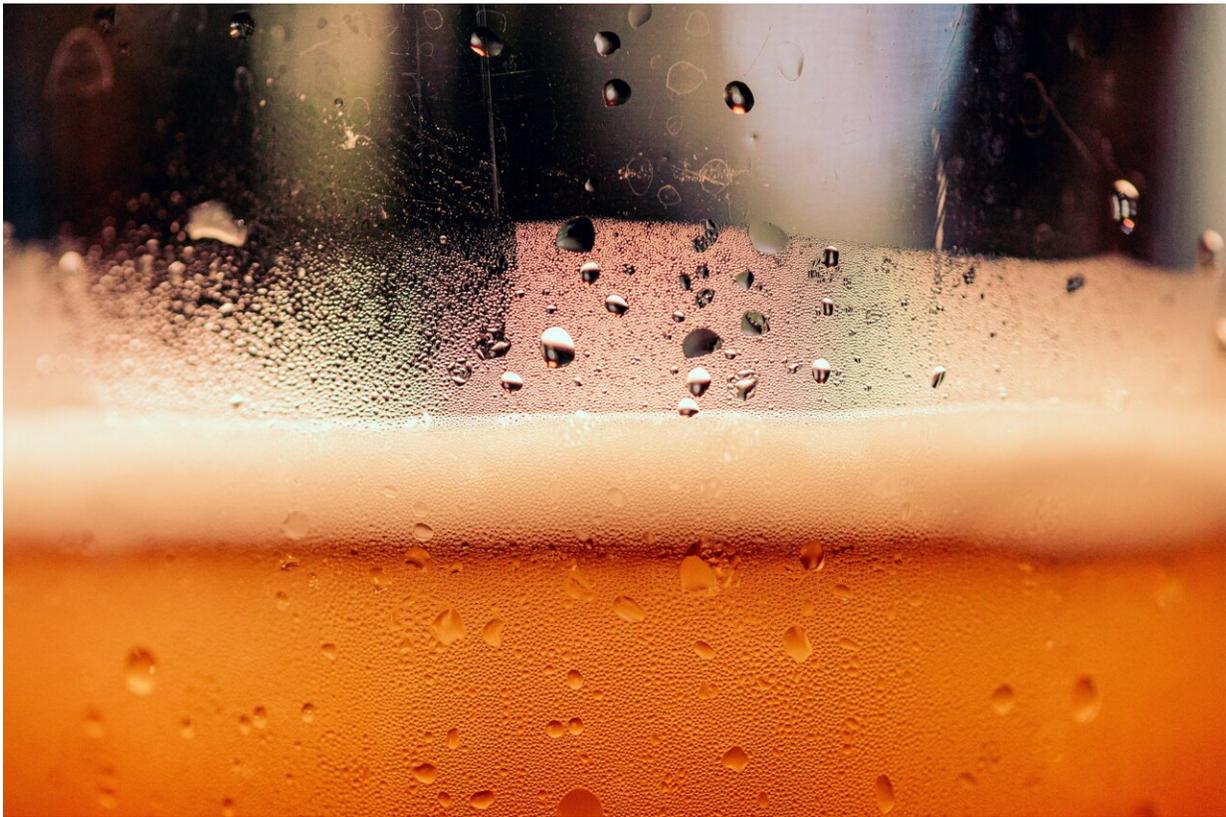


Fossil named after Nevada brewer who named his beer after it

January 16 2022, by Jim Krajewski



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

First, the beer was named for the fossil.

Now, it's come full circle, as a species of the fossil found in Nevada is

named for the maker of the beer.

The first giant creature to inhabit the earth, the ichthyosaur, dominated the earth's oceans in the Triassic period. Nearly 2.5 million years later, in 1993, Great Basin Brewing Company in Sparks debuted the Ichthyosaur IPA in honor of the extinct creature.

And as of late last year, one of the earliest species of ichthyosaur is now known as *Cymbospondylus youngorum* —named for Tom and Bonda Young of Great Basin Brewing Company. The name was announced at a ceremony at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles in December.

The fossil was found in northern Nevada, about 120 miles (193 kilometers) east of Reno, and is currently on display at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles.

The Youngs started Great Basin Brewing Company in Sparks in 1993. Before making beer, Tom was a geologist. His interest in fossils led him to name one of his first beers after the ichthyosaur.

The ancient leviathan has regional ties. The creature, which pre-dates dinosaurs, lived in what is now Nevada, when the continents were still joined together and Nevada was under an ocean. An ichthyosaur fossil was found in Nevada in 1928 in what is now Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park near Gabbs, at the site of the largest known concentration of ichthyosaur fossils in the world. One species of ichthyosaur, the *Shonisaurus popularis*, was named the state fossil in 1977.

A German team searching in Nevada for more fossils learned of the beer, which led them to Great Basin Brewing and the Youngs. In 2011, that team found another ichthyosaur in Nevada, and the Youngs helped the process of excavating and removing it through monetary donations, along with food and beer, and then by transporting the skull of the

55-foot fossil to Los Angeles in a Great Basin beer truck.

In December, the museum honored the Youngs by naming the fossil after them—the "Young" part of the scientific name.

Replicas of the specimen have been delivered to Great Basin and will be on display at the Sparks and Reno locations.

Dr. Martin Sander, paleontologist at the University of Bonn and research associate with the Dinosaur Institute at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, was the lead in digging out the fossil and getting it to the National History Museum.

Sander told the RGJ in 2020 that he was in the Augusta Mountains outside Winnemucca in October 2011, and at an outcropping around 6,000 feet (1,829 meters) in elevation, he spotted what appeared to be fossilized remains of an ichthyosaur spine.

The specimen was excavated from a rock unit called the "Fossil Hill Member" in the Augusta Mountains of Nevada, 41 miles (66 km) northwest of Austin.

Finding it took some digging.

He said only a few vertebrae were exposed on the side of the canyon. However, the anatomy of the vertebrae suggested that the front end of the animal might still be hidden in the rocks.

His crew then went and discovered the skull, forelimbs and chest region.

The next day, with cold and snow closing in, the team packed up the exposed fossils for further research. They returned in 2014 and excavated the rest.

The well-preserved skull, along with part of the backbone, shoulder and forefin, date back to the Middle Triassic (247.2-237 million years ago), and are the earliest case of an ichthyosaur reaching giant proportions.

It was as big as a large sperm whale at nearly 56 feet (17 meters) and is the largest animal yet discovered from that time period, on land or in the sea.

To get the fossil out was an expensive proposition. The crew lived in the desert for several weeks during the excavation, and had to hire a helicopter to help move it.

There was evidence the large, prehistoric, swimming reptile had been pregnant when it died.

The ichthyosaur was the second-oldest pregnant specimen ever found and it was of a species that had never before been identified. It was just one of two major ichthyosaur findings at the location in the Augusta Mountains.

An NHM spokesman said the elongated snout and conical teeth suggest that *C. youngorum* preyed on squid and fish, but its size meant that it could have hunted smaller and juvenile marine reptiles as well.

Tom Young is ecstatic about the discovery and display of the [ichthyosaur](#).

"It just makes my heart sing when I see people, this is one of the top scientists in the world, and he's bringing it down to my level and I get it," Young said. "Nevada is such a unique place. This is the first giant. This is pretty cool."

Young joked that he had a different idea for the name.

"I was voting for 'Beerosaurus' personally," he said.

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