

He hunts dino bones in the desert

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff

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Scott Richardson, a paleontologist technician, holds a fossil that he glued back together, May 30, 2014, in Kanab, Utah. He had excavated the bones on a previous trip.

HORSE MOUNTAIN, Utah—About 144 million years ago, desert-like Utah was a green forest.

It was a hard time to be alive. It was hot and sticky outside. There were huge meat-eating dinosaurs. There were also birds, bugs, insects and worms. And they all had sharp teeth.

Today, all that is left of the dinosaurs is their bones. But someone is hunting the dinosaurs.

Scott Richardson is a paleontologist. He searches for the bones left behind by the ancient dinosaurs.

Walking, And Watching

Richardson has worked in Utah for 12 years. He is always watching the ground when he walks. He hopes to see a dinosaur's bone sticking out from the ground.

Dinosaurs were huge animals. They “ruled the planet for millions of years,” Richardson says. The bones Richardson digs up are very old. The bones “haven’t seen the light of the sun for 80 million years,” he says.

He works in a wild national park. It wasn't even mapped until 50 years ago. Paleontologists haven't dug there very much. But in the past 10 years, scientists have found 20 new species of dinosaurs.

Along with the dinosaurs, the scientists found a 90-million-year-old kind of shark. The shark had grinding teeth. The scientists also found a horned skull the size of a small elephant. There were also 2-foot-tall creatures with razor sharp claws that ran in packs.

Finding Something Amazing

Richardson has dug up four new species of dinosaur all on his own.

Richardson remembers the first big dinosaur he found. The year was 2006. It had just rained very hard. Richardson spied bones in the dirt while hiking along a narrow ridge a few miles north of his campsite.

He dropped his heavy pack of tools. Richardson began carefully digging. His heart raced with excitement. He just knew he had found something truly amazing.

What Richardson found was huge. It was a full skull of an unknown cousin of the triceratops, the three-horned dinosaur.

The creature was named "the horniest dinosaur." Its skull had a record-breaking 15 horns. Scientists named it named *Kosmoceratops richardsoni* in honor of Richardson. His friends then began calling him "Scottosaurus."

Richardson puts pieces of dinosaur bones together, like a jigsaw puzzle. He thinks about his own skull when he digs inside a 90-million-year-old graveyard.

"I want to die inside a swamp," he says, so he can become a fossil. He hopes that 80 million years from now, someone will hold his skull and say, "Now, where does this go?"

Quiz

1. How many species of dinosaurs have been discovered in the past decade?
 - (a) 10
 - (b) 12
 - (c) 20
 - (d) 50

2. What did Richardson discover in 2006?
 - (a) a shark
 - (b) a dinosaur
 - (c) a bird with teeth
 - (d) a small elephant

3. Select the sentence that contains a word that is a synonym for “difficult.”
 - (a) It was a hard time to be alive.
 - (b) He searches for the bones left behind by the ancient dinosaurs.
 - (c) Dinosaurs were huge animals.
 - (d) It wasn’t even mapped until 50 years ago.

4. Select the sentence that contains a word that is a synonym for “bulky.”
 - (a) There were huge meat-eating dinosaurs.
 - (b) And they all had sharp teeth.
 - (c) The creature was named “the horniest dinosaur.”
 - (d) He dropped his heavy pack of tools.

Answer Key

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