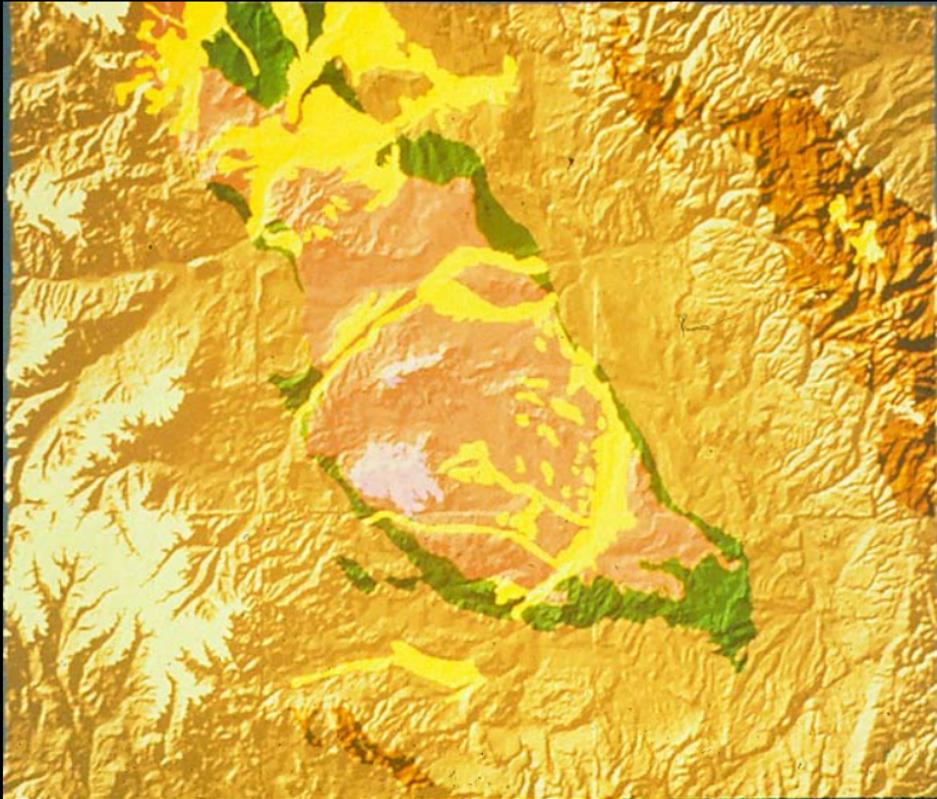
# Digging up a dinosaur



Introduction to Fossils

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Let's pretend we're all paleontologists and we want to find a dinosaur to learn about and put in our museum for people to see. That's the job of a paleontologist: to find fossils, learn about them, and make them available for scientists and other interested people.



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Where should we start looking? Paleontologists use geologic maps to find out where the best rocks are to find fossils in.



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They go to places where the rocks are well exposed and not covered with much vegetation, like these badlands...



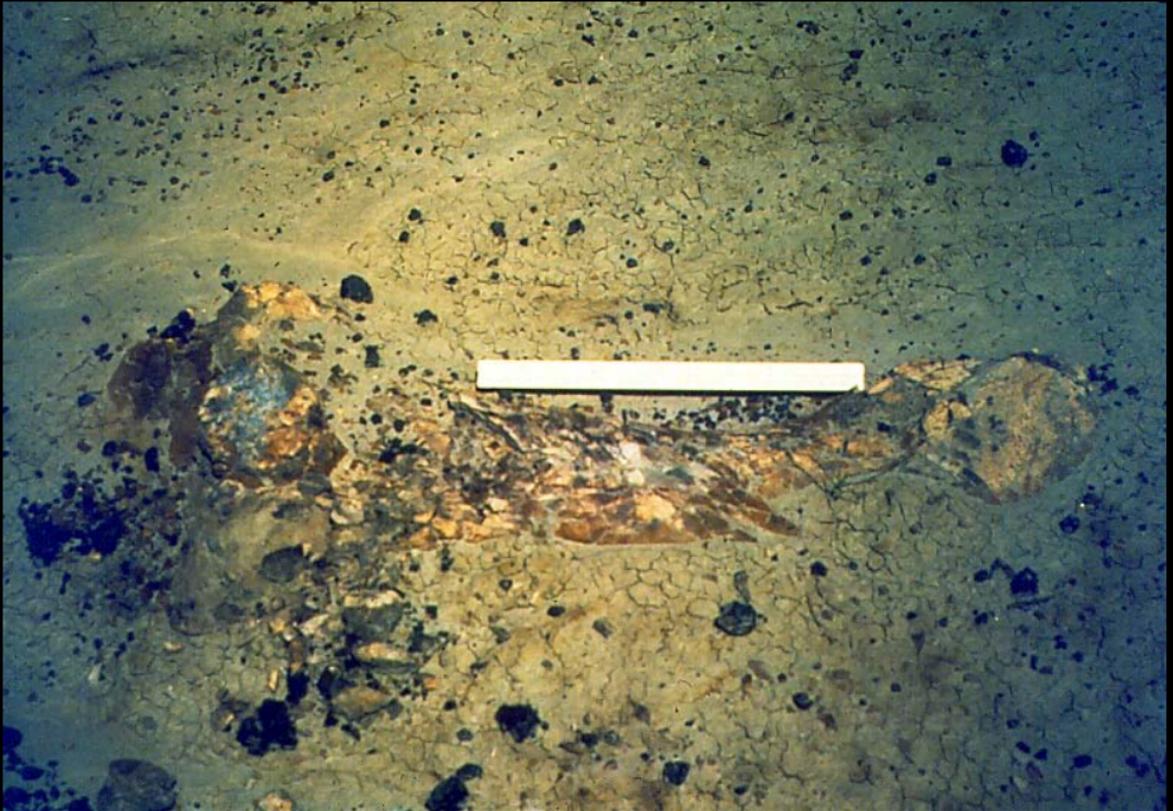
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or the side of a cliff.



