Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Prehistoric Tees Valley

Tees Valley Museums

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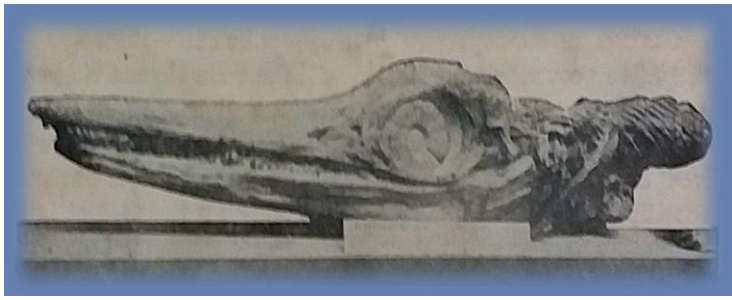
Tees Valley Museums



Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

This month we look into what our area was like millions of years ago and the creatures that lived here. Read about the Ancient Forest, a type of fossil wood used in jewellery, and the dolphin-like monster that lived in the seas. We will also show you how to make badges that look like ammonites.

Have you ever dug up a fossil?

What was it?

Did you keep it or give it to a museum?

The Ancient Forest

When the tide has been low, or there have been strong storms, an Ancient Forest is revealed on Hartlepool's beach. The remains of fossilised trees can be seen, and animal bones and flint tools have been found.

But how did this happen? How did a forest grow in the sea? Well, it didn't.

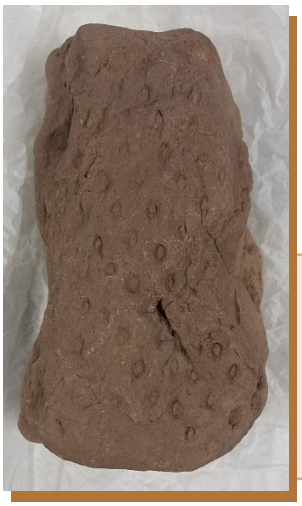
10,000 years ago, a stretch of land connected Britain to Europe, and it was called Doggerland. Miles of marshes, woods and hills would have covered the area of the North Sea, and it would have been possible for early humans to walk from Scotland to Denmark.

With the end of the Ice Age, and the melting of vast glaciers that covered continents, sea levels began to rise. Doggerland eventually disappeared into the sea.

The man in this photograph is Charles Taylor Trechmann, and he is walking across Hartlepool's Ancient Forest.

He was born in County Durham in 1885 and became a local archaeologist, uncovering prehistoric sites in the north east.

Let's look at the types of fossilised plants that would have been dug up from the Ancient Forest.



This is **Triplophyllum**, a type of fern that is still alive today, but can only be found in Brazil. 200 million years ago it would have been warm and humid in our area, a perfect place for this fern to grow.

Stigmaria are the fossils of tree roots. They are made when the tree dies and the roots rot away, leaving behind a cast which is filled with sedimentary rock.

Nilssonia are extinct cycads, evergreen, cone-bearing plants that grow in sand or hard rock. They too would have thrived in the Tees Valley when it was tropical.

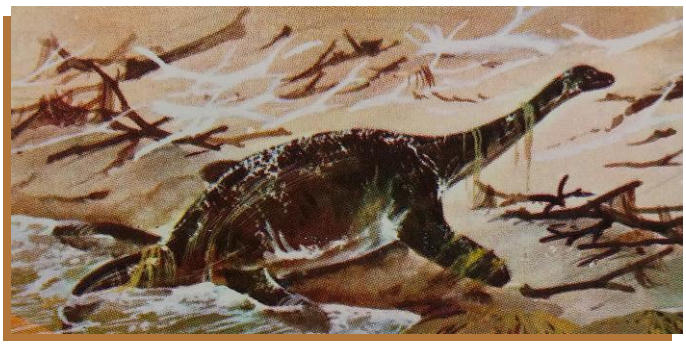
Jet

Jet is glossy black and looks like a precious mineral but is wood that has been fossilised. Jet from the cliffs around Whitby is of a high quality and has been used as jewellery since the Neolithic period.

