

Five Fossil Mysteries That Evolution Cannot Explain

Introduction. Since ancient times, fossils have aroused mystery and wonder. Where did they come from? What are they? Recent discoveries only add to the mystery -- until the Bible is included in the picture. No matter what the mystery, however, the place to begin looking for answers is always God's word (Proverbs 1:7; 2 Timothy 2:15). It is the one sure source of truth that sheds light on the history of life on earth.

This lesson is going to examine five random examples of fossil mysteries that beg for an explanation, if we want to better understand the past. Every year, new discoveries raise additional perplexing questions that inquisitive people want to answer.

We can never answer all the questions. But with practice at "fossil sleuthing" from a biblical perspective, at least we can get better at evaluating new discoveries in a God-honoring way that might yield new insights into God's person and work.

I. ***Life's Unexpected Explosion***

- A. Even 150 years ago geologists saw that the oldest fossils in the world sat atop thousands of feet of rock containing no fossils at all. The lowest fossil-bearing rocks were at that time beginning to be called "Cambrian" rocks, and the rocks beneath them "Precambrian." The Cambrian rocks contained abundant fossils, so passing from the Precambrian into the Cambrian looked like an "explosion" of fossils -- something which came to be known as the "Cambrian Explosion."
- B. When Charles Darwin published *On The Origin Of Species* in 1859, he considered the Cambrian Explosion one of the most significant challenges to his entire position. Why?
 1. In Darwin's view, species arise from other species in small steps over long periods of time. The more different two animal species were, the more evolutionary steps and the more time would be required to connect them.
 2. He also thought that all animals evolved from a single ancestor along an animal "family tree" -- species producing new species, similar to families producing the next generation in a human family tree.
- C. With the enormously different animals found in Cambrian rocks, Darwin inferred that an enormous amount of time and many, many generations of species must have come before the Cambrian. So why were there not any ancestors of these animals found as fossils in the Precambrian? Darwin suggested the fossils had been formed, but that

they had long since been eroded away. Since in most places rock was missing between the Cambrian and Precambrian, Darwin's idea seemed reasonable.

- D. So the search was on to find the missing fossils. Precambrian rocks were searched for fossils, and the world was searched for a place where Precambrian rocks had not been eroded away. So what has been the result of 150 years of searching?
- E. The missing rock layers were found in about a dozen sites around the world, and fossils were finally found in Precambrian rocks worldwide. But the fossils were not as expected. Precambrian fossils included bizarre organisms too different from Cambrian animals to be their ancestors, as well as fossils of bacteria and even microscopic animal embryos. But the ancestors of the Cambrian animals have never been found. If the rocks were able to preserve single cells, they could have preserved any animals that were really there. So it would seem that the Cambrian ancestors never really existed!
- F. Since evolution cannot explain the Cambrian Explosion, what can? Burying sea creatures on a worldwide scale could be the work of a global Flood. Why do we not find many fossils below the Cambrian? The earliest stages of the Flood, when the "fountains of the great deep were broken up" (Genesis 7:11), were apparently very violent. Many creation geologists believe these early stages of the Flood shaved most of the pre-Flood sediment off the ocean floors. This would have destroyed most of the fossils that had formed in the pre-Flood world. Then, only after the violence of the waters had partially settled, would the sediment and freshly killed sea-dwelling organisms begin forming the first sedimentary rocks and fossils from the Flood (known now as the Cambrian rocks and fossils). So only rarely, if at all, would pre-Flood fossils be expected beneath the earliest Flood rocks.

II. ***Those Not-So-Dry Bones***

- A. In 2005, a team of scientists led by paleontologist Mary Schweitzer published a paper in which they described an unusual upper leg bone of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. While the outer bone was completely fossilized, the interior regions were somehow sealed off from fossilizing fluids. Inside the *T. rex* femur were intact blood vessels and red blood cells. Once freed from the bones, the blood vessels could be stretched -- and even snapped back into place.
- B. Shortly after, Schweitzer and her colleagues made more headlines with a second paper. This one described intact proteins from the *T. rex* bone. The problem: laboratory tests and theoretical research have shown that proteins similar to those seen in the *T. rex* fossil degrade

too quickly -- even in ideal laboratory conditions -- to survive for more than a few thousand years.

- C. Furthermore, in early 2009, Schweitzer and colleagues struck again with a new paper. Now a duck-billed dinosaur from the Judith River Formation (in Montana, and supposedly 80 million years old) was described with a host of soft-tissue structures. The analyses of this fossil were done by multiple, independent labs. Several vertebrate-specific proteins (collagen, elastin, and hemoglobin) were discovered, as were bone-forming cells seen only in vertebrate animals.
- D. How could soft tissues survive for millions of years? No experimental results support long-age survival. Yet the discovery really makes sense if the bones were buried only a few thousand years ago during Noah's Flood (Genesis 7:21-23). It is certain that more creationists will be looking inside more bones to see what treasures are hidden there.

