

1-B Bringing Home the Fossils

Caren Chase has an exciting job. She works for a museum as a fossil preparer. She travels to places where fossils are found. There, she makes sure they are dug up and shipped carefully.

Chase's latest trip was to Mongolia's Gobi Desert. Some of the world's best preserved dinosaurs lie under the Gobi's sand. Getting a dinosaur skeleton safely out of its surrounding rock requires many hands, and Chase is there to see that the job is done right.

Chase collects specimens herself. On the Gobi trip, she found a five-inch (12.7-cm) lizard fossil. She brushed away the sand. She cut into the rock around the lizard, not too close to the actual specimen. When the block of soft rock with the lizard inside was almost free, she covered it with gauze and a layer of plaster of paris. Then she pulled the block free and flipped it over. She coated the underside with plaster of paris, too. The plaster kept the fossil safe on its journey to the museum.

Back at the museum, Chase carefully chipped away the plaster and the rock to expose the delicate fossil skeleton. Preserved and prepared, it would become part of the museum's display of prehistoric life.