

Question and Answer Fact Sheet  
Baby Stegosaurus Recovery Program  
Dinosaur National Monument

1. When was the baby stegosaurus first discovered?

The fossil bones were first unearthed in 1965.

2. Why, then, the present "excitement" if the discovery was made 13 years ago?

The operational plan of the Dinosaur National Monument Quarry was earlier considered to be the mere "uncovering" of fossils. Only with greater sophistication of recovery and identification, and with the expanding quest for knowledge about dinosaurs, has the full significance of this discovery been established as work and emphasis have changed. The fact that the leaf-like plates characteristic of stegosaurus are absent in this recovery is quite provocative, for reasons that monument staff members will make clear. Because the skeletal remains are being removed, the baby stegosaurus can now be thoroughly measured, studied and described. From these data, other information can be extrapolated so that the scientific community may learn much more about stegosaurus and the entire dinosaur community.

3. How rare is this specimen?

Only one other "baby" stegosaurus has ever been found in the world. That occurred about 100 years ago in Quarry No. 13 of the Como Bluff quarry about 60 miles northwest of Laramie, Wyoming. Those remains, now housed at Yale University, were of an older stegosaurus, and were not as complete as those found here.

4. How much of the animal is preserved as fossils?

In terms of the number of bones, about 40 per cent of the specimen has been found. Of these bones, the more diagnostic parts are extremely well preserved, including most of the bones of both legs, the pelvis and shoulder structures and small, fragile ribs.

5. What parts are missing?

The conspicuous missing parts include the feet, vertebrae, skull and leaf-like back plates. It's possible these missing pieces may yet be located, embedded deeper in the rock wall of the quarry. (The absence of the back plates that distinguish stegosaurus creates scientific interest as to whether the young even had the plates or if they developed only in mature adults.)

6. What are the plans for this specimen?

All available parts will be removed from the quarry face, cleaned, and used to make plaster casts. Casted parts made of a synthetic resin will be used to create an articulated standing exhibit of the baby stegosaurus, which will be exhibited at the Quarry Visitor Center. (Missing bones will be cast from bones borrowed from other museums. For identification purposes, these bones will be colored differently from the actual replicas.) A second exhibit will be made, using the actual fossils, positioned exactly as they were found on the cliff face.

7. What is the timetable for completion of the project?

All fossil bones will be removed from the quarry face this summer. Casting and final mounting of the specimen will be completed within 18 months from now.

8. Can others obtain replica casts?

The National Park Service cannot sell museum items. Only enough casts will be made to serve the interests of three or four other museums.

9. Why is the baby stegosaurus such a rare find?

Because the bone material of all living creatures is soft and pliable at infancy, the bones would be subject to rapid decay. Only if the remains are promptly covered by silt and mud at death is the decay process halted.



10. Of what size was an adult stegosaurus?

A full-grown stegosaurus was from 12 to 15 feet in length, stood about 7 feet high at the hip and weighed about 4,000 pounds. This specie was vegetarian. Nothing is known of their life expectancy. Neither has it been established whether the young were born alive or hatched from eggs.

11. Is it possible to establish the cause of death of the baby stegosaurus?

No. It is an educated guess, however, that it perished within one mile of the quarry site -- perhaps less -- and its body promptly covered by silt borne by a prehistoric stream at this location.

12. How old was the animal, and how much did it weigh?

There is no immediate means of establishing the stegosaurus' age, although additional research will certainly shed more light on growth rates in dinosaurs and other animals preserved in the fossil records. Based on bone size and structure, the baby stegosaurus' weight is estimated at about 75 to 100 pounds.