



AMMONITES

Ammonites are an extinct group of animals. They only exist as fossils. They are related to octopuses, squids, cuttlefish, and the living pearly nautilus. The group that these animals belong to is the cephalopods.

Pliny the Elder made up the name ammonite around 70 AD. It is named after the horns of Ammon, an Egyptian god who wore ram's horns.

Ammonites lived from the Devonian Period (415 million years ago) until the end of the Cretaceous Period (66 million years ago). They became extinct about the same time that dinosaurs became extinct.

What you see here are the shells of the ammonite or the impression of the shells. The animal that lived in these shells had a soft body that extended from the large end of the shell. It had large eyes and tentacles that it used to capture food.

Ammonites are important to scientists (paleontologists) because they are excellent index fossils. Finding a particular ammonite can tell the scientist the age of the rocks in which the fossils are found.

In the U.S. ammonites are abundant in rocks formed in the Western Interior Seaway that covered much of the area from Texas to Canada during the Cretaceous. One of these layers of rock is a thick layer known as the Pierre Shale, named after Fort Pierre, an old fort in South Dakota.