



Where the Dinosaurs Walked

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Imagine cutting through the side of a mountain to make way for a road and discovering huge tracks in the rocky slope – tracks too big to be made by any living animal. Tracks so unusual, they could only have been made by one kind of creature, the dinosaur!



That's what happened in the foothills of Colorado in 1937 when workers were building a road to the Red Rocks



Amphitheater. They blasted along a ridge and uncovered Dakota sandstone dotted with dinosaur tracks or trace fossils. The threetoed footprints, as big as bicycle wheels, were left by iguanodons. This area was later named Dinosaur Ridge and is now a national, natural landmark.



Erosion and excavating in the early 1990s revealed over 300 tracks made by a variety of dinosaurs. "How did the tracks get into the side of the mountain?" you ask. There is a place where the stone has ripple lines in it. This tells us the land here was once covered with water. Have you ever walked along a beach and left your footprints in the sand? That's probably what the dinosaurs did right before the water flooded, filling the footprints with silt, or fine rock particles. This preserved the impressions which became permanent



as layer upon layer hardened over time into sedimentary rock. Then, the flat ground pushed up at a 45-degree angle when the land shifted, moving the footprints to the side of the mountain.

If you come to Colorado and visit Dinosaur Ridge, you can walk about one mile along the road and see the large iguanodon footprints, dinosaur tracks, and fossils for yourself. On the east side of the hill you'll notice two sizes of theropod footprints. One is large, and the other is small. They were probably left by a mother and baby. A whole section of the hill is literally covered with dinosaur tracks. Bipedal birds left thin-toed marks. You can reach through the fence and touch some of the footprints. How many of your own handprints would it take to fill an iguanodon track?

On the west side of the ridge, you'll see giant bulges in the layers of rock sticking out of the side of the hill. These are sideways footprints made by the Apatosaurus, or what was called Brontosaurus. You will also see dinosaur bone fossils in the rock. Fossils here were discovered by Arthur Lakes in 1877. He uncovered the first bones of Stegosaurus and Apatosaurus. Diplodocus, and Allosaurus were also found. The turtle and crocodile bones found in this same area further prove that the land was once covered with water.

If you are a dinosaur maniac, you could come to Dinosaur Ridge Day Camp for ten to twelve-year-olds in the summer, or talk your parents into taking a family trip to Colorado for a day on the ridge. There's no other place quite like it on the earth. For a moment, you can be where the dinosaurs walked.

