

FIELD GUIDE · EDITION ONE



Prehistoric India

Nine animals that walked the Deccan before us

RANGE 185-66 MILLION YEARS AGO

BEDS LAMETA & KOTA FORMATIONS

GROUND GUJARAT · MADHYA PRADESH · MAHARASHTRA · TELANGANA

COMPANION TO THE NOVEL

PRAANN: THE RESURRECTION

SREENIVAS SAHITH KUKKALA

India had dinosaurs. Almost nobody tells you this.

Ask a child anywhere in the world to name a dinosaur and you will hear Tyrannosaurus, Velociraptor, Stegosaurus. Every one of them is American or Mongolian. Not one of them ever set foot in Asia south of the Himalaya.

Yet the rock beneath central and western India holds one of the richest late-Cretaceous fossil beds on Earth. Horned predators hunted here. Herds of long-necked giants nested in the river sand. A snake three and a half metres long coiled inside their nests and waited.

These animals have names — Sanskrit names, Marathi names, names honouring Indian scientists and an Indian poet. They were dug out of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana by Indian palaeontologists, and they are as strange and specific as anything from Montana.

This guide introduces nine of them. Everything here is real: the species, the localities, the dates.

A FOOTNOTE WORTH KNOWING

In 1877 Richard Lydekker described two tail bones from near Jabalpur and named them *Titanosaurus indicus*. The specimen is considered too incomplete to stand today — but the entire global group *Titanosauria*, hundreds of species across every continent, still carries a name that started with an Indian fossil.

The ground, layer by layer

Every page in this guide carries a strip down its outer edge. That strip is a simplified column of the rock under the Deccan — oldest at the bottom, youngest at the top. The green arrow marks the layer each animal came from.

DECCAN TRAPS

Basalt lava, ~66 Ma. Up to two kilometres thick.

RED BOLE

Weathered soil between eruptions. Every band is a pause.

LAMETA FORMATION

~70–66 Ma. River sand and limestone. Almost every dinosaur here.

KOTA FORMATION

~185 Ma, Early Jurassic. Telangana. Far older animals.

OLDER BASEMENT

Gondwanan rock, before the dinosaurs.

WHY IT ALL ENDS AT THE SAME LINE

The Lameta beds sit directly beneath the first lava flows. You can stand at Bagh or Rahioli and put your hand on the exact surface where a living landscape was buried. Almost nowhere else on Earth is an extinction so legible in the rock.

Rajasaurus

narmadensis

RAH-jah-SORE-us nar-mah-DEN-sis



NAME MEANS

King lizard of the Narmada

LENGTH

~9 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~67 Ma

DESCRIBED

2003

FOUND AT

Rahioli, Kheda district, Gujarat • Narmada valley, Madhya Pradesh

India's apex predator, and the only Indian dinosaur most Indians have heard of. A heavy-skulled abelisaurid with a single low horn growing from the roof of its snout — not a weapon so much as a signal, the way a stag's antlers are.

The bones sat in storage for decades before an Indian–American team reconstructed the skull and named it. It is a cousin of *Carnotaurus* from Argentina, which tells you something true and enormous: India and South America were once the same landmass.

Rahiolisaurus

gujaratensis

rah-hee-OH-lee-SORE-us goo-jah-rah-TEN-sis



NAME MEANS

Lizard from Rahioli

LENGTH

~8 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~68 Ma

DESCRIBED

2010

FOUND AT

Rahioli, Kheda district, Gujarat

A slimmer, longer-legged predator than *Rajasaurus*, sharing the same ground. Built for running rather than grappling.

What makes the find remarkable is the quarry itself: bones from at least seven individuals of different ages, jumbled together in a single bed. Whether they died together or were washed into one place is still argued — but the possibility that these animals moved as a group changes how you picture them entirely.

Indosuchus

raptorius

IN-doh-S00-kus rap-T0R-ee-us



NAME MEANS

Indian crocodile

LENGTH

~7 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~70 Ma

DESCRIBED

1933

FOUND AT

Bara Simla hill, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

Named from skull fragments dug out of a hill inside a Jabalpur army cantonment. The name is a misfire — it is not a crocodile and never was, but flat-skulled theropods confused everyone in 1933.

It belongs to the same family as *Rajasaurus*, which raises a genuine puzzle: how did three or four large predators share one floodplain? Somewhere in the answer is a partition of prey and territory that nobody has yet reconstructed.

Indosaurus

matleyi

IN-doh-SORE-us MAT-lee-eye



NAME MEANS

Indian lizard, for Charles Matley

LENGTH

~6 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~70 Ma

DESCRIBED

1933

FOUND AT

Bara Simla hill, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

Known chiefly from a partial braincase with an extraordinarily thick, rugose skull roof — bone built to absorb impact.

That thickening is the whole story. Animals do not grow armoured skulls for no reason, and the usual reason is each other. Head-to-head shoving between rival males is the leading guess, which means the fossil is less a portrait of a hunter than a record of an argument.

