

A Bone to Pick

Exploring the Sustut Basin

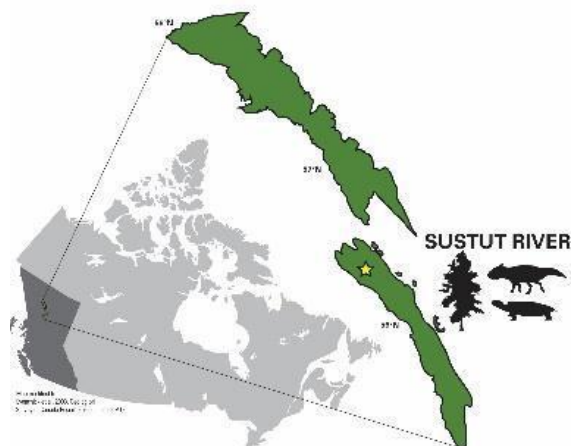
By Curator of Palaeontology Dr. Victoria Arbour

Fossil Discoveries in the Home of Dinosaurs

“Buster”, one of the first dinosaurs discovered in British Columbia, lived in an area that geologists and palaeontologists call the Sustut Basin, a long, narrow stretch of Cretaceous rocks (145 million to 66 million years old) found in what is now northern BC. In 2017, Dr. Arbour and a team of palaeontologists travelled to the Sustut River to look for more of Buster’s bones and record evidence of what the environment in the Sustut Basin was like during the age of dinosaurs. Almost 50 years have passed since Buster was discovered along the BC Rail line in 1971. Thick vegetation now grows along the abandoned railroad tracks, making it hard to find new fossils. The palaeontologists hiked many kilometres on foot along the railway and used jet boats to explore the banks of the Sustut River.

The team didn’t find any more pieces of Buster’s skeleton in the Sustut Basin, but they did find many new fossils.

Dr. Arbour and her colleagues collected more than 100 specimens of fossil plants and a fragment of a huge fossil turtle called *Basilemys* (BAZ-ih-LEM-ees).



Map showing the Sustut Basin and fossil discovery locations in northern BC. V. Arbour.

Finding new fossils is exciting, but understanding the rocks the fossils come from is even more important. The team used handheld GPS units to record locations and took detailed notes about the rocks they observed. They also collected samples of microscopic fossil pollen, which helps palaeontologists figure out the age of the rocks. This information helps paint a picture of Buster’s world.