



COPROLITES

Coprolites (*dung stones*) are fossilized feces. While at first we might think of them as body fossils, they are really trace fossils, as they provide evidence of an animal's behavior rather than its structure. Coprolites assist scientists as they study the eating habits and predatory nature of extinct animals. Paleontologists have studied coprolites from animals as small as snails to those of the largest dinosaurs.

An examination of coprolites from an area can tell paleontologists what animals lived in an area, even though no other fossil remains of that animal are found in the same location. Further, chemical analysis of coprolites can sometimes reveal the specific plants or animals that were eaten and then digested. Coprolites help scientists determine if a dinosaur was an herbivore or a carnivore. Finally, evidence of parasites or other microorganisms in coprolites can shed light on diseases of the past and provide insights into the migration patterns of different species.

Coprolites are valuable research tools for scientists interested in a past for which there is no written record.