

Fossils In North Dakota

FIND is a newsletter dedicated to helping young readers (in age or spirit) express their love of fossils and paleontology, and to help them learn more about the world under their feet. Each issue will be broken up into sections including Feature Fossils, Travel Destinations, Reader Art, Ask Mr. Lizard, and more!

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<https://www.dmr.nd.gov/ndfossil/kids/>



Feature Fossil: Our FIRST Mosasaur

This is a story of discovery, loss, and mystery. In 1981, Dr. John Hoganson began his work with the ND Geological Survey as a surface geologist. With the creation of a ND State Fossil Collection in 1989, the paleontology program was established, and Dr. Hoganson continued his career working with fossils until his retirement in 2014.

Most people who have dug with us know our first official Public Dig began in 2000, in the Pembina Gorge. To have a public dig however, you have to know there are fossils around – you don't want to bring a whole crew of people out to a site without knowing something is there. On October 6, 1996, he and colleagues traveled up to the Pembina State Museum, in Pembina, ND, to give a geology presentation. While there, locals convinced him to come check out a fossil producing site near Walhalla, ND. Upon surveying the area, they found dozens of mosasaur bones! Everyone was excited, and agreed to return the following summer to work on this new site. It would be a treasure-trove of information for locals, and ND prehistory.

Tragedy struck twenty days later, when the road near the site was widened – the bones were scraped away, and dumped down the hillside. The bones, preserved with soft gypsum, did not survive the destruction of the site. Roadwork continued in 1997 and 1998, and a few small fossils from fish and sharks

were removed, but no mosasaur.

Then, on September 10, 1999 while inspecting the area – more mosasaur bones were found slowly weathering out of the hill! The bones were collected in a plaster jacket (or cast), and temporarily taken back to the Johnsrud Paleontology Laboratory in Bismarck, ND where they were cleaned and repaired. They were then brought back to Walhalla, and put on exhibit at the Chamber of Commerce.

Time marched on, people came and went, and the fossils were moved to the library to be put on display. More people came and went, information was lost, and the specimen was moved into storage. In 2018, during one of their trips to Walhalla, Clint Boyd and Becky Barnes visited the library. While there, the librarians found out they ran the summer public fossil digs nearby, and asked them to take a look at a fossil they had in the back. They obliged, and were dumbstruck – it was the tail end off of a mosasaur!

Taking a closer look, they found field numbers on the bottom of the plaster jacket – it was one of Dr. Hoganson's numbers. The pieces began to fall in to place! They loaded up the specimen to bring back to Bismarck again, so the specimen could be cleaned up a little more. The case was repaired, and the fossils



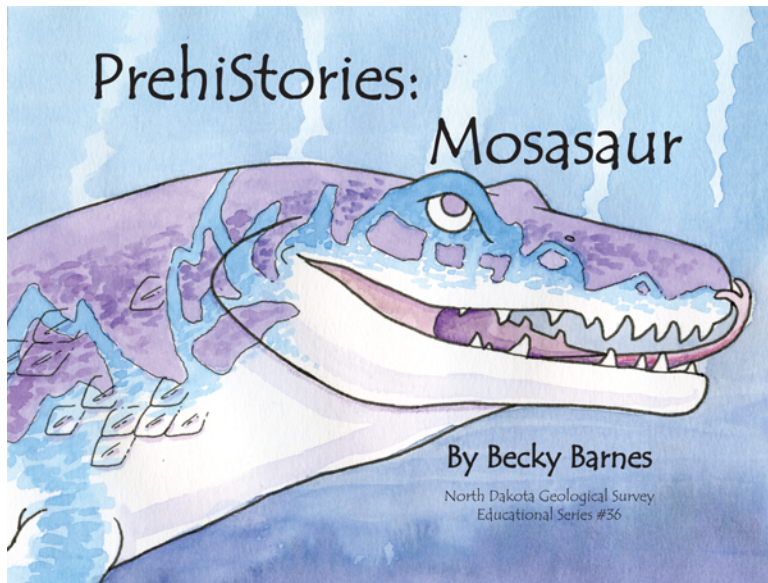
cleaned and new cradles made to keep everything together. Dr. Hoganson's notes were checked to find the When, Where, and How surrounding the fossil.

Finally, in January 2020, Clint Boyd and Becky Barnes travelled up to Walhalla, ND, to re-install the mosasaur exhibit. Now with a refurbished home in the Walhalla Public Library, and signs with information about the mosasaur (and mosasaurs in general). Becky got a little carried away, and inspiration struck one night. There are not many kid-friendly books out about mosasaurs, so she decided to make one.

The first in the series of what will be called "PrehiStories" is about this mosasaur! It is available free online at:

https://www.dmr.nd.gov/ndfossil/paleo_primer/

It fits perfectly on an iPad or tablet. Feel free to download and read! If you're more of a physical-book type of person, then you can purchase a hardcopy at the State Museum and Heritage Center's store.



STEM Events!

Paleo has been invited to participate in a STEM conference Wednesday March 18th at Bismarck State College. We will be working with local 5th grade classes, teaching about Natural Selection, and what influences it. To help us out, we'll be turning to a game called "Will You Survive?!"

We will also be attending the Gateway to Science STEM Spectacular on April 18th, from 1-4pm. This FREE event is located at 1810 Schafer Street, Suite 1, Bismarck, ND. Here we will be talking about Fossils and their composition, and how they can help us learn about past environments.

Coming Soon...

April 18: Gateway to Science STEM Spectacular

April 21: Prehistoric Fishing - join paleontologists Jeff Person and Becky Barnes on a prehistoric fishing trip. Learn about creatures that lived in the water millions of years ago! Free event, 10:45am in the Russel Reid Auditorium at the Heritage Center. Great for younger audiences - participation encouraged!



April 23: Earth Day! During the afternoon we'll be meeting with classes and schools. Once evening hits and the event is open to the public at the Career Academy, come visit with us! We will have a table with fossils to view and touch, and probably some give-away goodies.

May 29: Kickoff to Summer Reading day, from 10am-3pm at the Heritage Center. This year's theme is centered around fairy tales, mythology, and fantasy. The slogan is "Imagine Your Story". See how fossils have influenced our mythology and legends. People have been discovering fossils for thousands of years - what stories would YOU make after finding bones and shells from monstrous creatures, that you've never seen before?

COVID-19: Coronavirus

As with everywhere else, our plans may be subject to change with the ongoing developments surrounding the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic. Everyone stay safe, stay calm, and wash your hands!

