

Amateur collecting

Visitors to public lands are welcome to collect reasonable amounts of plant fossils, such as leaves and stems or common invertebrate fossils, such as clams and ammonites without a BLM permit. These materials must be for your personal collection and cannot be sold or traded. The only public lands not open to this type of collection in the Royal Gorge Field Office are the lands within the Garden Park Fossil Area.



This photo shows a group of volunteers from the Denver Museum of Nature and Science working hard to remove overburden from a quarry operated by paleontologist Virginia Tidwell in a quarry in the Garden Park Fossil Area.

Scientific collecting

Permits are required for the collection of vertebrate fossils including dinosaur and mammal bones and teeth, fish, turtle shells, and tracks. Vertebrate fossils represent animals with a backbone and in many cases they are rare or even one of a kind. BLM permits are generally issued only to professional paleontologists, who agree to preserve their finds in a public museum, a college, or a university because of their relative rarity and scientific importance. Permits can be applied for from BLM's paleontologist at the BLM Colorado State Office.

Many amateur paleontologists assist scientific investigations under the guidance of scientists that hold permits. Commonly the amateur scientists help perform field work or laboratory preparation of fossils that would not otherwise be accomplished by one or two professional paleontologists. The reward for all of this hard work is the intimate interaction with a professional paleontologist that leads to an increase in knowledge and the ability to help educate others on the significance of paleontology. These volunteers contribute to the science of paleontology and the results of their hard work are housed in repositories at colleges and museums to enable scientific study and education in perpetuity.

Commercial Collecting

Paleontology Permit Information

For information about obtaining a permit to collect vertebrate fossils on BLM lands in Colorado please contact BLM's paleontologist at the [BLM Colorado State Office](#). For additional information on permitting for the collection of fossils on BLM lands throughout the nation, please visit the [National BLM website](#).

There are no provisions for the commercial collection of fossils on Federal lands.

The Zen of fossil Collecting

Collecting fossils can be a rich and rewarding activity for family and friends. The joy of finding a fossil or trace of a life form that lived millions of years ago is a remarkable opportunity and an excellent way to introduce ourselves and our children to science. Fossils are one of our most valuable treasures and a window to the past. If you collect fossils, read and ask questions, take photographs, share your discovery.

Although some fossils can be found in almost unlimited quantities such as the fossil fish quarries in Southwest Wyoming, most fossils are difficult to find and some are rare. Careless collecting practices can significantly damage a site that may otherwise provide a great location for viewing and collecting fossils for many years. Many fossil locations listed in books as collection sites are now degraded with little left for the next person to discover.

Spending time to learn about the fossils, collecting information, asking questions, reading books and gathering information on the internet is a rewarding experience. Nothing is probably more exciting than working with a scientist and seeing their excitement at discovering something that has never been seen before. One of the most exciting programs anywhere is the Denver Museum of Nature and Science's paleontology certification program, bringing scientists and amateurs together.

Developing a well researched and documented school collection is a rewarding approach to an educational collection. Building on the knowledge base of that collection can be a rewarding exercise for almost any age group of students. On the contrary, taking a group of school kids to a fossil locality for the purpose of letting them dig out specimens and taking them home, later to be discarded is a far less satisfying approach. Collecting a fossil for a knick knack is not putting the fossil to its best use.

Fossils that are professionally collected, researched, and placed into a location where they can be learned about by the public is a powerful choice. Fossils that are photographed and left in place with the pictures being shared on the internet is also a very powerful approach.

There are many good amateur organizations and clubs that emphasize care in collecting fossils. Numerous publications exist that can guide you on how to take care of the fossil you find. We would encourage you to learn about the fossils in your backyard and join one of these organizations. In Colorado the Western Interior Paleontology Society is a group of both professionals and amateurs and is an example of a group to get acquainted with.

One of the best ways to view fossils is to visit one of quality museums we have in our state and beyond. If you come across a paleontology museum in your neighborhood, cherish and support it! Better yet, become a volunteer with a museum and grow your passion.