

“What is Louisiana’s largest fossil?”

Earth Science Assessment Probe

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The 8th grade earth science class had just completed a study of fossils, and the topic of fossils in Louisiana had been introduced. The teacher asked the students if they knew what ancient organism represented the largest fossil known from Louisiana. Read the responses of several of the students listed below. Choose which student you think has the best answer and explain why.

Ainsley: During the last Ice Age, Louisiana had ancient elephant-like animals known as mammoths and mastodons. These animals were as big or bigger than modern elephants and would have been the largest fossil organism known from the state.

Bobby: There have been shark teeth found in Louisiana that are almost four inches long. This would represent a shark that was probably 40 or 50 feet long. This large toothed shark would represent the largest fossil from Louisiana.

Mat: I think the largest fossil organism from the state would have to be some of the sauropod dinosaurs over 100 million years ago. Many of the sauropods were 100 feet or more counting their long necks and tails.

Melissa: When the oceans covered Louisiana about 36 million years ago, there was one of the early whales that was 60 feet long. This would have been the largest fossil organism from Louisiana.

Explanation:

Key

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Answer:

The correct answer is the one given by Melissa. The ancient whale was named *Basilosaurus cetoides* and was probably at least 60 feet long. It had a skull that was four feet long. The information in the responses of Ainsley and Bobby are true except those were not the largest fossil organisms.

The answer of Mat’s is not correct since no dinosaur remains have ever been discovered in Louisiana. Unfortunately, Louisiana’s oldest exposed rocks are Cretaceous. There were dinosaurs in the Cretaceous, but Louisiana’s Cretaceous rocks were deposited in the ocean. No dinosaurs lived in the ocean (all lived on land).