III. ***Without A Leg To Stand On***

- A. "Birds are the modern version of dinosaurs," declare many evolutionists who believe bipedal dinosaurs evolved into birds. But not all evolutionists accept the dogma. In a recent *Journal of Morphology* paper, Devon Quick and John Ruben of Oregon State University exposed a major flaw in the dinosaur-to-bird model -- and simultaneously revealed a unique feature of bird biology.
- B. The scientists examined the unusual way that birds use their femur (thigh bone) when walking. Unlike most other creatures, birds do not move their femurs significantly. Instead, birds use their lower legs. But their odd "knee running" motion is not just a funny quirk. It is actually crucial to their ability to breathe rapidly. The femur bones and thigh muscles support the bird's air-sac lung as it breathes, preventing the lungs from collapsing. "This is fundamental to bird physiology," Quick said. "It's really strange that no one realized this before."
- C. Researchers determined that dinosaur fossils show no evidence of fixed femurs. "Theropod dinosaurs had a moving femur and therefore could not have had a lung that worked like that in birds," Ruben explained. "That undercuts a critical piece of supporting evidence for the dinosaur-bird link." The physiology of dinosaurs was likely much closer to crocodilian creatures than to birds. David Menton, a former Washington University anatomist who has researched the dinosaur-to-bird idea, commented, "It appears that both feathers and the avian mode of breathing are unique to both."
- D. Perhaps the dinosaur-bird connection, now rejected by creationists and some evolutionists, will one day fall out of favor entirely. But Ruben noted, "There's a lot of museum politics involved in this, a lot of careers committed to a particular point of view even if new scientific

evidence raises questions." At the very least, we now know of another ingenious anatomical feature that the Creator gave birds from the very beginning so they could achieve the miracle of flight.

IV. ***Amazingly Preserved Leaves***

- A. Unless you follow special directions, plants shrivel, brown, and crumble soon after being picked. In fact, it is quite difficult it is to preserve a plant. With this thought in mind, the number of fossil plants at Mazon Creek (near Chicago, Illinois) is remarkable. Not only are the leaves well preserved, but they are quite flat -- flatter, in fact, than they were when they were alive! Furthermore, Mazon Creek is not unique. Similar well-preserved, flattened fossils are found around the world.
- B. Under special conditions, leaves will become rigid today. If a green leaf is stripped from a plant and submerged in water, the still-living cells will swell, stretching the flexible membrane surrounding the cells and pressing against cell walls outside that membrane. This process, called turgor pressure, causes wilting plants to straighten when watered.
- C. If a leaf is dead when it falls into water, however, nothing happens. The reason is simple. When a plant "dies," biologically speaking, the membranes surrounding the cells break and shrink away from the cell walls. So we deduce that special conditions must have produced the leaves in the fossil record. There are three conditions that had to exist.
 1. The leaves must have been ripped off while the plants were still alive.
 2. The leaves must have been carried in water long enough for water to enter the cells and stiffen and flatten the leaves.
 3. Since leaves curl up as soon as the water drains away, the flattened leaves must have been buried before the water left the cells.
- D. The Bible's description of a global Flood provides the clues that help us solve the mystery of how these leaves could be deposited worldwide. As rising water inundated the earth (Genesis 7:17-20), we would expect the plants to be ripped up and then float in water, before sinking and being buried.
- E. The catastrophe destroyed more than just one kind of leaf. The Mazon Creek fossils include many kinds of small ground plants, intermediate-sized trees, and very tall trees. Every part of each of those plants (roots, bark, branches, leaves, flowers, and seeds) has been found, as well as varied animals that probably lived with those plants. So it seems that parts of an entire ecosystem were suddenly destroyed and buried in some watery catastrophe.
- F. Similar fossil localities with the same plants are found across the eastern United States, Europe, and westernmost Asia. So it seems that both the ecosystem and the catastrophe must have been huge -- at

least the size of a continent. That is just what might be expected of a global flood! When evaluated through the lens of scripture, Mazon Creek fossil leaves confirm what is written on the leaves of the Bible.

V. ***Tracks But No Trilobites***

- A. In a remote area near Death Valley, one can visit one of only a dozen or so places in the world where the lowest layers of animal fossils exist. An examination of trilobite trackways will discover tracks, but no remains of the trilobites themselves.
- B. Eventually, one will come across a layer full of trilobite "shells." Why would dozens of feet of rock have tracks but not the animals that made them? This finding is especially mysterious if you believed the rock was deposited over thousands of years. Interestingly, the site is not unique. Tracks are found before trilobites everywhere that the lowest trilobite layers are known.
- C. Such a worldwide pattern of fossil layers suggests that a global catastrophe, such as the Bible describes, once struck the world. What if, when the "fountains of the great deep were broken up" (Genesis 7:11), the spreading waters surprised the trilobites living on the ocean bottom? As the water became muddy, trilobites scurried about, leaving their tracks behind them. Then as a layer of mud covered their tracks, they climbed through the mud and left tracks on the next layer -- repeating this process until they finally succumbed in exhaustion and were themselves buried and preserved.

Conclusion. Science and faith are not in opposition to one another! By starting our scientific investigations with a firm faith in the truth of the biblical account of the Flood, scientists can find a solution to these mysteries within the evolutionary perspective.