

PROFESSOR TALBOT'S BIG DISCOVERY

Kira Eaton – Interpreter, Dinosaur State Park

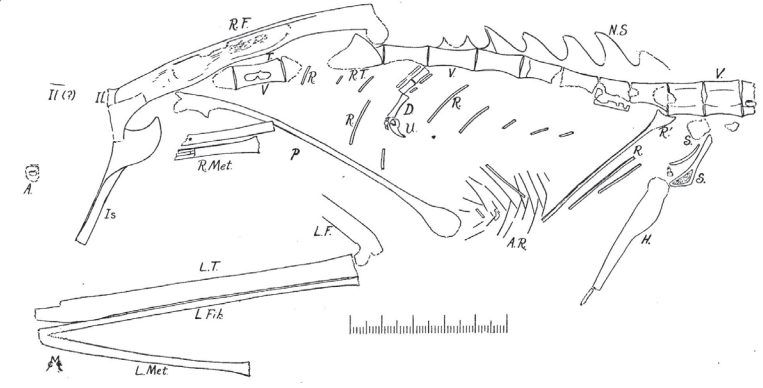


Mignon Talbot (1911 or earlier).
Photo Credit: Asa Kinney ++

PODOKESAURUS.



Hypothetical life restoration of Podokesaurus.
Author FunkMonk (Michael B. H.) **



Podokesaurus skeleton. Interpretative drawing
from 1911. By Clara Gould Mark °°

The Central Valley of Connecticut and Massachusetts is rich in fossil footprints but there are sadly few bones. We know of one of the few species of dinosaur that would have roamed the area thanks to Mignon Talbot. She was born in Iowa in 1869 into a middle-class family. She had support from her father to gain higher education and in 1904 she became the first woman to earn a PhD in geology from Yale University. Right out of school, she was accepted to a teaching position at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts-where she taught for 31 years. Four years after she started teaching, in 1908, she became the head of the geology department. Mignon Talbot also became the first woman ever admitted to the Paleontological Society in 1909.

Professor Talbot's big discovery happened by chance one day in 1910 while she was out for a walk. She happened upon a sandstone boulder and was amazed to discover not just some bone fragment-but almost an entire skeleton. The only part missing was the skull. The skeleton was only about 45 inches long, yet it was an adult dinosaur! She named this very small newly discovered dinosaur, Podokesaurus. Professor Talbot already had an extensive collection of fossil footprints that she had previously been studying. This time she teamed up with Richard Lull at Yale to learn more about this particular find. After research, and investigating the bones Professor Talbot found, they speculated that Podokesaurus was a meat-eating dinosaur that most likely ate bugs. Professor Talbot published a paper on Podokesaurus in 1911-making her the first woman to name and describe a (non-avian) dinosaur.



Dinosaur State Park. Podokesaurus skeleton replica.

Since we do not find many dinosaur bones in the Central Valley area of Connecticut, it can be very difficult to know what animals made all of the footprints. However, Grallator (a type of footprint-not the name of a dinosaur) is thought to belong to a small meat-eating dinosaur. It could possibly have been made by Coelophysis-which was a similar dinosaur also known to be in the area-but the footprint comes in a few sizes. Some of the smaller specimens seem too small for Coelophysis, so these Grallator footprints could very well have been made by Mignon's Podokesaurus. Tragically, there was a fire in the geology building at Mount Holyoke College that destroyed the skeleton she originally found on her walk. Mignon was able to rebuild her footprint collection, but there has never been another Podokesaurus bone or skeleton found. This makes it difficult to learn more about the dinosaur and the footprints. Thankfully, several casts of the original skeleton survived and we have two here at Dinosaur State Park for visitors to see!

On your next walk outside, take a look at the ground and rocks around you. While you may not find a dinosaur fossil or footprint, you can certainly find cool rocks and minerals. These rocks are like a book that record earth's ancient history, all we need to do is to read it!

°° By Clara Gould Mark - Podokesaurus holyokensis, a new dinosaur from the Triassic of the Connecticut Valley. American Journal of Science (Series 4) 31:469-479., Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25355776>

++ Asa Stephen Kinney(Life time: 1873-1961), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

** FunkMonk (Michael B. H.), CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons. Hypothetical life restoration. Based on figures in original description[1] and skeletal diagrams of the related Coelophysis, such as in the 2016 book The Princeton Field Guide to Dinosaurs by Gregory S. Paul.



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CCSS.ELA.Reading:
Informational Text: 3-5.2, 3-5.3, 3-5.8
NGSS Connections: MS-ESS2-3 Earth's Systems

