

Digging Dino Buried Alive!

Scientists uncover a new type of dino fossil in China.



A fossil of the buried dino

Look outside. What do you see? Now, try to picture what was there 125 million years ago. This month, some scientists in China got a peek into that piece of the past. They uncovered two fossils of a new kind of dinosaur. And they think the creatures had been buried alive.

The experts named the new dino *Changmiania liaoningensis*. “*Changmiania* means ‘eternal sleep,’” said Eugenia Gold, a scientist who has studied dinosaurs. “The dinosaurs looked like they were asleep!” she told *News-O-Matic*. Gold explained that *Liaoningensis* means “from Liaoning.” That is the area of China where experts uncovered the fossils.

Scientists were surprised to see such complete remains of the creatures. “Both animals were discovered with no deformation of the skeleton,” Pascal Godefroit told *News-O-Matic*. He helped lead the study. “This means that the animals were buried while they were still alive or immediately after their death.”

The animal had a short neck and arms. So it could “dig burrows, much like rabbits do,” Godefroit said. “And the top of its snout is shaped like a shovel,” the expert added. The dinos were able to use these characteristics to tunnel into the earth. But that didn’t save them. Godefroit and his team think the dinos were trapped by a volcanic eruption. Volcanic ash likely buried the creatures as they slept. Then, they stayed there for millions of years.

Gold explained how scientists determine the age of fossils. She said the bones are usually found in rock layers. Those layers have lots of volcanic material. That material forms when hot lava cools. As it cools, minerals form. “Some of those minerals will contain radioactive elements,” she said. “We can use those elements to calculate an age for the rock,” Gold added. “If there are layers above and below the fossils, then we can get an estimate of how old those fossils are.”

Age isn't the only interesting thing about this critter. The team noticed other features of the bones. The creature had powerful hind legs and a long tail. So the dino was likely a super-fast runner.

This quick little dino is a brand-new find. But how do scientists know that? After all, there are tons of fossils found by scientists. "We look at the bones and compare them to the skeletons of other dinosaurs," Gold explained. "We run that information through a computer program," Gold added. That program can help show how dinosaurs are related.

Experts such as Gold and Godefroit will keep digging up the dirt on dinos. After all, Gold said, "There is always more to discover!"

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