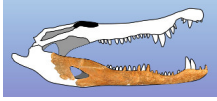


An Ancient Alligator for the Alf Museum

Written by Andrew Farke

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Ancient Utah was even more infested by crocodylians than thought, thanks to a new discovery announced by the Alf Museum. This 75 million year old partial skeleton turns out to be from an early alligator called *Leidyosuchus*, which had previously only been known from rocks of a similar age in Alberta. With this find, scientists have identified a whopping six different kinds of ancient crocs living in southern Utah at the same time!

The Alf Museum's *Leidyosuchus* was discovered in 2010 by Kevin Quick, a science teacher at [The Webb Schools \(Claremont, California\)](#), and Sam Woodward '12, then a high school student at Webb. They were on a summer paleontology expedition with the museum in southern Utah, within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Kevin found a small cobble with a piece of bone sticking out one end; returning to the site with Sam, they together found the rock layer where the fragment had originated. Excavations in 2011 uncovered the partial skeleton of this animal, including lower jaws, osteoderms (bony plates embedded in the back of the animal), ribs, vertebrae, and limb bones.

In collaboration with Augustyn Family Curator Dr. Andy Farke, Webb students Madison Henn '13, Albert Xu '13, and Sam Woodward '12 worked to identify the type of animal that the bones came from. Several features in the skeleton identified it as an alligatoroid, a member of the crocodylian group that includes alligators and caimans. Details of the jaw bones further narrowed the fossil's identity to a type of animal called *Leidyosuchus*. *Leidyosuchus* (whose name means "Leidy's crocodile," in honor of a noted early American paleontologist) was an early alligatoroid, distinguished from modern gators most notably by its more triangular skull in top view. Although the shape of the snout in the Alf Museum specimen suggests it was probably previously unknown species of *Leidyosuchus*, the researchers decided not to give it a formal name until more complete skull fossils are discovered.

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