

The Dino Express

Experts discover dinosaur footprints along an ancient route.

What do you get when you crowd dinosaurs, crocodiles, and flying reptiles onto the same route? A prehistoric traffic jam on a path known as the Dinosaur Freeway!

Paleontologists in Colorado recently announced that they found about 350 additional footprints on the pathway. A paleontologist is a scientist who studies dinosaurs. The Dinosaur Freeway is a large area of rocky roadways in Colorado and some nearby states. The site is covered with thousands of tracks from ancient creatures, including dinosaurs.



Courtesy of R. Kukihara
This plaster mold represents one of the footprints scientists found.

Paleontologist Martin Lockley and his team discovered the latest tracks. "When we first started looking at these tracks ... we had no idea there were so [many]," he told *WR News*. "It's very exciting when you find something new."

Beasts of the Boulevard

The Dinosaur Freeway extends for hundreds of miles through what is now Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The prints were made about 100 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. Many animals used the path to **migrate**, researchers say. To migrate is to move from one area to another.

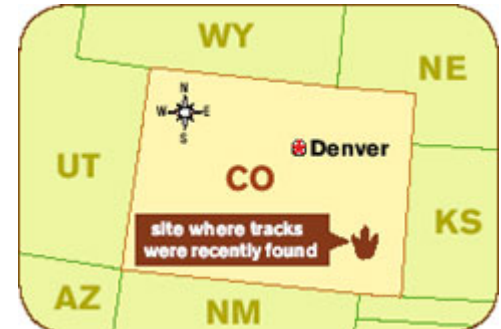


Louie Psihoyos/Corbis
Experts study dino tracks in Colorado.

Experts say many of the track marks were made by iguanodonts (ih-GWAH-noh-dahnz). The plant-eating dinos are known for their thumb spikes, which they may have used to defend themselves.

Other tracks are from plate-backed dinos called ankylosaurs (ANG-kih-loh-sorz). They most likely **lumbered** along the route in search of food, Lockley says. To lumber is to walk heavily.

Scientists also noticed marks from pterosaurs' (TEHR-uh-sorz) claws. The flying reptiles may have left the marks in the earth as they swooped down to catch fish, scientists say.



Leigh Haeger

Rough Roadblocks

Life on the freeway wasn't a walk in the park for dinosaurs, though. Lockley and his team also found footprints from giant crocodiles. They believe the killer crocodiles may have preyed on the plant-eating dinosaurs along the freeway.



Dea Picture Library/Getty Images
Crocodiles may have hunted dinos on the freeway.

There is no evidence of meat-eating dinosaurs near the route. Until recently, experts were not sure what could have hunted the plant-eating dinosaurs. "Suddenly, we began to realize that the main predators were the crocodiles," Lockley explains.

Many of the crocs were more than 13 feet long. That would have made the meat eaters big enough to take on iguanodons and other traveling dinosaurs.

"The crocodiles would **ambush** them when they were crossing streams," Lockley says. To ambush means to attack by surprise.

The Road Ahead

Paleontologists are eager to study the footprints in greater detail. The markings can offer clues about the animals' sizes and diets. They can also reveal how fast the creatures were, says Spencer Lucas. He is a paleontologist who has searched for dino tracks along the Dinosaur Freeway in New Mexico.

Lucas hopes that he and other scientists will continue to find tracks. That way, they can learn more about the dinosaurs.

"Dinosaurs were around for 150 million years, and there were many kinds living all over the planet," Lucas told *WR News*. "That tells me there are many more dinosaur tracks out there waiting to be discovered."

Dino Dates

Dinosaurs lived during a time in history called the Mesozoic (meh-zuh-ZOH-ik) Era. The Mesozoic Era lasted for about 183 million years. Read on to learn more about the days of dinos.



Highlights for Children/Getty Images

Triassic Period

Years: about 248 million to about 208 million years ago
Fact: The first dinosaurs roamed Earth during this period.



Richard Bizley/Photo Researchers, Inc.

