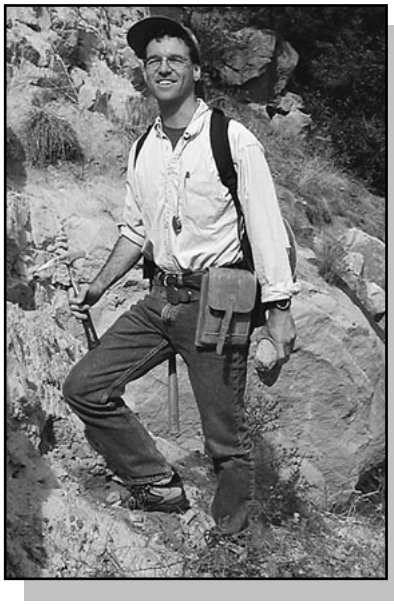
Paleontologist Copymaster: Interview with a Paleontologist

Why did you go into your field?

Being a geologist is fantastic. For 20 years now, I've researched how mountains form and the history of continents. I've always been interested in the outdoors and mountains, so this was the perfect career for me.



Steve Getty
Visiting Professor of Geology, Colorado College

What do you find most interesting or exciting about your work?

In my research, I've been able to travel all over the globe. One of my most exciting experiences in my research was when I lead a team of science teachers at a paleontology dig in New Mexico in June 2002. Much of the area was along the highway, and we found bones from toads, snakes, birds, extinct rats, voles, giant muskrats, large extinct land tortoises, and one-toed horses. These bones are about 3 million years old. Then, one of the teachers moved an orange, plastic garbage bag left by a highway cleanup crew. Underneath it, the teacher found a bone leading back into the rock. As she dug deeper, several bones from the lower leg of a giant, extinct camel were uncovered. These camels used to roam North America in the Pliocene.

Another teacher wandered into a gully down beneath the highway and came back to the group with a bunch of bones wrapped in his shirt. He had spotted them where they were eroding out of the side of the gully. The bones were unmistakably most of the claw of a 3-million-year-old saber-toothed cat!

The group returned for more field work in 2003. We found more of the camel and saber cat, and bones from a small three-toed horse, a shrew, an ancient dog or wolf, and a turkey-sized bird. Nearby we found a mammoth tooth.

What do you find most challenging or frustrating about your work?

I love taking people into the field, either groups of teachers or students, to learn about geology and the history of earth. There is so much great stuff to learn about rocks, minerals, and fossils. Sometimes people are frustrated that they can't learn it all in a day, or a month. I just tell them that I am still learning too!

I also love seeing where traditional boundaries are blurred between geology and biology. One has to understand the geology fundamentals to see the record of life in the rock record. But one also has to understand different forms of life to see how we define key intervals of geologic time.

