

ACTIVITY: Fossil-Related Careers

Objective: Learners will be introduced to fossil-related careers and the work that they do to locate, study, and preserve fossils.



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Introduction: Studying fossils opens doors to diverse careers spanning paleontology, museum curation, and education. These careers offer exciting opportunities to explore Earth's past and inspire future generations of scientists.

Have learners:

1. Look at the images on the handout.
 - a. Brainstorm a possible title for each image.
 - b. Discuss what the people in each image are doing, and clarify their roles using the context for each image (in the order in which they occur on the handout):
 - A park ranger teaching about a fossil that is *in situ* (has been left in place where it was found).
 - Paleontologists carefully excavate a recently discovered fossil specimen.
 - A collection curator catalogs fossil specimens being stored at a park facility.
 - A lab technician tests a fossil for radiation.
 - Paleontologists work on interpreting fossils using observation techniques, including looking under the microscope.
2. Brainstorm a list of ways people might interact with fossils, including but not limited to:
 - Locating
 - Excavating (digging them up)
 - Studying their anatomy
 - Studying the rocks or environment of the area for context
 - Collecting
 - Preparing
 - Preserving
 - Describing (writing or teaching about fossils)
3. Read about **why fossil collections are maintained**.
4. Watch a **video on Hagerman Fossil Beds**, an NPS site used for scientific research.
 - ▶ *Why is this site of particular interest to researchers?*
 - ▶ *How do field work and lab work differ in terms of studying fossils? Why are both necessary?*

5. Read about different roles in NPS and how they contribute to locating, understanding, and preserving fossils:
 - a. **NPS Careers: Resource Management**
 - b. **NPS Careers: Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services**
 - c. **Who are the People Behind National Park Paleontology?**
 - d. **Paleontology in the Parks Fellowships**
 - e. **Museum curator**
6. Optionally, use the **What Kind of Scientist Are You? Matching Game** (pages 12-14 of the document) to discuss various fields of paleontology.
7. Choose one fossil-related career and research their background and roles. Possible options include: paleontologist (or specific foci like invertebrate paleontologist), paleoclimatologist, the NPS careers listed above, museum curator or collections manager, preparator or lab technician, scientific illustrator, or others:
 - ▶ *What level of education or training does this career require?*
 - ▶ *Where might someone in this career work (e.g., university, museum, park)?*
 - ▶ *What tasks or roles do they have that are related to fossils?*
 - ▶ *What other tasks or roles do they have as part of their job?*
8. Optionally, discuss the **difference between paleontology and archeology** to distinguish the two fields and to address the misconception that they are interchangeable.

HANDOUT: Fossil-Related Careers



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As you view each image, consider what each person's role might be when it comes to collecting, studying, or preserving fossils.



Credit: NPS



Credit: Annette Rousseau, NPS



Credit: F. Brown, NPS



Credit: Jared Infanger, NPS



Credit: NPS

Describe what you think each person is doing in their fossil-related career. Add a descriptive title above or next to each image.