

Dinosaur highway' dating back 166 million years discovered in England

A worker digging up clay in a southern England limestone quarry noticed unusual bumps that led to the discovery of a “dinosaur highway” and nearly 200 tracks that date back 166 million years, researchers said recently.

The extraordinary find made after a team of more than 100 people excavated the Dewars Farm Quarry, in Oxfordshire, expands upon previous paleontology work in the area and offers greater insights into the Middle Jurassic period, researchers at the universities of Oxford and Birmingham said.



“These footprints offer an extraordinary window into the lives of dinosaurs, revealing details about their movements, interactions, and the tropical environment they inhabited,” said Kirsty Edgar, a micropaleontology professor at the University of Birmingham.

Four of the sets of tracks that make up the so-called highway show paths taken by gigantic, long-necked, herbivores called sauropods, thought to be a dinosaur that grew to nearly 60 feet in length. A fifth set belonged to the Megalosaurus, a ferocious 30-foot predator that left a distinctive triple-claw print and was the first dinosaur to be scientifically named two centuries ago.

An area where the tracks cross raises questions about possible interactions between the carnivores and herbivores.

“Scientists have known about and been studying Megalosaurus for longer than any other dinosaur on Earth, and yet these recent discoveries prove there is still new evidence of these animals out there, waiting to be found. Nearly 30 years ago, 40 sets of footprints discovered in a limestone quarry in the area were considered one of the world’s most scientifically important dinosaur track sites.

The group that worked at the site this summer took more than 20,000 digital images and used drones to create 3-D models of the prints. The trove of documentation will aid future studies and could shed light on the size of the dinosaurs, how they walked and the speed at which they moved.

“The preservation is so detailed that we can see how the mud was deformed as the dinosaur’s feet squelched in and out,” said an earth scientist at the Oxford museum. “Along with other fossils like burrows, shells and plants we can bring to life the muddy lagoon environment the dinosaurs walked through.”

The findings will be shown at a new exhibit at the museum and also broadcast on the BBC’s “Digging for Britain” program.