

Welcome to Dinosaur Country!

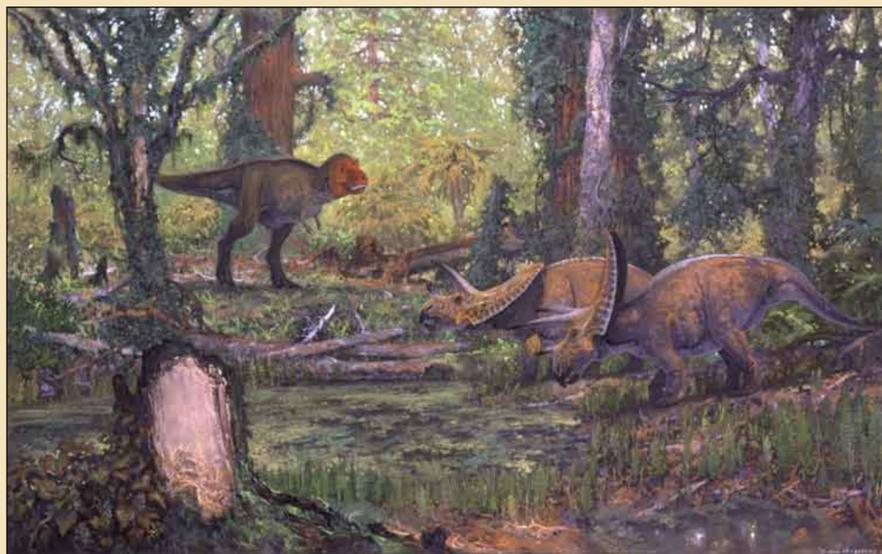


Montana is famous for its dinosaur fossils. Paleontologists have discovered seventy-five different species of dinosaurs in Montana, more than any other state in America. The oldest dinosaur fossils are found in rocks of the Jurassic Period, which are 155 million years old. They include the gigantic *Diplodocus*, the plated *Stegosaurus*, and the fearsome *Allosaurus*. Most Montana dinosaurs come from Cretaceous Period rocks, including the “raptor” *Deinonychus*, made notorious by the 1993 motion picture *Jurassic Park*, and the burrowing dinosaur *Oryctodromeus*. About 80-75 million years ago, nesting dinosaurs like *Maiasaura* and *Troodon* lived in the coastal plains next to the inland sea. Many millions of years later, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, vast herds of horned *Triceratops*, and the armored *Ankylosaurus* all lived in Montana. During the millions of years the dinosaurs ruled this region, the climate and geography were very different from today. Inland bays of the Pacific Ocean during Jurassic times and the Atlantic Ocean during the Cretaceous period provided Montana with a hot and humid subtropical climate.

Montana's big sky drew tourists even during the darkest days of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Thousands of people came to Montana to enjoy its wide open spaces and experience its Old West heritage. Good roads and cheap gasoline helped make it possible. The Montana Department of Transportation distributed colorful highway maps and brochures at ports-of-entry stations and information centers. Beginning in 1935, the MDT installed interpretive markers at roadside picnic areas to tell readers about Montana's exciting history. The signs told stories reminiscent of a cowboy spinning a yarn to a greenhorn. Over 250 roadside signs still introduce visitors and residents to Montana's history and geology.



Measuring 5-feet across, the T-rex skull pictured is the largest in the world. The specimen is now on display at the Museum of the Rockies at Montana State University. Photo courtesy of The Museum of the Rockies, John Little.



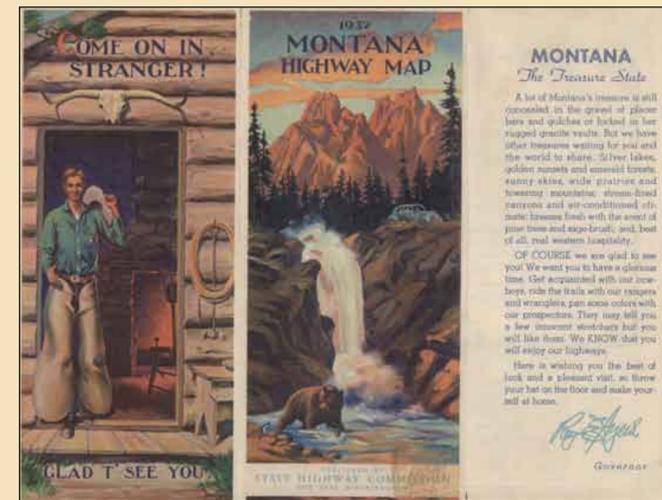
T-rex and Triceratops. Illustration courtesy of Douglas Henderson.

Paleo-Facts:

- American Museum of Natural History paleontologist **Barnum Brown** discovered the first *Tyrannosaurus rex* fossil in eastern Montana in 1903. Since then, at least **24 partial Tyrannosaurus skeletons** have been discovered in Montana.
- Discovered near **Bridger, Montana** in 1964, **Deinonychus** fossils suggested to paleontologists that some dinosaurs were warm-blooded and are the ancestors of today's birds.
- About **65 million years ago**, the **Western Interior Seaway** receded as the **Rocky Mountains** rose, pushing the shoreline farther east. Great rivers meandered through the coastal plain in a warm and humid climate, depositing sediment which would later become known as the **Hell Creek Formation**. Dinosaur fossils are frequently found in the Hell Creek Formation.

Paleo-Activity:

- Imagine eastern Montana 65 million years ago when it was much different. Instead of herds of cattle, enormous herds of **Triceratops** and **hadrosaurs** roamed the area. **Pterosaurs** soared across the sky instead of birds. What kinds of predators searched for prey in those days?



Montana Highway Map from 1937.