



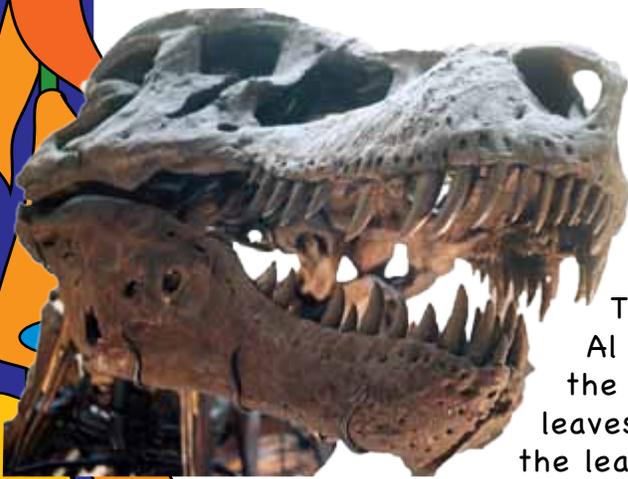
The Adventures of Pixel, the Stowaway



Sidewalk Fossils

"Hi, everyone! Pixel here. I was having a boring day and was looking for something interesting to do when I remembered how much there is to see and learn no matter where you are. Did you know that there are interesting things to see right in your own neighborhood?

Al decided to walk his dog and also to take his camera with me in it. We thought we'd go for a walk and use our Nature Smarts. Guess what we saw - fossils in the sidewalk! Do you know what a fossil is? I thought it was only the imprint of dinosaurs and prehistoric fish and animals in rocks, but it turns out that a fossil is anything that is evidence of previous life. That means a fossil is anything that shows us a living thing was there before we came along.



As I peered through the camera lens, I saw some leaf prints in the sidewalk. Al says those are fossils too. The leaves had fallen onto the wet cement when the sidewalk was made, and they left impressions. When the leaves rotted, only their impressions were left in the hard cement.

They became fossils! Al was able to identify the trees where the leaves came from. Some of the leaf fossils were right



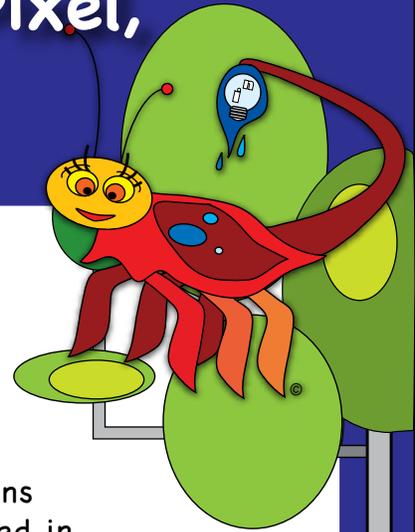
next to the trees that dropped the leaves, but other leaves must have blown in on the wind from trees elsewhere. We even found fossil footprints of a dog, a cat, and a person who walked on the sidewalk when the cement was still wet. I wonder who was more surprised to discover they were walking in wet cement - the animals or the person? We even found fossil writing - someone wrote her name in the wet cement. I wonder if she still lives close by?



All photos courtesy of Al Giraldi unless otherwise noted.



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Al told me that the fossils in museums were formed the same way as sidewalk fossils. A leaf falls in wet mud or an animal walks in the mud. The mud dries, and over time the mud turns to stone with the impressions

still in it. Fossils can also be formed when a bone or stick is buried in mud, and minerals seep into the object and replace the living material. This takes a long time. Al said most dinosaur fossils are made that way. Sometimes the shells of animals like clams or snails get filled with mud, and then the mud turns to stone. These insides are called casts and paleontologists (scientists who study fossils) use the casts to learn about the animals that lived in the shells.



Courtesy of Wikipedia

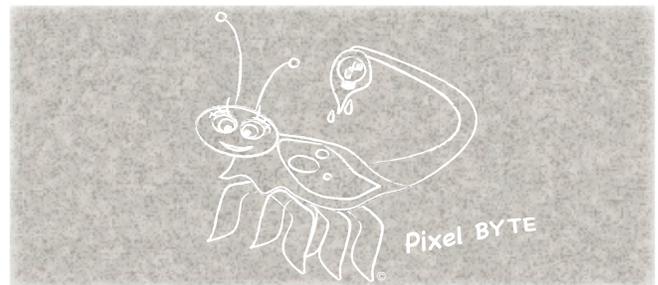
Al says we can find fossils all around if we know where to look. Do you have an old fashioned blackboard in your school?



Artwork by M Dalto

Blackboards used to be made of slate, a kind of stone that forms underwater. Sometimes when the slate is being cut, workers find fossils of plants and animals that lived under water long ago between the layers of slate. Chalk is another fossil! The chalk your teacher uses to write on the blackboard is made of the shells of millions of tiny animals that settled to the bottom of ancient oceans and became soft stone. Gardeners use fossils too. They sprinkle diatomaceous earth around plants to keep slugs and snails away. It's made from the shells of tiny ocean plants called diatoms. Diatoms make their shells out of silica which is what glass is made of.

Now that I know fossils aren't just in museums, I'm going fossil hunting in the Info-verse right now! Look around and see if you can find any fossils in your neighborhood, school, or even in your house."



Artwork by M Dalto

Do you think it is important for paleontologists to study fossils? Why or why not?