

Illustration
MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Dinosaur Burrow

Oryctodromeus dug deep

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This family of [dinosaurs](#) (a species called *Oryctodromeus cubicularis*) lived about 95 million years ago in what is today the U.S. state of Montana. [Paleontologists](#) discovered the *Oryctodromeus* [fossil family](#) in 2006.

Oryctodromeus was a burrowing dinosaur. The Montana [burrow](#) reached about half-a-meter (1.6 feet) underground, twisting and turning more than 2.1 meters (6.9 feet) along the way.

QUESTIONS

- Dinosaurs, like *Oryctodromeus*, were terrestrial animals. This means they lived mostly on land. Today, many terrestrial animals dig burrows similar to *Oryctodromeus*. Can you name some burrowing land animals?
Answers will vary. **Armadillos** have burrows very similar to *Oryctodromeus*. Other burrowing land animals include **moles, meerkats, kangaroo rats, gopher tortoises,** and **puffins**.
- What are the benefits of having a burrow?
Answers will vary. Animals usually burrow to **find food, escape predators,** and **survive in extreme environments**.
- *Oryctodromeus* wasn't very big. The widest part of its body (its shoulders) was about 26-30 centimeters (10-12 inches). The burrow's tunnel was about 30 centimeters (12 inches) wide. The tunnel was a very tight fit! Why do you think *Oryctodromeus* dug such a narrow tunnel?
Answers will vary. A narrow tunnel probably **protected Oryctodromeus from larger predators** that could not squeeze into it.
- A burrow creates a "microclimate." A microclimate is a place where the environmental conditions are different from the surrounding area. Burrow microclimates are usually more moderate than the area outside the burrow. The burrow microclimate helped *Oryctodromeus* survive in habitats where it probably could not have survived outside. What are some of these extreme habitats?
Oryctodromeus and other burrowing dinosaurs were able to survive in **polar regions,** arid and windy **deserts,** and high **mountains**.

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
arid	adjective	dry.

bipedalism	<i>noun</i>	form of movement where an animal consistently uses two legs for standing or walking.
burrow	<i>noun</i>	small hole or tunnel used for shelter.
desert	<i>noun</i>	area of land that receives no more than 25 centimeters (10 inches) of precipitation a year.
dinosaur	<i>noun</i>	very large, extinct reptile chiefly from the Mesozoic Era, 251 million to 65 million years ago.
environment	<i>noun</i>	conditions that surround and influence an organism or community.
family	<i>noun</i>	group of organisms that come from the same ancestors and share similar characteristics. Family is also a classification in chemistry and math.
food	<i>noun</i>	material, usually of plant or animal origin, that living organisms use to obtain nutrients.
forelimb	<i>noun</i>	front limb of an animal, such as an arm, leg, wing, or flipper.
fossil	<i>noun</i>	remnant, impression, or trace of an ancient organism.
habitat	<i>noun</i>	environment where an organism lives throughout the year or for shorter periods of time.
microclimate	<i>noun</i>	small area where the climate differs within a larger climate region, such as "heat islands" in a city.
Oryctodromeus	<i>noun</i>	species of small, burrowing dinosaur.
paleontologist	<i>noun</i>	person who studies fossils and life from early geologic periods.
polar	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with the North and/or South Pole.
predator	<i>noun</i>	animal that hunts other animals for food.
terrestrial	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with the Earth or dry land.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- [New Scientist: Dinosaur Digger Found Its Own Burrow](#)
- [National Geographic News: Digging Dinosaur Discovered Inside Fossil Den](#)

Images

- [Instituto Ciencia Hoje: Um Dinossauro Cavador—Caçadores de Fósseis \(Portuguese\)](#)



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