Jurassic Period

Years: about 208 million to about 144 million years ago
Fact: The biggest dinos lived during this time. Many new types of dinosaurs appeared.



Mike Agliolo/Photo Researchers, Inc.

Cretaceous Period

Years: about 144 million to about 65 million years ago
Fact: Dinosaurs became extinct at the end of this period, possibly because a meteorite struck Earth.

The Dinosaur Tracker

Martin Lockley was one of the first paleontologists to study dinosaurs' footprints. *WR News* recently tracked down the scientist to talk about his work.

WR News: What was one memorable discovery you made on the Dinosaur Freeway?

Martin Lockley: When we found the first pterosaur track ... it gave us a whole new branch of study. Since we found that track a few years ago, we've been finding a bunch more. Just when you think you're not going to find anything new ... you find something.

WR News: What is a day searching for tracks like?

ML: It can be very hot and hard work, and other times it can be very pleasant. There



Courtesy of M. Lockley

are some days when we don't collect anything. There was a day last year ... we collected 300 to 400 pounds of rock!

WR News: Why did you decide to become a paleontologist?

ML: I was brought up hanging around nature. I like the outdoor life. [Then] in college I had a really inspiring teacher who got me excited about paleontology.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is a paleontologist?

- A a large area of rocky roadways
- B a scientist who studies dinosaurs
- C a dinosaur that doesn't eat meat
- D a footprint on a pathway

2. What does the author describe in this text?

- A Spencer Lucas found the first pterosaur track.
- B Footprints on the Dinosaur Freeway were made during the Triassic Period.
- C Paleontologists have discovered the tracks of the biggest meat-eating dinosaur.
- D Tracks recently found on the Dinosaur Freeway were made by iguanodons, ankylosaurs, and giant crocodiles.

3. The discovery of additional footprints on the Dinosaur Freeway will help scientists learn more about dinosaurs. What evidence in the text supports this statement?

- A The markings can offer clues about the animals' sizes and diets.
- B Experts say many of the track marks on the freeway were made by iguanodons.
- C The freeway extends for hundreds of miles through what is now Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, and Oklahoma.
- D The biggest dinosaurs lived during the Jurassic Period.

4. Paleontologists discovered about 350 additional footprints on the Dinosaur Freeway. These prints, made by dinosaurs and other ancient creatures, were made about 100 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period.

According to the chart on page four, what inference can be made about the dinosaurs that made these prints on the Dinosaur Freeway?

- A The dinosaurs that made these prints were some of the last living dinosaurs.
- B The dinosaurs that made these prints were the first dinosaurs to roam Earth.
- C The dinosaurs that made these prints were the biggest dinosaurs that lived.
- D The dinosaurs that made these prints were new types of dinosaurs.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A Plate-backed dinosaurs called ankylosaurs lumbered along the Dinosaur Freeway in search of food.
- B Martin Lockley was inspired to become a paleontologist by a teacher in college.
- C Paleontologists study footprints on the Dinosaur Freeway to learn more about dinosaurs.
- D Dinosaurs became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous Period, possibly because a meteorite struck Earth.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

“Life on the freeway wasn't a walk in the park for the dinosaurs, though. Lockley and his team also found footprints from giant crocodiles. They believe the killer crocodiles may have preyed on the plant-eating dinosaurs along the freeway.”

What does the phrase "a walk in the park" mean here?

- A an easy time
- B a rocky roadway
- C a short journey
- D a dangerous path

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Paleontologists are eager to study the footprints in greater detail _____ the markings can offer clues about the animals' sizes and diets.

- A unless
- B because
- C although
- D before

8. Read this sentence from the text.

“When we first started looking at these tracks ... we had no idea there were so [many],” he told WR News.”

Locate this quote from Martin Lockley on the first page. About how many tracks did Lockley and his team find?

9. List two questions Martin Lockley is asked in the interview on page five.

10. Compare the topics discussed in the interview to the main idea of the text. Support your answer with evidence from the text.