They are prepared to spend a lot of time crawling on their hands and knees looking for small bones.



Sometimes the bones are broken up from being exposed to the weather.



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Paleontologists use cameras and notebooks to record everything they find. It is important not to disturb anything until the find has been recorded. Otherwise, information will be lost and the fossil will be useless.



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Here, someone has found the tip of a big, shiny tooth. He is careful not to scratch it as he moves the dirt from the top.



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It is a long, sharp tooth of Tyrannosaurus rex! The root of the tooth is at the right, near the nickel. The tip of the tooth, to the left, has serrations like a steak knife. It's a good tool for a hunter like T. rex. Since this is such a rare fossil, maybe the bones collected today will tell us something about the animal that no one knew before.



Most fossils are fragile and would break into pieces if we tried to pick them up. The best way to keep this from happening is to leave lots of dirt around the fossil and finish cleaning it when we get to the lab. Here, the paleontologist is digging a pedestal around the tooth so he can loosen it from the ground.



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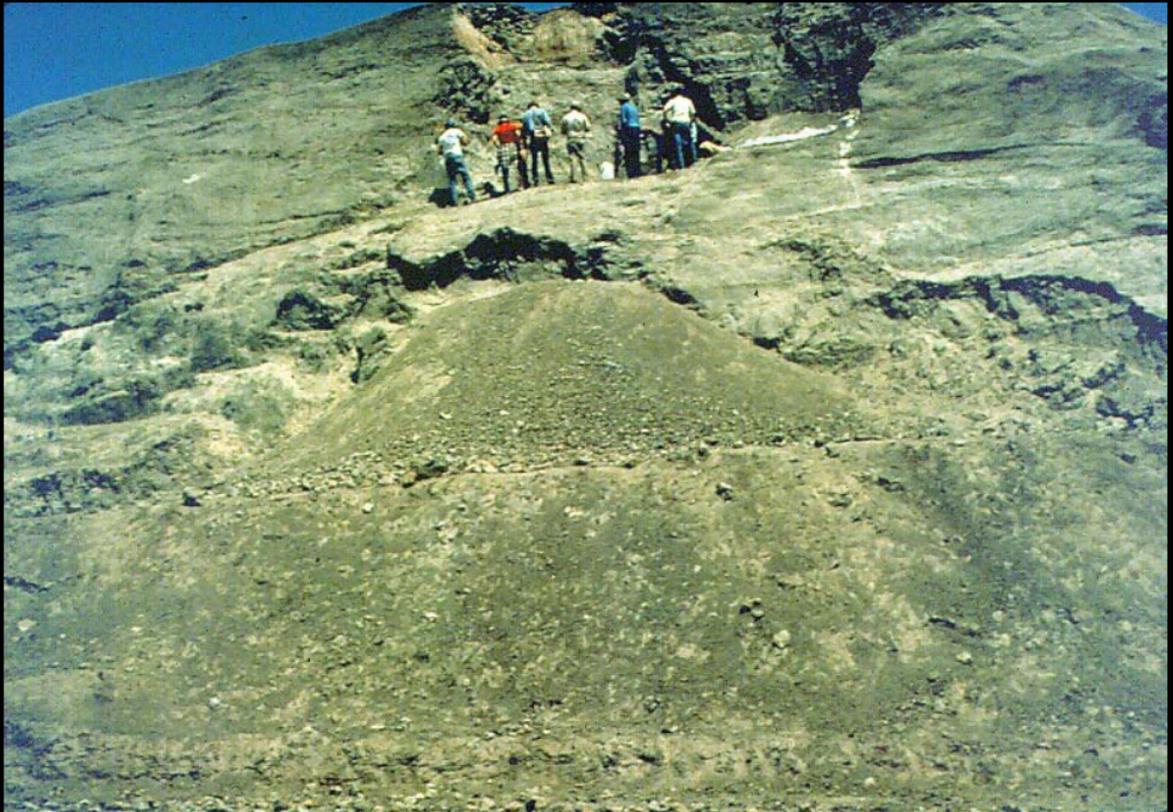
He will use cloth strips soaked in plaster to strengthen the block of dirt containing the fossil.



