



Geologic Wonders of Texas

Dinosaur Tracks Activity 4

Make your own dig

Purpose:

To have the experience of being a fossil hunter

Method:

Bury fossil replicas in a sandbox.

Materials needed:

Sandbox (use an existing sandbox or a plastic backyard pool and fill it 5 to 7 inches deep with sand), water in a bottle, plaster of paris, small disposable container for mixing water and plaster of paris, plastic shovels, and paintbrushes.

Procedure:

1. Use photographs or drawings of fossils to form molds of “fossils” in the sand. Create both large and small shapes—thigh bones, ribs, teeth, and skulls, if you have an artistic flair.
2. Mix plaster of paris with water in the mixing container to form a thick mixture, following instructions on container. Pour plaster into molds, allow them to set up for several hours until plaster is firm, then dig out the fossils and allow to harden and dry at least overnight.
3. Dig down in the sandbox and bury the newly made “fossils” flat-side down. For heavy use, you may want to glue fossils to the bottom of the sandbox before covering with sand. Small plastic shovels and paint brushes should be supplied for excavators. Younger students will dig for the “fossils” over and over again. Older students can take a scientific approach by making notes on clipboards, mapping what the excavation team unearths, noting how much of the “animal” was fossilized, and deciding whether the fossils represent one animal or more than one.