

### North Dakota Scrubland

By the Oligocene, about 30 million years ago, North Dakota had changed dramatically from the subtropical, forested swampland conditions dominated by crocodiles during the Paleocene to a temperate, nearly treeless scrubland habitat supporting vast herds of exotic mammals. Mammal fossils from the Brule Formation are displayed in the North Dakota scrubland exhibit (fig. 8). Remains of about 60 species of mammals have been recovered from this formation in North Dakota. One of the more spectacular is the giant pig-like animal called *Archaeotherium*. A skull and cast of the skeleton of this animal are featured specimens in this display. Fossils of several other herbivores including the ubiquitous oreodont, *Merycoidodon*, a sheep-like animal are in the exhibit. One of the earliest horses, *Mesohippus*, lived in North Dakota at this time. This three-toed horse was similar to the modern horse in some ways but the adults were only about two feet tall. A skull and lower jaws of *Mesohippus* are displayed. Remains of some of the small mammals, insectivores, rabbits, squirrel-like animals are also in the exhibit.

Fossils of carnivores are not common in the Brule Formation in North Dakota. Skulls of *Dinictis*, a saber-toothed nimravid (cat-like animal), about the size of a small mountain lion, are accompanied by a skeleton (cast) of that animal perched on a cliff. A skull of one of the other carnivores, *Hyaenodon*, is also in the exhibit. Several species of turtles lived in North Dakota at that time including the large tortoise, *Stylomys*. Some of these were the size of the living Galapagos tortoise. Fossils of these animals are also in the exhibit.

A wall-size mural that reconstructs this 30 million-year-old scrubland habitat in North Dakota is a backdrop for the diorama.

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## ***North Dakota History: Readings about the Northern Plains State*** **receives national award**

A recent book detailing North Dakota's history from dinosaurs to the 21st Century (see June 2008 Newsletter) has been named a national award recipient by the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH). *North Dakota History: Readings about the Northern Plains State*, has been selected as a recipient of the AASLH's Award of Merit. This award is presented to recognize excellence for projects, individual achievement, and organizational general excellence.

*North Dakota History* is a collaborative publication of the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) and the North Dakota Center for Distance Education. The book is a collection of articles and images from more than a century of SHSND publications and also features narratives by several North Dakota scholars including survey paleontologist John Hoganson.

Although intended for use as a North Dakota history textbook for high school students, *North Dakota History* will appeal to anyone with an interest in the state's historic and prehistoric past.