

The Age of the Dinosaurs

The Age of the Dinosaurs – The Mesozoic Era

The Mesozoic Era began 250 million years ago and is mid-life in the Earth's history. It was made up of three periods: Triassic (200-250 million years ago), Jurassic (200-145 million years ago), and Cretaceous (65-145 million years ago). Preceding extinctions created new opportunities for life on Earth. The Mesozoic was The Age of the Dinosaur.

Dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago and no one knows exactly why. One widely accepted theory is that an asteroid struck Earth and changed global climates and made it difficult for plants to grow by using the sun's energy. This caused a collapse in the Earth's food chains, triggering global extinctions. Other scientists now suggest that massive volcanic eruptions in India may have been partly responsible.

Pangaea (Pan-jee-uh) was a supercontinent made up of all the Earth's continents. It lasted for about 100 million years and during the three periods of the Mesozoic it slowly separated into the continents that are now familiar to us.

Mesozoic British Columbia

Several First Nations groups who live in BC's interior tell their children that the world was born from the waters of surrounding lakes. This creation myth is similar to the way scientists explain how the land mass of British Columbia came to be.

- Triassic BC was mostly an underwater world. Wandering fragments of land and ocean crust drifted towards the western coast of the North American continent, which was located near the present BC-Alberta border. Our understanding of BC's evolution comes from marine deposits found in places like Wapiti Lake, BC. Huge marine reptiles like the Ichthyosaur from northern BC ruled the waters. It was 23 metres long and may have been the largest predator that ever lived.
- In Jurassic times, mountains formed and land emerged from the sea in our province. The ancient oceans were full of shelled creatures. Clams are still with us, but the ammonites of that ancient time disappeared with the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.
- British Columbia as we know it today arrived mostly in the Cretaceous period, between 65-140 million years ago. A great inland sea separated what is today Alberta and B.C. from the rest of North America. Vancouver Island and parts of the mainland coast drifted towards their present locations. The east side of Vancouver Island was a verdant subtropical forest with huge palms like the *Phoenicites* (FEE-nih-SIGH-tees). Crabs like the *Longosorbis* (LON-goo-SOR-bis) skittered across the bottom of the sea and along the shore. Huge extinct reptilian predators like the *Elasmosaur* (a-LAS-mo-SOR) hunted BC's waters. It looked like a giant turtle with a snake threaded through it. True birds and flying reptiles soared through the sky.