This is Whitby jet mourning jewellery. It was worn during the Victorian period, especially by Queen Victoria after her husband, Prince Albert, died.

Fun Fact

Jet isn't the only thing that's been discovered in Whitby's cliffs – the fossils of marine creatures like plesiosaurs have also been uncovered there!



Evolution – How fish became reptiles

400 million years ago the Tees Valley was made up of rivers and swamps and most of the animals that used to live here were fish and amphibians.

As the continents began to shift and the land rose, some fish (like this **Eusthenopteron**) developed lungs that could breathe air. If their river began to dry up, they could pull themselves onto land and search for a new watery home.

This **Ichthyostega** was the next stage in evolution. It had fully developed limbs for crawling on dry land and its tail had fins, so it was a powerful swimmer. Like a frog, it lived in rivers and on land.

Eryops were like crocodiles, they lived in swamps but could only breathe air and had scaley skin that would not dehydrate like their fishy ancestors.

Ammonites

Ammonites are the fossils most likely to be found on our coasts. They are the remains of cephalopods, squid-like creatures that swam in the ocean over 60 million years ago.

As the cephalopod grew it would make new chambers in its shell, possibly making a new one every month, creating the spiral that we all recognise.

Fun Fact

In folklore there is a story that Whitby was plagued by snakes. The Abbess of Whitby, Saint Hilda, decapitated the snakes and turned them to stone. Ammonites, with their coiled shells, were believed to be the snakes.

Ichthyosaurs

Ichthyosaurs were dolphin-like lizards that lived in the ocean over 150 million years ago. They would have been about 8 feet long, had fearsome jaws and large eye sockets.

Ichthyosaur fossils are not always found in good condition. The first fossils were discovered in 1699, but people didn't study fossils then. Like the ammonites being thought of as stone snakes, ichthyosaur fossils were believed to be very old fish bones.

Then in 1857 an almost complete fossil skeleton of an ichthyosaur was discovered near Whitby.

This is the fossilised skull of an ichthyosaur discovered in 1902 in Carlin How mine. It was owned by Bell Brothers, one of the leading iron-making companies in Teesside.

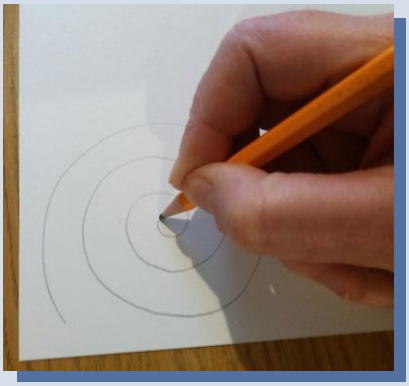
Sir Thomas Hugh Bell was the Managing Director and kept the fossil until 1905 when he donated it to Dorman Museum.

Have a Go! - Make your own Ammonite badges

Follow these steps to make badges that look like ammonites!

You will need –

- Pencil
- Card
- String
- Glue
- Scissors
- Tin foil
- Coloured cellophane
- Safety pin



Step 1 – Draw a large spiral on a piece of card. Leave enough room to cut out the shape later.

Step 2 – Cut a piece of string that will be long enough to cover your pencil drawing and stick the string to the card using a glue stick or PVA glue. Let it dry for a few minutes.

Step 3 – Cut out the spiral shape. Cover the cut-out card with tin foil, use glue to help it stick. Press down on the tin foil to show the pattern of the string.

Step 4 – Once it is covered in tin foil, glue your cellophane over the shape.

Step 5 - Glue a safety pin on the back to wear it.

And there you have your Ammonite Badge!

All images used in this pack are courtesy of Dorman Museum, Hartlepool Museum and Kirkleatham Museum and Grounds.

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under 'Latest News' or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk