



Paleontology & Natural History

We've gathered some of the best paleontological and natural wonders that The Great American West has to offer. There is a big advantage to viewing the many dinosaurs in Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, compared to those in "Jurassic Park." Our dinosaurs are dead and have been for 65 million years. Long before paleontology became popular, sites within our region were famous worldwide for the extremely rich fossil beds and accessible dinosaur skeletons. New and exciting finds are still being made every year, including the first-ever discovery of dinosaur eggs in Montana and the first full-sized Allosaurus in Wyoming. The region was, and is, a true "Jurassic Park."

Denver

One of the most extensive dinosaur exhibits in the nation is at Denver Museum of Natural History. Called "Prehistoric Journey," the \$7.7 million exhibit offers visitors a unique look at prehistoric life, following a cobblestone path and entering an "envirooama" where they'll be immersed in a 3.5 billion year old landscape. After visiting Denver, head north into The Great American West.

Wyoming

The Geology Museum at the University of Wyoming in Laramie is the only museum west of the Mississippi River featuring a full-sized Brontosaurus, as well as many other exhibits. Just north of Laramie, Como Bluff has given up some of the most outstanding dinosaurs ever discovered. Many Como Bluff finds are in museums in the U.S. and Europe. What is left of the treasures is a fossil cabin, a small cement structure that uses dinosaur bones in place of logs.

Head east through Cheyenne to Pine Bluffs, the site of a superb archaeological dig featuring 11,000 years of human migration. The project extends for miles and includes thousands of stone teepee rings, Native American burial grounds, prehistoric trails and bison jumps.

From here head north into South Dakota. You will return to see more finds in western Wyoming at the end of this tour after your visit to Montana.

South Dakota

The Mammoth Site in Hot Springs has captured world-wide attention for containing the largest concentration of Columbian mammoths found in the world. This National Natural Landmark is the only on-site display of fossil mammoths in America. It has been cited as one of the top exemplary fossil interpretive programs in North America. Guided tours take visitors within feet of the 26,000 year-old fossils. Sixty-one Columbian mammoths have been unearthed so far under the roof at the site.

Badlands National Park is a wonderland for archaeologists and paleontologists featuring some of the most diverse landscape imaginable. Relentless erosion that created Badlands National Park exposed a vast array of exotic animal and fish remains which are on display along walkways throughout the Park.

Rapid City features the Museum of Geology, a world-class collection of dinosaurs, sea lizards, ancient camels, horses, and a mother oreodont with the skeletons of unborn twins encased in her bones. The Black Hills Petrified Forest near Piedmont has Barasosaurus bones dated to the Jurassic period. The Black Hills uplift has also exposed the remains of a cypress forest. The Black Hills Institute of Geologic Research in Hill City prepares fossils and mineral specimens for museums and collectors worldwide.

When traveling further east, stop to see Mitchell's Prehistoric Indian Village & Acheodome, nearly 1,000 years old, which was the home of early Plains Woodlands Indians, a tribe of around 1,000 people.

North Dakota

Near the northern border in South Dakota, near Lemmon, is the Petrified Wood Park, a collection of petrified logs, stumps, fossils, and prehistoric mudballs found within a 35-mile radius of Lemmon. Over 6.4 million tons of ancient wood have been used to construct structures within the park.

The Pioneer Trails Regional Museum and Paleontology Department in Bowman studies, collects and curates fossils from all of the different aged outcrops present in the region. These include vertebrates, invertebrates and plants from 73 million year old marine deposits up to the latest deposits of the area, which are 28 million years old. Some of the animals that have been found are mosasaurs, plesiosaurs, dinosaurs, and early mammals that include camels, rhinoceroses, horses and giant pigs. The Paleontology Department conducts Public Day Tours out to active research sites in the field. The museum also offers a more intense summer field activity through their annual Summer Field School.

The Dakota Dinosaur Museum in Dickinson brings dinosaurs to life. Mighty T-Rex guards the lobby and full-scale models of an assortment of dinosaurs stalk the main gallery. See realistic baby dinosaurs hatching from eggs in an original sculpture and view beautiful hand-painted murals depicting landscapes that dinosaurs knew.

The State Museum at the North Dakota Heritage Center, in Bismarck, features life-sized skeleton casts of Tyrannosaurus rex and a Triceratops ready to battle.

Continue further west to the Petrified Forest within the Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness which is believed to be the third largest petrified wood area in the United States. As Congressionally designated wilderness, this area has the highest level of protection and will remain undeveloped, allowing retention of its primeval and wild character. It offers the opportunity for solitude, contemplation, discovery, and the ability to experience this unique area in its natural state. You are welcome to wander and explore throughout the area and make your own discoveries. Please remember that all rocks and fossils are clues to the area's geologic past and must be left where they are found for other visitors to enjoy and scientists to study. Collecting of any kind is prohibited.

Montana

Near Glendive, Makoshika State Park contains fossil remains of such dinosaurs as tyrannosaurus and triceratops. The visitor center features the skeleton of a juvenile triceratops unearthed in this State Park. Head west to the Garfield County Museum in Jordan which houses the full-sized replica of a complete Triceratops and has an impressive display of fossils taken from the area.

The Fort Peck Interpretive Center and Museum showcases wildlife, history and paleontology discoveries, including the life-size Peck Rex. In nearby Malta, the new Great Plains Dinosaur Museum is home to the world's best preserved dinosaur Leonardo. In Havre, the H. Earl Clack Museum features fossil and geological displays. The museum is the starting point for tours of a nearby buffalo jump site. Visitors can see dig areas, with layers of bone, ancient processing and cooking hearths.

The beginning of the movie Jurassic Park was based on the finds near Choteau, where Egg Mountain exhibits and fossils are on display at the Old Trails Museum. Egg Mountain Dinosaur Dig site near Choteau is accessed only by special arrangements with the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, but displays one of the most unique sites ever found in the world. Nearby in Bynum, the Two Medicine Dinosaur Center, take in a dig or see the world's largest full-size skeletal dinosaur model.

Famed dinosaur hunter Jack Horner is the curator of the large dinosaur exhibit at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, one of the best dinosaur exhibits in North America. The museum houses several important dinosaur finds, including the skulls of Triceratops and Styracosaur.

From here head south to the western side of Wyoming.

Wyoming

The Wyoming Dinosaur Museum in Thermopolis is one of the few museums in the world to have its own excavation within driving distance. It features over 30 mounted skeletons, a preparation lab with visitor viewing and hundreds of displays and dioramas. The center's resident rock star is Jimbo, a 106 foot long sauropod found near Douglas, Wyoming. He is the largest Supersaurus ever discovered.

Head south from Thermopolis into the Wind River Canyon which is literally "a drive through the ages." The winding highway takes you through the history of the earth carved out by the Wind River and other geological forces.

In Fossil Butte National Monument, northwest of Rock Springs, resides one of the most extensive concentrations of fossilized fish in the world, all of which were found locally. There are also six private quarries outside the boundaries of the Monument, and several offer digging opportunities and fossils for sale. The Natural History Museum and Dinosaur Collection in Rock Springs, located on the campus of Western Wyoming Community College, is open year-round, and features full-sized life-casts of Tyrannosaurus rex, Triceratops, Stegosaurus, Camptosaurus, and Xiphactinus audax, a rare monster fish.

Depart Rock Springs for Salt Lake City for your departure flight for home.