



discovering fossils

bringing the prehistoric world to life



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Meet the team



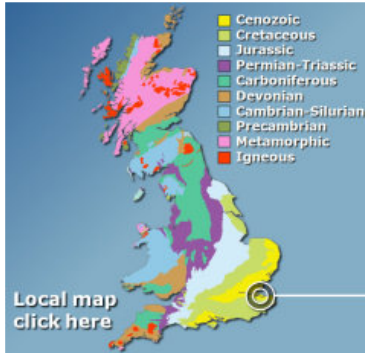
Discovering Fossils is a non-commercial public resource dedicated to showcasing palaeontology. Written and designed by Roy Shepherd, scientific guidance by Robert Randell. ©2009

Fossil hunting guidelines



Isle of Sheppey (Kent) fossils

Map and directions



Directions: Access is made along Jetty Road. Follow the B2231 until you reach Leysdown-on-Sea. Turn right on to Warden Road and follow it until you reach the beach. A small car park is located off on Jetty Road.



Location summary

Geological period

Lower Eocene

Approximate age

48 million years

Fossil diversity

Shark teeth, crab carapace...

Find frequency

High

Dangers to consider

Deep mud and rising tide...

Equipment needed

Bags to contain fossils...

Protection status

This location is designated a [SSSI](#)

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How might the Isle of Sheppey have looked 48 million years ago?



Introduction

The Isle of Sheppey is an excellent place to find fossils. The location itself is accessible to all, however some parts of the beach do become rocky and/or muddy. The following page is based on fossils found within close proximity to Warden Point (click map above).

The Isle of Sheppey is located on the Thames estuary and is within a short distance of London. The best place to explore for fossils is along the north coast, which stretches from Sheerness to Leysdown-on-Sea. If it's your first time visiting you should access the beach at Warden, just west of Leysdown. Here you'll find plenty of parking off Imperial Drive and a short walk down to the beach (see below-left). Over the years erosion of the coastline has been rapid, resulting in roads and buildings simply falling into the sea. The picture below-right shows two buildings which have succumb to this process... how much will home insurance cost here!



Left: Parking is available at Warden, from here head Left along the beach. **Right:** Erosion of the cliffs has been rapid in recent years.

Where to look for fossils?

From the car park head west towards Sheerness. Fossils are abundant at Sheppey and little experience is needed to find a wide range of fossils. The first place to direct your attention is the expanse of pyrite pebbles that occur near the foreshore. Here you'll find a range of plant and marine fossils, mainly small pieces of wood/twigs, plenty of gastropods and sharks teeth.



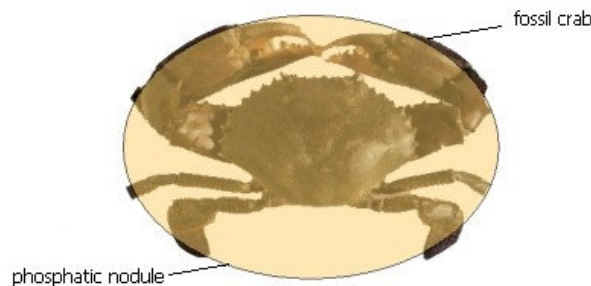
A small pyritised gastropod from the foreshore pebbles.

There's little point looking for fossils in the cliffs themselves, as the vast majority of fossils are washed out from the clay on the beach. Among the fossils Sheppey is most famous for are crabs, fish and lobster remains which are often in excellent condition when found.



The best fossils are found within phosphatic nodules on the foreshore, no tools are required, just a keen eye.

Less than one in a hundred phosphatic nodules contain complete fossils, so a little patience and determination is needed. The nodules you're looking for will have clear evidence of the fossil within, distinguishable by the contrasting dark areas. For example, in the instances of complete crabs the claws are often visible on the outer edges as pictured above right (see diagram below).



Many of these nodules occur on the foreshore, however they're often damaged due to the affects of wave action. The best quality fossils are always found in situ on the foreshore expanses but are not frequent. For more information about the features and processes controlling coastal fossil collecting locations [click here](#).

It's best to avoid trying to remove the fossils from the nodules - they will break. Instead wrap them in foam and wait until you've returned home where careful prepping can be undertaken. The best way to prepare the fossils is to scrape the matrix away with a scalpel or Stanley knife. If the specimen is not completely exposed then an air-pen can be used to remove the rest. Some collectors of London Clay fossils only hand prepare choosing not to take the chance of damaging the fossil with the air-pen.

Important: Whilst Sheppey is an excellent place for fossils, you should also pay attention to the presence of deep mud. There are areas of the foreshore where the mud reaches several feet in depth especially in spring or autumn. These liquid mudslides occur on the cliff slopes and can form a crust that

appears solid. Children are at particular risk, so please ensure you take extra care if they accompany you. We recommend you always carry a mobile phone to alert others in the event of an accident.



Left: Some areas of the mud are deep and slippery. **Right:** The shallow beach gradient means the rising tide occurs very fast.

What fossils might you find?



Left: A large crab with missing claw within foreshore nodule. **Right:** Large lobster underside *Linuparus eocenicus*.



Left: A rather nice gastropod found within the shingle. **Right:** A lobster burrow.



Left: A small twig preserved as pyrite. **Right:** A section of a lobster's tail.

Protecting your finds

It's important to spend some time considering the best way to protect your finds onsite, in transit, on display and in storage. Prior to your visit, consider the equipment and accessories you're likely to need, as these will differ depending on the type of rock, terrain and prevailing weather conditions.



Left: Fossil wrapped in foam, ready for transport. **Right:** A small compartment box containing cotton wool is ideal for separating delicate specimens.

When you discover a fossil, examine the surrounding matrix (rock) and consider how best to remove the specimen without breaking it; patience and consideration are key. The aim of extraction is to remove the specimen with some of the matrix attached, as this will provide added protection during transit and future handling; sometimes breaks are unavoidable, but with care you should be able to extract most specimens intact. In the event of breakage, carefully gather all the pieces together, as in most cases repairs can be made at a later time...[continued](#).

A great family day out...



Left: Participants on various Discovering Fossils and Junior Geo fossil hunting events. **Right:** Families handle some real fossils at the event base.

Join us on an organised fossil hunt! Discovering Fossils and JuniorGeo have joined forces to provide a series of exciting prehistoric experiences for families and individuals of all ages and levels of knowledge. Our events include an introduction to the geology and fossils, followed by a group fossil hunt where everyone has an opportunity to find and collect a variety of fossils. To find out more [CLICK HERE](#).



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