

Prehistoric crocodile fossil discovered in New Mexico

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Credit: Matt Celesky

Jurassic dinosaur fossils were first found in New Mexico more than 100 years ago. Now a crocodile fossil has been discovered in New Mexico's Jurassic rocks. The fossil was discovered in September of 2018 by hikers in the Ojito Wilderness near San Ysidro.

Bob Chesebrough and his two sons found the unusual fossil and sent the photo to Dr. Spencer Lucas, a paleontologist at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science. Dr. Lucas confirmed that the fossil is part of the skull of a Jurassic crocodile from around 150 million

years ago. This is the first evidence of a Jurassic crocodile found in New Mexico.

Lucas says the small crocodile was about 5 feet in length and had a 10 inch skull. While the fossil seems small it is pretty typical in size for a Jurassic croc. The crocodile fossil was found in the Morrison Formation (a [rock formation](#) known for its [dinosaur fossils](#) from localities that extend from Wyoming through Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma and New Mexico.) The Morrison Formation was formed by a vast river basin that covered a good portion of the United States.

Dr. Lucas contacted the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to get permission to collect the fossil along with the Chesebroughs and Bureau of Land Management staff.

The crocodile discovery is an excellent example of how fossils from Federal Wilderness are often found by hikers. Chesebrough and his sons, who found the fossil, have discovered over one thousand [bone fragments](#) embedded in cliffs and boulders in the Ojito Wilderness throughout the years.

Dr. Lucas says it is important to refer to specialists before collecting any fossils without permission from land-managing agencies so that the fossils can be lawfully and properly collected.

Chesebrough is working with the New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science, the Bureau of Land Management, and the New Mexico Friends of Paleontology to ensure they have accurate records of their discoveries. "It is important to have a heritage to pass along to our kids and grandkids so they can have the excitement of discovering these bones for themselves," says Chesebrough.

Provided by New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science

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