

fact, the vertebrae were so common in some areas that local residents used them as andirons. Lewis Harper mentioned in his 1857 report on the geology of Mississippi that the vertebrae were often used as foundation supports for cabins.

For many years, partial remains of these archaeocetes have been found in Upper Eocene sediments of Mississippi and Alabama. However, in June 1971 the Mississippi Gem and Mineral Society excavated the most complete specimen of an archaeocete whale found to date. The bones of this whale, *Zygorhiza kochii* (Reichenbach), were found in the bed of Thompson Creek in the Moodys Branch Formation near Tinsley, Mississippi; ap-

Excavation of a *Basilosaurus cetoides* (Owen) in Madison County, Mississippi.



Office of Geology staff plot the location of a *Basilosaurus cetoides* (Owen) skeleton by means of survey instruments.

proximately 80% of the skeleton was recovered. The discovery of this nearly complete skeleton sparked enough public interest that passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 557 in 1981 designated "the prehistoric whale" as the official fossil of the State of Mississippi. This skeleton has been restored and is on display at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson.

Suggested Reading:

Carpenter, K., and D. T. Dockery, 1985, "... And the bones came together, bone to his bone." Ezekiel 37:7, The making of a state fossil: Mississippi Geology, v. 6, no. 1, p. 1-6.

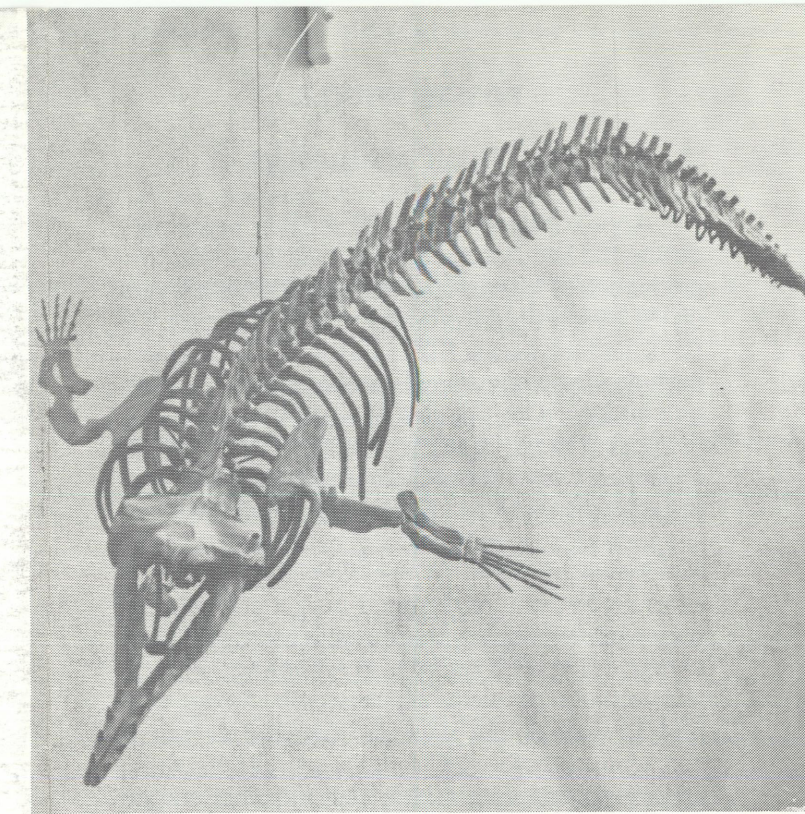
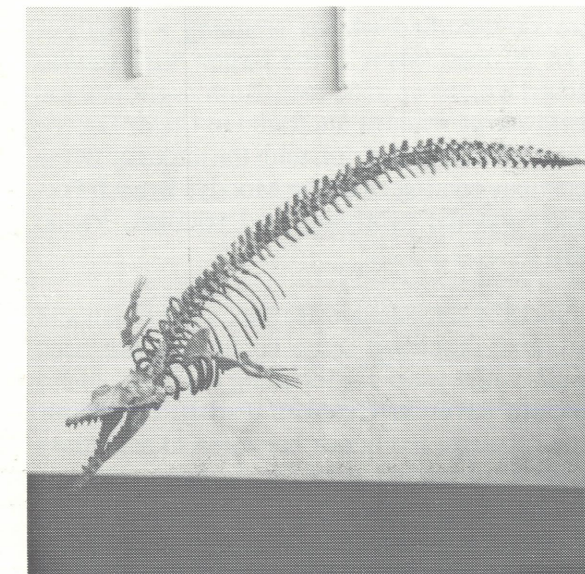
Carpenter, K., and D. White, 1986, Feeding in the archaeocete whale *Zygorhiza kochii* (Cetacea: Archaeoceti): Mississippi Geology, v. 7, no. 2, p. 1-14.

Dockery, D. T., and J. E. Johnston, 1986, Excavation of an archaeocete whale, *Basilosaurus cetoides* (Owen), from Madison, Mississippi: Mississippi Geology, v. 6, no. 3, p. 1-10.

Frazier, M. K., 1980, Archaeocetes: whale-like mammals from the Eocene of Mississippi: Mississippi Geology, v. 1, no. 2, p. 1-3.

Thurmond, J. T., and D. E. Jones, 1981, Fossil Vertebrates of Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, University, AL, 244 p.

Reconstructed skeleton of *Zygorhiza kochii* (Reichenbach) on display at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson, Mississippi.



FOSSIL WHALE

State Fossil of Mississippi

John E. Johnston

Pamphlet 3

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