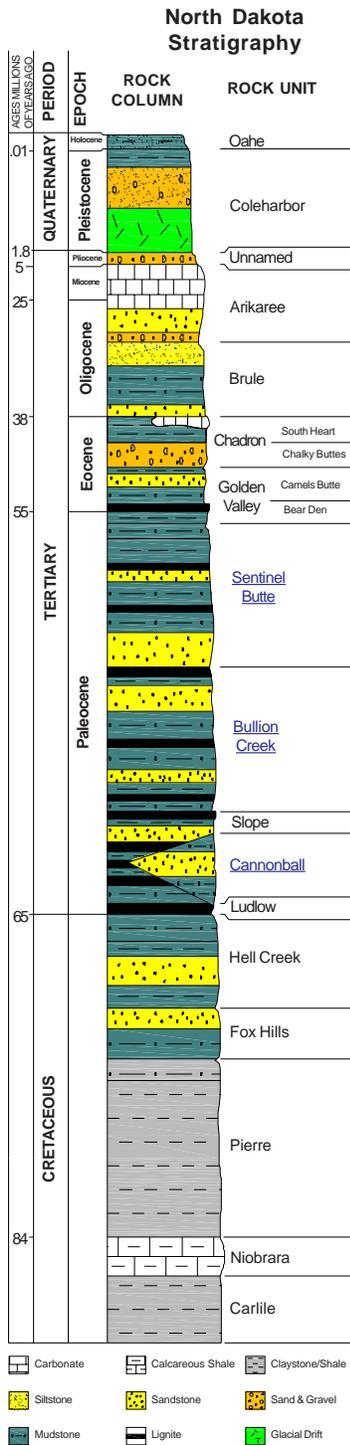


Champsosaurus gigas



Common Name:

Classification:

Class: Reptilia

Order: Choristodera

Family: Champsosauridae



Skeleton of the crocodile like champsosaur, *Champsosaurus gigas*, on display at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck. Collected from U. S. Forest Service-Dakota Prairie Grasslands land near Belfield, Billings County. Length of skeleton is 2 m. North Dakota State Fossil Collection ND 94-225.1.

Description:

Champsosaurus gigas (*champsos*=crocodile, *saurus*=reptile, *gigas*=very large) was one of several now extinct species of crocodile-like reptiles that inhabited ponds and swamps in western North Dakota about 60 million years ago when the climate of North Dakota was subtropical, probably similar to Florida's climate today. As suggested by its name, *Champsosaurus gigas* was the largest species within the *Champsosaurus* group attaining lengths of up to about 12 feet. *Champsosaurus gigas*, although not a true crocodile, resembled the living long-snouted gavial crocodylians. It is believed that *Champsosaurus gigas* was an aggressive underwater predator that fed on fish because of its hydrodynamic body, powerful back legs, and long snout lined with sharp, pointed teeth. It is likely that these animals spent much of their time submerged in water, lying on the bottom waiting for prey. When a fish swam by, the champsosaur would quickly lunge off the bottom after it propelled by its large, powerful back legs.



Champsosaurus gigas was an underwater predator that would lunge off the bottom after fish with its powerful back legs. Painting by Jerome Connolly courtesy of the Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul.



Locations where fossils have been found