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The paleontologist puts cloth strips soaked in plaster on all sides of the block. After a few minutes in the hot sun, the plaster will dry and the fossil will be removed from the ground in a neat package.



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Meanwhile, the rest of the crew has found more of the skeleton on the nearby hillside.



It is the tail bones of the T. rex, all in a row.



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The crew digs a pedestal around the tail, too.



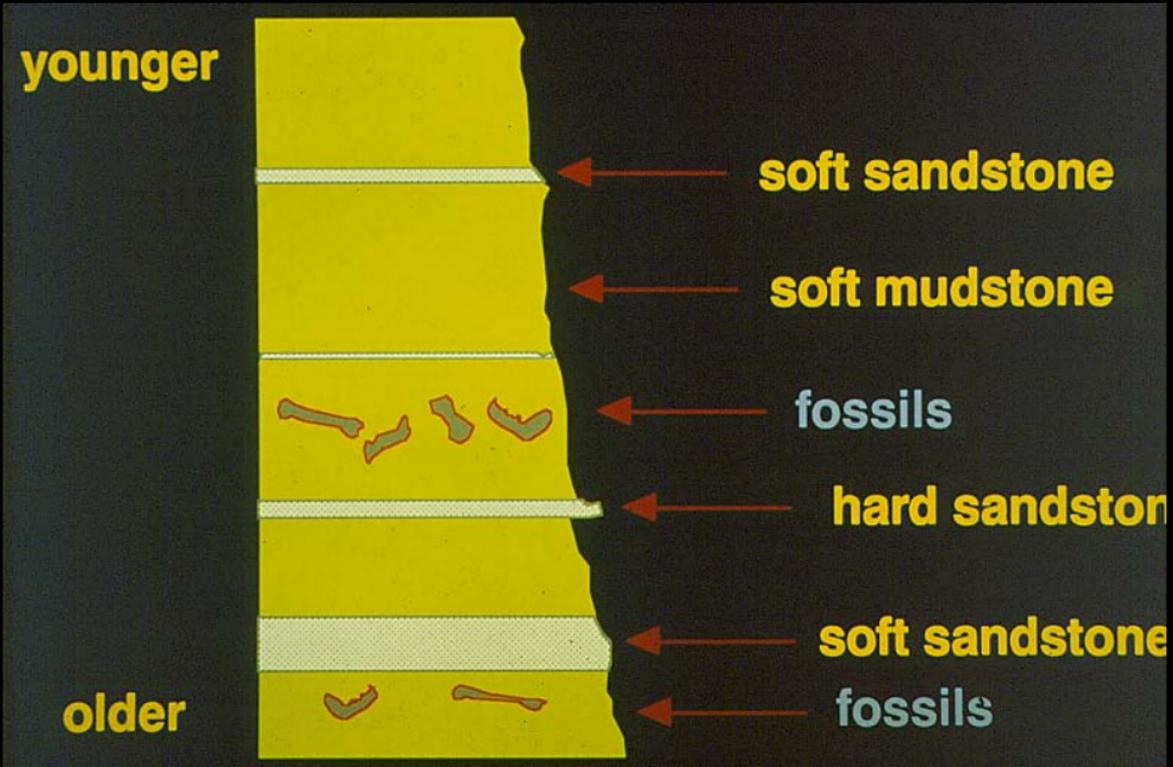
Next they put a giant cloth and plaster bandage on the top of the tail to protect it.



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Then they dig trenches underneath and wrap bandages around the whole thing. They use steel rods to make the big package stronger. After three days of work the tail is finally ready to be taken to the museum.



When a paleontologist finds fossils, he or she has to take careful notes about where they were found. Keeping track of where, in the stack of rocks, fossils are located is important because things found down low are older than things found above. Paleontologists also write down the type of rocks they find fossils in because this may give them clues about the environment where the plant or animal was fossilized. (This is an image of what paleontologist call a stratigraphic column)



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Paleontologists know that they must be prepared before they go into the field to collect fossils. And there are lots of things to remember. Being a paleontologist is as much work as it is fun.  
(Paleontologist examining rocks)