

Dear Beakman,
How do fossils
turn into rocks?
Chad Conley
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Beakman or Jax,
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Dear Chad,
Fossils are like the planet's scrapbook. Things get saved and sometimes hidden or forgotten in a scrapbook. When we find them again, these bits and pieces of life's leftovers are full of clues about our past. It's the same with fossils. But fossils are *not* things that have turned into rock. Most fossils are rocks that were made in the shape of a living thing that decayed and left behind a mold – a mold in the living thing's shape. *You Can* use plaster to make a fossil in a few minutes. Real fossils take many thousands of years to form.

Beakman
Beakman Place

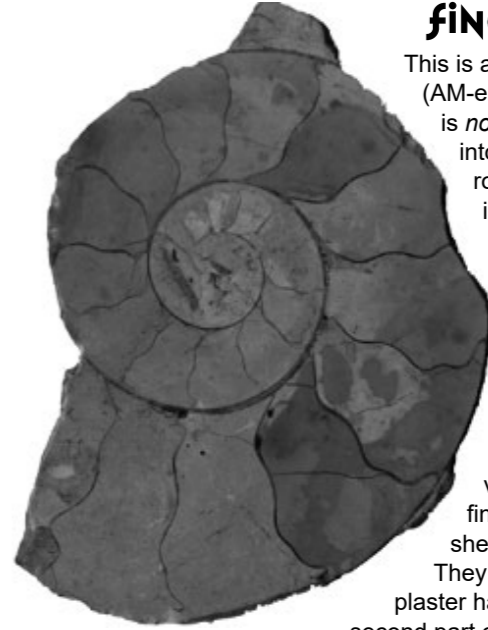
experiment #1 Make A Fossil

WHAT YOU NEED: Plaster of Paris - petroleum jelly - old baking pan - help from a grown-up

WHAT TO DO: Slime up one of your hands with the petroleum jelly. Mix enough plaster to put about an inch into an old baking pan. Gently press your hand into the plaster until you have just dented the plaster's surface. *Caution: Do not push your hand all the way into the plaster. You could get stuck.* Plaster makes heat when it cures, so expect the pan to get warm. Since your hand will be on top of the plaster, *You Can* just lift it off if it gets too warm for comfort.



MORE STUFF TO DO: Leave your hand in place until the plaster cures – 15-20 minutes. After it's hard, slime up the plaster handprint you just made. Cover it with greasy petroleum jelly. Mix up another batch of plaster and pour it on top of your handprint. After the new plaster cures, pop them apart. If it won't pop open, stand it up on the edge and tap it lightly with a hammer.



finding fossils

This is a fossil of an ammonite (AM-en-ite). Remember, this is *not* a shell that turned into rock. Rather it is a rock that was deposited in the shape of an ancient animal.

You Can find fossils all around. You just have to look closely at lots of rocks.

A great thing to look at is limestone driveway gravel. Look very closely and you'll find little fossils of sea shells in the bits of gravel.

They are a lot like the plaster hand you made in the second part of your experiment.

