

A FOSSIL FORMS

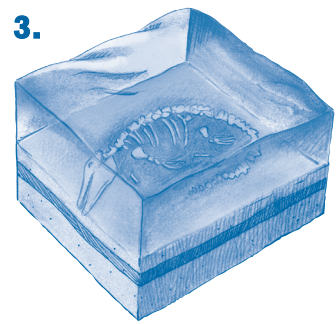
Only a small percentage of all living plants and animals become fossils. Plants and animals that die and are quickly buried by mud, sand, volcanic ash, or other sediments are most likely to become fossilized. Once the sediment has hardened, other factors—including oxygen, sunlight, microorganisms, and geologic forces—play an important role. Even with millions of years to form, a fossil is the result of a rare and unique process, and it must be found and analyzed in order to become part of the fossil record.

1.

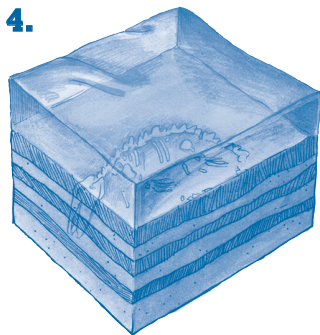
A *Tylosaurus* dies and sinks to the seabed.

2.

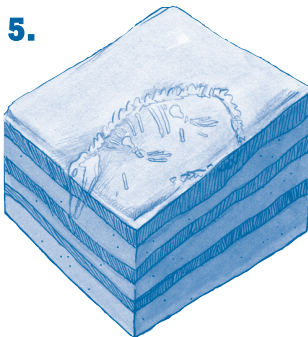
Animals and bacteria remove its flesh.

3.

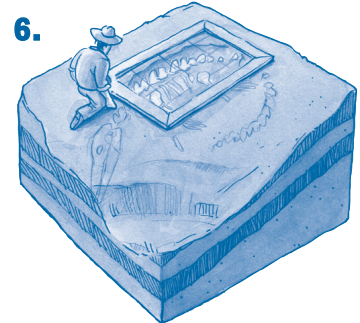
Over time, layers of sediment bury the remains.

4.

Slowly, the sediments turn into rock and preserve the remains as a fossil.

5.

Millions of years pass. Earth's plates shift and the ocean floor is uplifted. Waters retreat and seabeds become dry land.

6.

More time passes. Natural forces like wind and water erode layers of sedimentary rock, exposing the fossil.