

## Reading About the Burgess Shale

The Burgess Shale is a rock formation in British Columbia. It's the most famous Cambrian Explosion fossil site. The Burgess Shale was the first place where scientists found fossils from this important event.

In August 1909, a paleontologist named Charles Walcott found fossils that confirm this explosion of life. A horse in Walcott's group kicked off rocks from a cliff face. Walcott collected fossils he saw in those rocks. He shipped the fossils back to the Smithsonian Museum. Walcott looked at some of the 80,000 fossils but wasn't sure what they were. He thought they might be the ancient ancestors of insects and crabs: arthropods.

Scientists didn't know what the Burgess Shale fossils were. So they stayed in boxes in the museum for sixty years. In the early 1970s, a paleontologist named Harry Wittington was studying ancient invertebrates. His research led him to the cabinets where the Burgess treasures were stored.

Wittington decided that some of the animals in the fossils were arthropods. The others were ancient examples of the body plans for every other animal alive today. All the animal groups that are alive today have their roots in the Cambrian Explosion.