

OUR STATE FOSSIL- The Trilobite

By Cindy Eusey

Everyone knows the **state bird** is the cardinal. The **state flower** is the scarlet carnation. The **state mammal** is the white-tailed deer. The **state insect** is the ladybug. The **state tree** is the buckeye. The **state beverage** is tomato juice. The **state gemstone** is flint.

But do you know the state fossil? A state fossil, you might ask? Yes, the trilobite is Ohio's state fossil and some school children made it happen! During construction of the Huffman Dam near Dayton a complete, 14.5 inch specimen was uncovered in 1919. Two elementary-school classes in Dayton proposed that the Huffman Dam trilobite be made the official state fossil. While declining to designate only that specific specimen, the legislature instead passed a bill naming the genus *Isotelus*, and it was signed by the governor on June 20, 1985.

While the largest complete *Isotelus* known measures 16 inches, partial remains indicate that the largest individuals may have grown to as much as 28 inches.

The mysterious Trilobite was a sea dwelling creature that lived over 250 million years ago, during the Cambrian Period. The Cambrian Period is known as "The Age of Trilobites." Back then, Ohio was covered by the sea. We can only see trilobites as fossils because they are extinct now. They went extinct before dinosaurs even came into existence.

Although over 20,000 species of trilobites are known, *Isotelus* was a predatory giant among its fellows, crawling along the sea floor in search of smaller creatures to eat.

The body of the trilobite is made up of 3 parts, the **cephalon** (head), the **thorax** (chest) and the **pygidium** (tail). Some trilobites were as small as 1 millimeter (the thickness of a dime) and others grew as big as 2 feet long!

Trilobites were hard shelled animals and they used their **spiny** armor to help protect them. Some could even roll up into a ball to help protect their soft undersides, like pill bugs or rolie pollies. Some trilobites had no eyes, and others had **compound eyes** that let them see all around them at once. They also had **jointed legs** on the underside of their bodies. They had three sets of legs for their head and one set of legs for each of the **segments** in their thorax.

Trilobites were **arthropods**, and are related to today's arthropods, such as the horseshoe crab! Trilobites are found in the rocks of all continents.

If you would like to learn more about Ohio's state fossil, the trilobite and other fossils, come to the Rock'n Fossils Event on Saturday, January 19 from 1-4 PM. Tom Kottyan will give a presentation on Trilobites at 3 PM. Check out our website for more details. www.crawfordparkdistrict.org

Some information provided by ODNR and Enchanted Learning

