

INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO THE CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING THE OWNERSHIP AND SALE OF FOSSILS



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Ownership and sale of fossils

- Where?

- ▣ Historical geology, Dinosaurs

- Why?

- ▣ Laws and ethics
- ▣ Connections between science & society

- What?

- ▣ More complex than you may think...

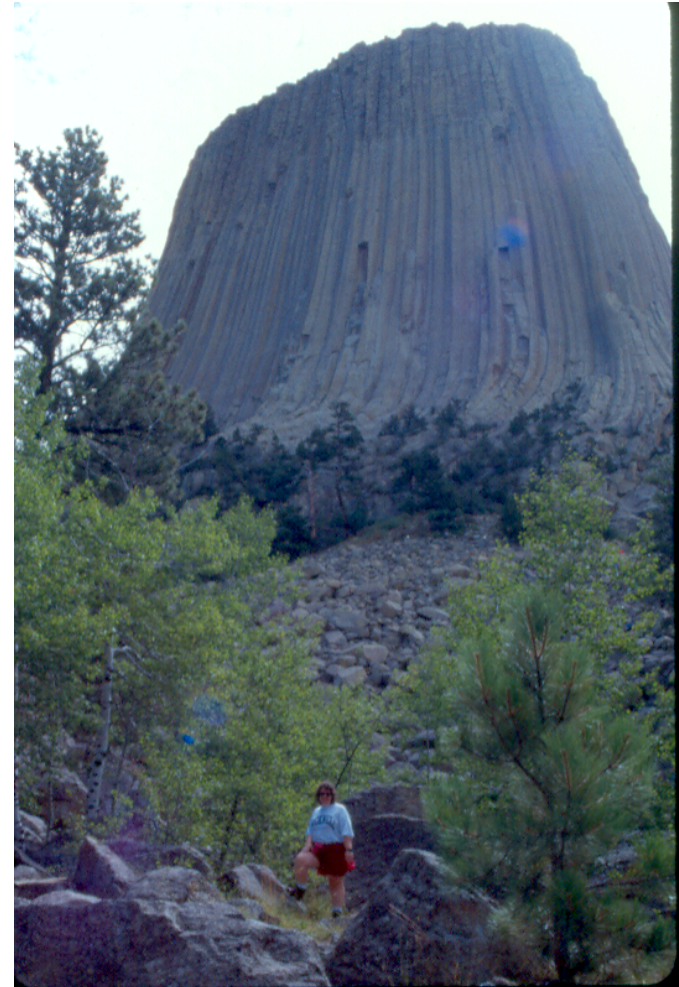
The Laws to Protect Fossils *(or do they...)*

□ **Antiquities Act of 1906**

- *“a major part of the legal foundation for archaeological, historic, and natural conservation and preservation in the United States”*
- *“archaeological sites and historic structures, and by extension, other kinds of cultural resources...”*
- *“professional and scientific approaches in the examination and treatment of other kinds of cultural resources, including historic structures, museum objects, and cultural landscapes, are accepted and valued”*

The Laws to Protect Fossils *(or do they...)*

- Conservation and preservation vs. commercial uses of public land
- National Monuments



March 2009

- The Paleontological Resources Preservation Act (PRPA) attached to the **Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009**
 - ▣ Passed House March 3 (394-13)
 - ▣ Passed Senate March 19 (77-20) w/amendment
 - ▣ House agreed to amendment March 25 (285-140)
 - ▣ Signed into law by President Obama March 20, 2009

- ▣ Vote of 285 to 140
 - Democrats → yea = 247 nay = 4 not voting = 2
 - Republicans → yea = 38 nay = 136 not voting = 4

What about private land?

- “Can” vs. “Should” be done with a fossil found on private property?



Auction of Fossils

- 1997 - *T. rex* named Sue
- 2012 - *T. bataar* from Mongolia



From Heritage Auctions

Online sale of fossils

- eBay

- Mr. Z. Rex
 - ▣ eBay - July 1999
 - Up to \$8 million (by teenage pranksters)
 - ▣ Lycos/Millionaire.com – January 2000
 - Started at \$5.8 million, went for \$15 million

 - ***“This auction is open to the world. If we don’t have the right to (sell the fossil), then we don’t live in America.”***

Comment, Harvard museum curator

- *“It’s not unethical to sell it, it’s just a shame it goes to the highest bidder... some specimens do get away from scientists, but that’s life... it’s sad, though.”*

Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT)

- What if a fossil is found on private land? Should a paleontologist be expected to pay the landowner the market value for that fossil before it can be studied? Explain why/why not.
- Does an amateur collector who originally finds a fossil get co-authorship on a scientific report of the fossil? Does the professional paleontologist acknowledge the collector or does the paleontologist deserve sole authorship because of his/her advanced educational background? Explain.

Student comments - JiTT

- *Finding dinosaur bones and being able to keep them is a tricky business*
- *I liked the DinoByte this week. I am very interested in the laws to protect fossils. I see a problem with it only because fossils have value like oil. If you find oil on your land, you are rich. Can we say the same about fossils? It seems that the philosophy that made the United States the way it is like claiming land for your own and building a future has to be revised to protect the natural resources like fossils.*

Student comments - JiTT

- *I think that these were some of the most interesting questions we've had so far. Due to our democratic/capitalistic society, fossil hunting/finding is becoming more and more cut throat.*
- *I am not sure if I did this weeks assignment correct, but I hope you will recognize and appreciate my effort. I read all of the articles and my text, but could not find the information I needed. I guess I was looking in the wrong places. This is why all of my answers are in opinion form.*

Student comments - JiTT

- *The questions in this DinoByte were interesting in the fact that they can be related to other fields and activities that have to do with ownership of works such as musicians, novelists, inventors, screenwriters, etc. each having different laws and procedures for claiming ownership of something.*

Is this a controversy?

- Is there a right or wrong answer?
- Does this topic make students think? Struggle?
- Can this topic be made relevant/applicable/current?

