



## FOSSILS

You have probably seen them at a museum, maybe if you are very lucky you have found some on a hill, on the beach or even dug one up in your back garden. But what exactly is a fossil?



A fossil is the remains of an animal or plant that died a long, long time ago - anything from a few thousand to hundreds of millions of years ago. When most animals or plants die they rot away or may be eaten by other creatures. But sometimes if they sink into soft mud or are gradually covered over by sand or sediment, the remains can turn slowly into a fossil.



The hard body parts like teeth and bones are gradually replaced over enormous lengths of time by minerals. These mineralised remains are often what we call fossils. A fossil bone for example has the same shape as the original object but is much heavier now as it is mineralised and like a rock.

Fossils are often found in sedimentary rocks like sandstone and limestone. These are

rocks formed from the gradual accumulation of sand or other sediments in seas long long ago. These old sea beds may now be hills or mountains as the earth has changed enormously over millions of years.

Not all fossils are the remains of animals or plants, but traces left behind by them. For example coprolites (fossil droppings), footprints, tooth marks, nests and even eggs can be fossilized. Other types of fossils include whole creatures like insects in amber, and those species preserved in ice or tar.

Fossils can be found all around the world and can vary in size from tiny pieces of plant leaves to entire giant dinosaur skeletons. Fossils are remarkably common and many people collect fossils as a hobby. A professional who studies fossils for a living is called a palaeontologist.



Fossils help us to understand about creatures and plants that lived long ago, and how life and the Earth have changed over time.

In Australia fossils may be found in numerous sites including Riversleigh in Queensland. Here fossils of extinct giant marsupials have been discovered.

Western Australian fossils can be found at the appropriately named Fossil Hill, amazing gogo fish fossils have been found in the Kimberleys, but the very best place to find a fossil is in a museum.

We visit schools with fossils and other nature and science exhibits.