

# SPORTING CLASSICS

## GREEN RIVER STONE FINDS RARE FOSSILIZED CROCODILE

You wouldn't expect to find a crocodile in the high sagebrush desert of southwestern Wyoming, but that's just what Jerome Montgomery, quarry manager and geologist for the Green River Stone Company, discovered last summer at the company's private quarry.

Crocodiles existed in Wyoming since the Eocene Epoch - some 50 million years ago - when the climate there was tropical, much like that of Florida today. It was also during this time that a large inter-mountain basin formed, what geologists now call Fossil Lake. The lake was home to tropical plants as well as a large variety of fish and reptiles.

Conditions in Fossil Lake were perfect for preserving whatever fell to the bottom. The depths were void of oxygen, which kept scavengers at a minimum and inhibited decomposition. Blooms of algae and runoff from surrounding mountains covered the plants and animals on the lakebed with a layer of silt, which over the course of millions of years petrified into layer upon layer of fossil-rich stone.

Fifty million years later, beautifully preserved fossils, almost all of them fish, were discovered. Green River Stone Company has been harvesting fossils from its private quarry since 2001.

While moving pieces of stone, Montgomery noticed the outline of something that was not a fish - as was the usual fare - but something much larger and more unusual, perhaps a rare and valuable find. What he initially saw turned out to be two large eye sockets and a very long snout. He immediately gathered all



*Carbon-dated a roughly 50 million years, this remarkably intact crocodile fossil was discovered in its sandstone bed at Green River Stone's private quarry in Wyoming. The fossil sold for a quarter-million dollars.*

the stone from that layer and took it back to the fossil preparation laboratory in Logan, Utah.

Fossil crocodiles are extremely rare finds in the Green River Formation. In fact, in the entire 150-plus years of fossil digging in the area, only four complete crocodile specimens were known until Montgomery's find. The specimen measures 57 inches long from snout to tail and was recently sold to a collector for more than \$250,000.