



FOSSILIZED FEMUR

The femur is the upper bone in hind legs of animals. A femur contains a distinctive “ball” that fits into the hip socket. This example is the right femur of a mammal that lived about 30 million years ago known as an oreodont.

Oreodonts became extinct about 4 million years ago. They probably lived in herds that roamed the Great Plains of North America 6 million years ago. They are related to sheep, goats, and even camels. They have no known descendants. They lived with other large animals such as the rhinoceros, horses, deer-like animals, and other large, pig-like animals. Some scientists believe that some oreodonts may have lived in burrows and others may have climbed trees.

Oreodont fossils have been found in North America as far east as Florida and as far south as Central America. They are most common, however, in the Western U.S.

This fossil was discovered in a rock formation known as the White River Group. It contains the rocks that form the beautifully colored striped patterns of the Badlands National Park in South Dakota. Collecting fossils in national parks is forbidden without a permit.