



FOSSILIZED FEMUR

The femur is the upper bone in hind legs of animals. The femur contains a distinctive “ball” that fits into the hip socket. This specimen is a right femur of a mammal that lived perhaps as long ago as 30 million years. It probably belonged to an extinct mammal known as an oreodont.

Oreodonts originated in the Eocene Epoch (48 million years ago) and became extinct in the Pliocene Epoch (4 million years ago). They are related to sheep, goats, and even camels, but have no known descendants. They probably lived in herds that may have roamed the Great Plains of North America during the Oligocene and Miocene Periods (34 to 6 million years ago). They lived with other large animals such as the rhinoceros, horses, deer-like animals, and other large pig-like animals. Some vertebrate paleontologists 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. Oreodont fossils have also been found in Central America. They are most common, however, in the Western U.S.

The White River Group 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.