

Investigating the Specimen

Identifying Fossils

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Fossil identification is not an easy task. Millions of species have lived on earth over the past 4.5 billion years. Identifying fossils usually requires professional training at an institution like a university. It is so complicated that many experts only study one specific group of fossils, like ammonites, clams, gastropods, brachiopods, hadrosaurian dinosaurs, or microscopic fossils.

To identify a fossil, scientists read all the latest research, looking for detailed descriptions and illustrations of fossils. It takes a lot of work to carefully organize fossils in collections, and experts scrutinize and compare many specimens before an identification is made.

For the amateur fossil collector, there are some good books that illustrate fossils. Sometimes the books are set up to help with identification. There are also websites that can help. An interesting new book on evolution is: *Evolution the Whole Story*. You can also identify fossils online.



Royal BC Museum volunteer researcher, Raymond Graham, identifies a late Cretaceous gastropod (snail) from the Nanaimo Group rocks.