

Fossils

If you are in Southwest Ohio, exploring fossils is as simple as going outside and finding some rocks.



Background

When we think of fossils, we immediately think of dinosaurs. Even though, the Greater Cincinnati region is a hotbed for fossils, dinosaur fossils are rarely found. Why is that? The reason is that fossils found in this region are all from the Ordovician Period (over 480 million years ago), which came before dinosaurs.

During the Ordovician, Ohio was covered by a shallow sea and so all of the commonly found fossils in this region are of ocean animals.

Even though dinosaurs might be tough to find, fossils are not. The bedrock in this region is all limestone and it is chock full of fossils.



About This Activity

Grades: **1st and up**

Activity Level: **Medium**

Materials: (optional) **Sandwich bags** for collecting small fossils; **Paintbrushes** for cleaning the fossils off; **Magnifiers**

Finding Fossils

All you need is limestone. Limestone is a sedimentary rock that makes up much of the bedrock in Southwest Ohio.

Anywhere that the bedrock is exposed is a great spot to find limestone and fossils. Some places to look would be along creeks, places where excavation has happened, and hillsides along roads. Be safe and ask for permission before taking any. Most schoolyards have a spot where limestone can be found – that can be part of the challenge.

Limestone is a rough rock that has a generally flat profile. Once you find some, just look on the surface and you should see a variety of fossil formations.

Happy Fossil Hunting!

For nearly 30 years, Imago has been leading students outside to study and learn from the natural world. Imago's Branching Out program leads outdoor education at schools, builds and supports outdoor learning stations and provides teacher resources for outdoor learning. Contact Imago for information on how we can help you get your students learning in nature.



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FOSSIL FIELD GUIDE

See if you can find the most common fossils found in our area



BRYOZOANS

They look like bones, but they are pieces of coral.

Difficulty: VERY EASY



CRINOIDS

You can find tiny little rings in the rocks or longer pieces called stems.

Difficulty: EASY



BRACHIOPODS

These look just like shells!

Difficulty: EASY



HORN CORAL

These look like horns, just like in their name.

Difficulty: HARD



CEPHALOPODS

These are long fossils with rings on them, but bigger than the crinoids.

Difficulty: HARD



TRILOBITES

They look like pill bugs, but we usually only find some of their pieces. Each of those shiny parts of the rock in the picture, is a piece of a trilobite not the whole animal.

Difficulty: VERY HARD



WHAT IS A FOSSIL?

A fossil is what's left of a living thing that was alive a long time ago. Or it can be something that an animal or plant left behind, like a footprint, or even poop!

Fossils can be left from dinosaurs or other animals like insects and birds. Plants can be fossils too!

Fossils are usually hard and made out of rock.

HOW IS A FOSSIL MADE?

Sometimes when an animal or plant dies, it falls into the water and sinks. Then it gets covered up with mud. The soft parts of an animal, like the skin, break down but the hard parts like the bones and shells can last a long time. After a long time, the mud hardens and turns into a rock that is in the shape of the animal!

CAN WE FIND FOSSILS HERE?

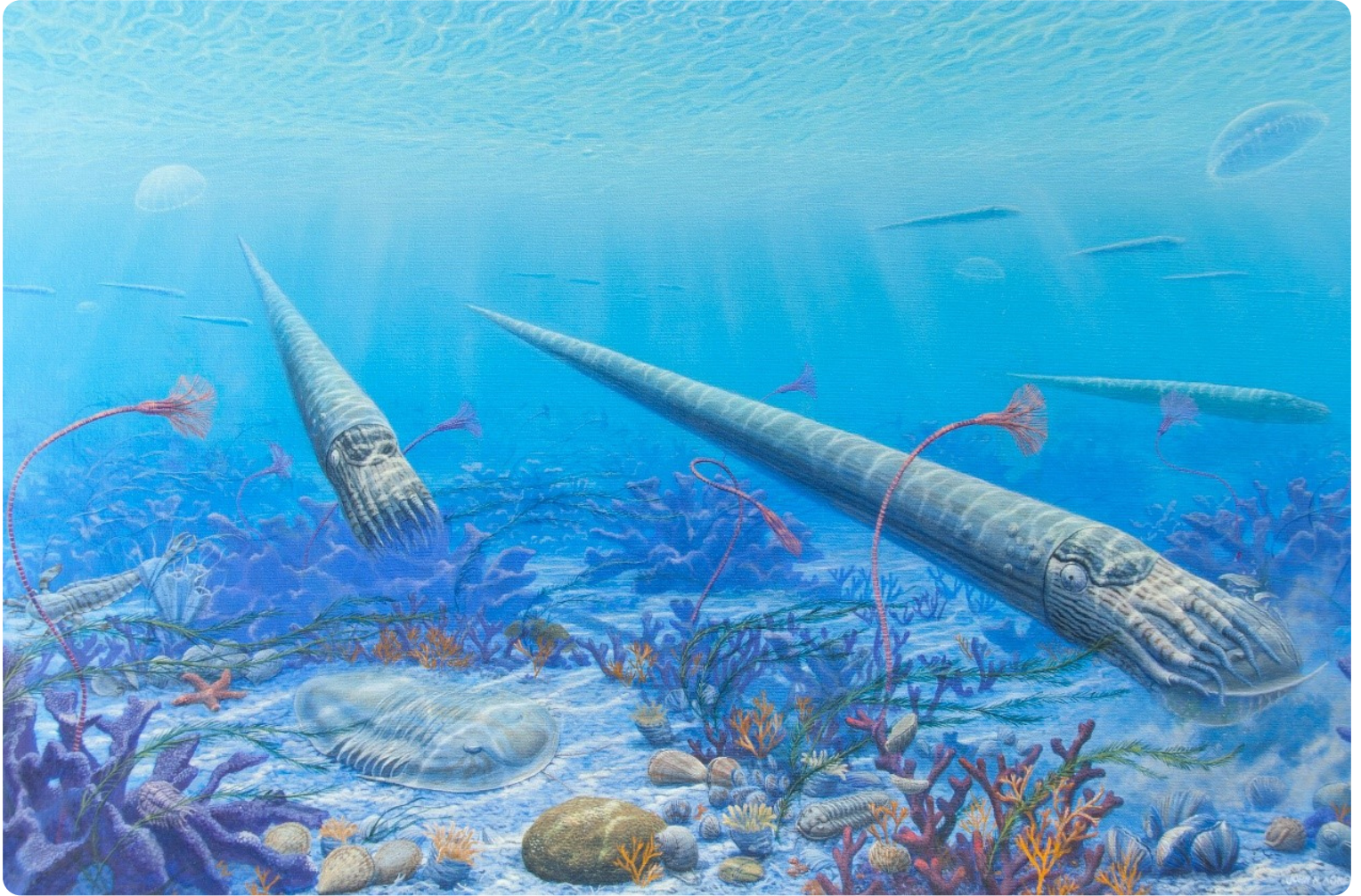
Absolutely! The Cincinnati area is full of amazing fossils that anyone can find. Scientists who study fossils are called **paleontologists**.

The most common fossils found here are from a time period called the **Ordovician**, which was over 480 million years ago!

During the Ordovician, our area was covered with a small ocean, so the fossils we find are usually sea animals.



Imagining Underwater Ohio



This is an artist's idea of what Southwest Ohio could have looked like during the Ordovician Period (480 million years ago). Ohio was covered by a shallow sea. That's why almost all of the fossils found in Ohio are of marine life.

