

First Mosasaur Discovered at Badlands

In response to a visitor discovery last October, a park paleontological team verified the first fossil specimen of a mosasaur (genus *Mosasaurus*) at Badlands National Park, South Dakota, on November 8, 1996. A marine lizard, the mosasaur

lived at sea 75 million years ago and fed on fish. The discovery is of a juvenile, about 15-feet long, perhaps half of adult size, and the team recovered part of the jaw and some vertebrae. Dr. Gordon Bell, visiting professor at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and a mosasaur expert, was among the field team. Follow-up field work has revealed other vertebrate fossils that provide more information about the time period in which the mosaur lived, but no

additional mosasaur remains have been discovered.

Badlands is world famous for its assemblage of Oligocene-Eocene mammalian fossils and is the birthplace of North American paleontology. Recently, paleontologists have begun looking for fossils in older rock formations in the park, which are slowly yielding additional glimpses into the past. Under the direction of park paleontologist Rachel Benton, the less studied Pierre Shale of the Late Cretaceous period has been the subject of considerable scrutiny during the last 2 years. Such efforts paid off in the case of the mosasaur discovery, which was made in this older formation.

*Mosasaurus, a sea-going lizard
of the Cretaceous period.*

