



One August day, in the summer of 1990, Sue Hendrickson kept looking for fossils when the rest of her companions left to repair a flat tire. Staying behind in the Badlands - near [Faith, South Dakota](#) - was one of the best things she ever did.

Sue has written an autobiography - *Hunt for the Past: My Life as an Explorer* - in which she shares some of her adventures with the rest of the world. (For example ... she made her first "find" when she was four years old.)

Doing careful background work, before she hit the dinosaur-searching trail, Sue tells us how she thought about where to look:

To find the dinosaur she calls "the biggest, baddest carnivorous beast that ever walked on earth," Hendrickson started with maps made by geologists searching for oil. She identified areas of rock from the late Cretaceous period, when T. rex lived. Walking along those rocks, Hendrickson reminded herself how fossils are made.

"To be preserved, an animal has to be sealed off from oxygen before it's eaten or decomposes," she says. "So I look for thin layers of rock, because thin layers were laid down quickly." Hendrickson's trained eye can pick out differences in the rocks. One dark-brown rock was the bone from a 67-million-year-old T. rex!" (Online interview, by Scholastic, Sue's publisher.)



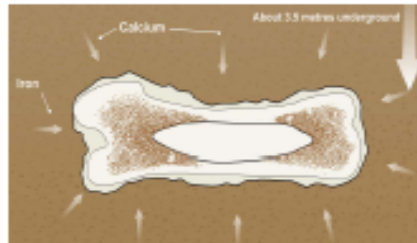
Bear kills the animal. The skin, organs, and flesh are eaten by the bear and scavengers.



The soft body parts such as skin and muscles rot away. The skeleton falls apart. The bones and teeth remain.



Before the bones break up in the sun, the river rises and covers them with a layer of sand.



Minerals in the bones are dissolved away. These are replaced with minerals in the ground. This takes a very long time.



Over time the sand and mud layers build up. They harden to form sedimentary rock.



Soil is washed away exposing the fossils. Fossils are found by palaeontologists.

In this story, we see Sue Hendrickson with her namesake discovery "Sue, the Dinosaur," who (once extracted from the South Dakota land) now lives at Chicago's Field Museum (when "she" ** is not on tour somewhere else in the world).

Click on the image, at the top of this page, for a much-better view.

** Although Sue, the Dinosaur, is often referred to as "she," no one is sure whether this huge *T. rex* is actually male or female.

Credits:

Image online, courtesy [Black Hills Institute of Geological Research, Inc.](http://www.blackhillsinstitute.com/)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



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Fossil Formation

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Sue Hendrickson with Her T. rex Find

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