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SWITZERLAND - LAND OF THE DINOSAURS

About five years ago palaeontologists discovered nearly 500 well-preserved Dinosaur footprints in a layer of limestone near Courtedoux (JU), and since then another 1500 dinosaur footprints have been excavated from sites near Courtedoux - some up to 1 metre across! It is expected that another 4000 to 5000 tracks would be found in the next few years.

Scientists have been able to identify two main types of dinosaurs, sauropods and theropods, from these footprints.



Sauropods were large four-legged herbivores, 20-25 m long, with very long necks and tails and elephant-like bodies, while theropods were fierce, meat-eating dinosaurs which stood on two legs.

Some 150 million years ago, when these dinosaurs

lived, northern Switzerland was comparable to the Bahamas today, with beaches, large lagoons, islands, a dry climate and elevated temperatures. Conifers, ferns and vegetation similar to palm trees made up the sauropods' diet.

In August 2007 a huge dinosaur graveyard was found in Frick (AG), where a hobby fossil collector spotted several bones on a building site - and then realized that one of the muddy walls of the site was encrusted with dinosaur remains!. Frick is now the most important dinosaur site in Europe. Almost every 10 metres you dig, you come across a dinosaur. They are plant-eating Plateosaurs, up to 10 m long and 4 m high, with a small skull on a long neck, sharp teeth, a long tail, powerful limbs and a large thumb spike on each hand, probably used for defence and feeding. Plateosaurs were the first animals on earth to evolve the ability to feed on high vegetation.

More on: www.palaeojura.ch

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