# HOW TO IDENTIFY FOSSILS

Picking up and looking at rocks is really exciting but how do you know if the rock you have has a fossil inside?

To be honest it's a skill that comes with lots of experience and practise. It's a good idea to start reading a basic geology book that tells you about what types of rocks contain fossils.

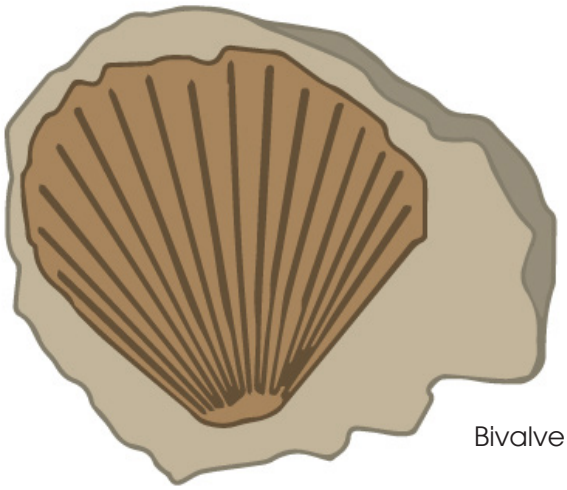
Trilobite

Sedimentary rocks are the only rocks that contain fossils so you can rule out looking in granite or slate for anything that might resemble a fossil.

Next, you have to use clues in the rock to tell you about how it might have formed. A stripy piece of orange sandstone where you can just about see the grains of sand with your eyes, is most likely to have formed in a desert.

Ichthyosaur backbone

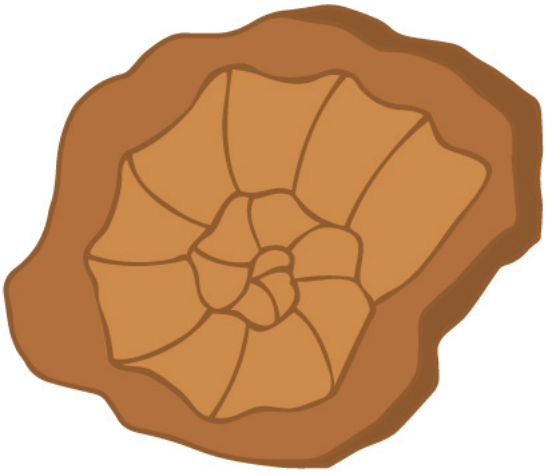
If we think about deserts today, they are not teeming with wildlife because they are such hard places to live. This rock is likely to have formed in a similar environment and probably won't have any fossils in it.



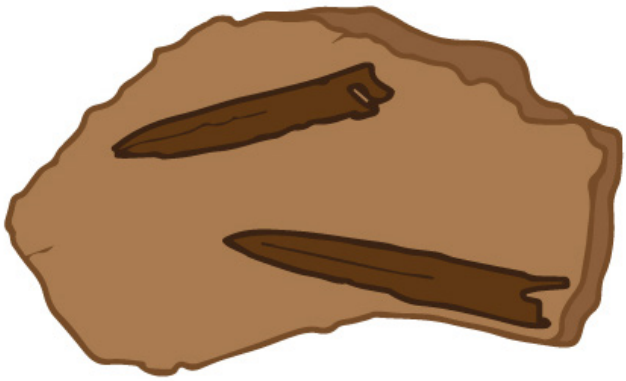
Bivalve

A piece of limestone that formed millions of years ago at the bottom of a sea bed however will have a greater chance of containing fossils. This is because ancient seas were home to a rich and diverse community of creatures and when they died and sank to the bottom of the sea bed, their bodies became fossilised and part of the rock. Shapes and colours are also important clues to look for.

Ammonites have a spiral shell and belemnites look like small bullets.



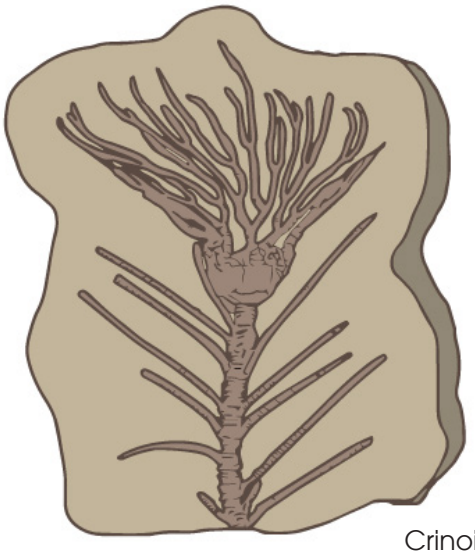
Ammonites



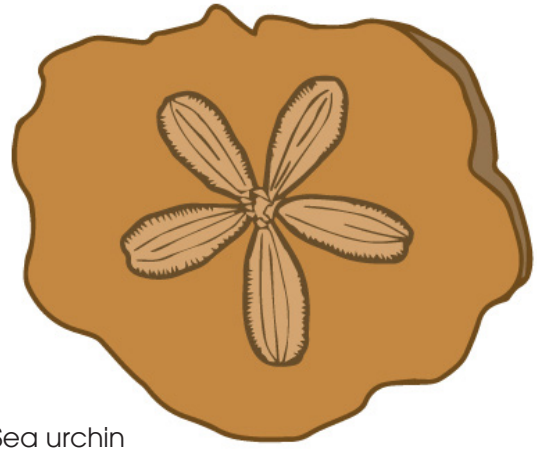
Belemnites

In many cases, these fossils appear sparkly white or brown (due to a mineral called calcite) or gold (iron pyrites or fools gold).

To practice your fossil identification skills, why not borrow a book out of your local library and visit your local museum to test whether you can tell which fossil is which.



Crinoid



Sea urchin

The more rocks you look at, the better you will get at understanding which ones are more likely to have fossils in them!

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