
MARY ANNING

PALAEONTOLOGIST



Keys to the Ecosystem

A renowned fossil hunter, Mary Anning scoured the dangerous Jurassic cliffs at Lyme Regis searching for 'curios' to sell. She found ammonites, belemnites and strange 'bezoar stones' which, when cracked open, revealed fossilised bones and scales. Anning deduced that they were fossilised faeces, or coprolites. The analysis of these coprolites is now an important way to study past ecosystems.

"She understands more of the science than anyone else in this kingdom."



An Age of Reptiles

When she was 12, Anning and her brother Joseph unearthed an ichthyosaur, the most complete specimen ever found, causing a scientific uproar. Anning excavated, cleaned and prepared several more ichthyosaurs between 1815 and 1821.

Anning also discovered the first plesiosaur, another marine reptile. This specimen had such a long neck, with 35 vertebrae, that one scientist briefly believed it was a fake. Anning found a second, more complete plesiosaur in 1830, as well as the first pterodactyl outside of Germany and several fish.

Her groundbreaking discoveries provided evidence for both extinction and an ancient "Age of Reptiles".



It is "to her exertions we owe nearly all the fine specimens of Ichthyosauri of the great collections."



Mary Anning
Born: 21 May 1799
Died: 9 March 1847



Ada Lovelace Day
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