Laevisuchus

indicus

lee-vee-SOO-kus IN-dih-kus



NAME MEANS

Light crocodile

LENGTH

~2 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~70 Ma

DESCRIBED

1933

FOUND AT

Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

The small one. A lightly built noosaurid known from a handful of neck vertebrae — hollow, thin-walled, built for speed rather than force.

Nothing about it is impressive on a museum label, and that is exactly why it matters. Ecosystems are mostly made of small fast animals eating smaller ones. *Laevisuchus* is the evidence that the Lameta floodplain was a functioning world and not just a stage for giants.

Isisaurus

colberti

EYE-sis-SORE-us kol-BER-tye



NAME MEANS

Indian Statistical Institute lizard

LENGTH

~18 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~70 Ma

DESCRIBED

1997, renamed 2003

FOUND AT

Bara Simla, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

India's best-known titanosaur, and an odd-looking one. Unusually long forelimbs and a short, thick neck held closer to vertical than the classic sauropod pose — less a bridge, more a crane.

Fossilised dung associated with these animals has yielded grass phytoliths, pushing the origin of grasses back into the Cretaceous. A creature the size of a bus is quietly responsible for one of the more disruptive findings in botany.

Jainosaurus

septentrionalis

JAIN-oh-SORE-us sep-ten-tree-oh-NAH-lis



NAME MEANS

Jain's northern lizard

LENGTH

~18 m

PERIOD

Late Cretaceous, ~68 Ma

DESCRIBED

1994

FOUND AT

Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, and across central India

Named for Sohan Lal Jain, whose work anchored Indian dinosaur palaeontology through decades when almost nobody outside the country was paying attention.

A broad, heavy titanosaur that shared the floodplain with *Isisaurus*. Two giant herbivores in one habitat implies different feeding heights or different plants — the same partition you see today between elephant and rhinoceros.

Kotasaurus

yamanpalliensis

KOH-tah-SORE-us yah-man-pah-lee-EN-sis



NAME MEANS

Kota lizard from Yamanpalli

LENGTH

~9 m

PERIOD

Early Jurassic, ~185 Ma

DESCRIBED

1988

FOUND AT

Yamanpalli, Adilabad district, Telangana

One of the most primitive sauropods known anywhere — a long-necked giant caught early in the process of becoming one, still carrying features from its two-legged ancestors.

→ Around eight hundred bones from a dozen individuals came out of a single Telangana quarry, jumbled together by an ancient river. No skull was ever found; only teeth. It shared its floodplain with *Barapasaurus*, and between them these two animals make the Kota beds one of the most important Early Jurassic sites on Earth.

Barapasaurus

tagorei

bah-RAH-pah-SORE-us tah-GOR-ay-eye



NAME MEANS

Big-legged lizard, for Rabindranath Tagore

LENGTH

~14 m

PERIOD

Early Jurassic, ~185 Ma

DESCRIBED

1975

FOUND AT

Pochampally, Adilabad district, Telangana

A hundred and twenty million years older than everything else in this guide — and the only one from the Telangana rock, near enough to Hyderabad for a weekend drive.

Some three hundred bones from at least six animals came out of that quarry, making it one of the earliest well-known sauropods anywhere on Earth. It was found in Tagore's birth centenary year, and named for him. There is no other dinosaur named after a poet.

The ground opened

Around sixty-six million years ago, western India began to erupt — not from a volcano but from long fissures in the crust, in flood after flood of basalt.

The Deccan Traps are among the largest volcanic provinces on Earth. Lava buried an area larger than France, in places two kilometres deep. It went on, in pulses, for hundreds of thousands of years, loading the atmosphere with sulphur and carbon dioxide.

At almost the same moment an asteroid struck the Yucatán. Which of the two did the killing is one of the longest-running arguments in the earth sciences, and the honest answer is probably both — a world already destabilised, then hit.

What is not in doubt is where it is written down. The animals in this guide lie in the Lameta beds. Directly above them is basalt. You can put a hand on the line between them.

WHERE TO STAND

Bagh caves and Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh · Rahioli and Balasinor, Gujarat, where the Raiyoli fossil park protects a nesting site · Jabalpur's Lameta Ghat, the type locality, on the bank of the Narmada.

THE NOVEL

PRAANN

The Resurrection

November 1988. An Indian naval detachment en route to Malé puts ashore on an uncharted island. What the excavation turns up is not supposed to exist.

Eleven years later, PRAANN — the Prehistoric Resurrection and Ancient Ancestry Naturalism Node, an organisation the world believes studies fossils — is ready to run its pilot. The island is stocked. Nothing on it has drawn breath since the Deccan burned, and every one of them came out of Indian rock.

Outside, a cyclone has just flattened the eastern coast, a war has just ended in the north, and every computer in the country is being checked for a date that hasn't arrived yet.

Nobody is watching. Nobody knows to.

PRAANN: The Resurrection

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Illustrations in this guide were generated with AI tools. Species, localities and dates are drawn from published palaeontological literature.