Explore/Explain: Evidence for Change across Time

Paleontologist Copymaster: *Hyracotherium*

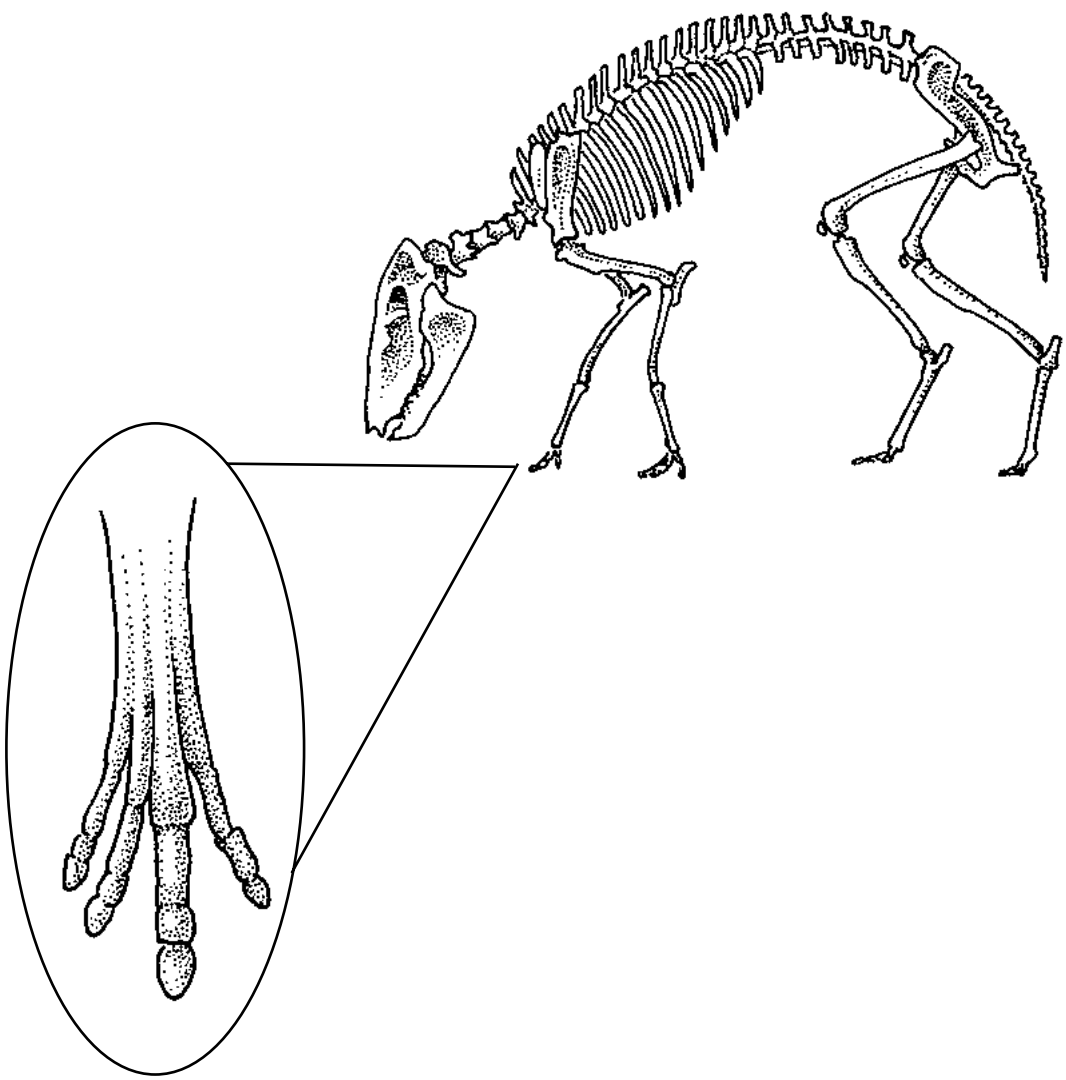
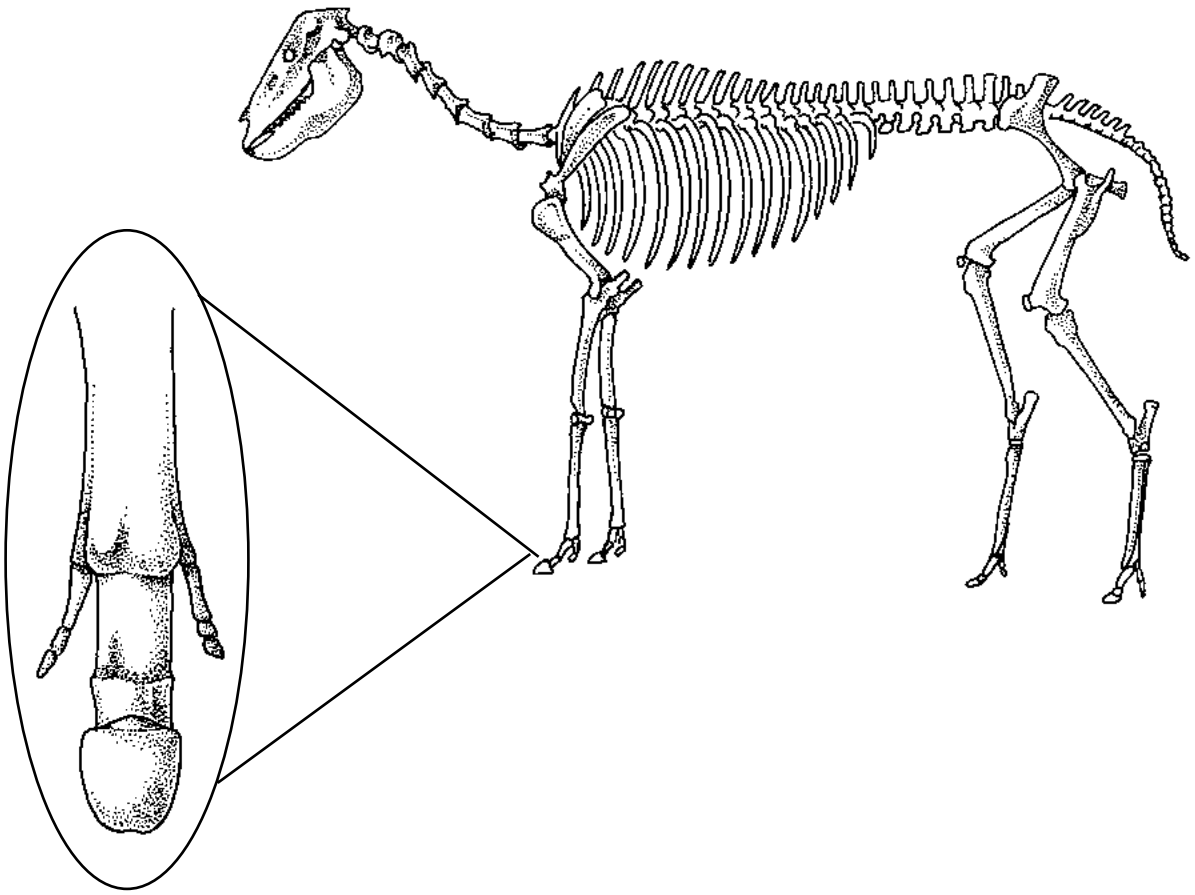


Illustration by Marjorie C. Leggitt

Explore/Explain: Evidence for Change across Time

Paleontologist Copymaster: *Merychippus*



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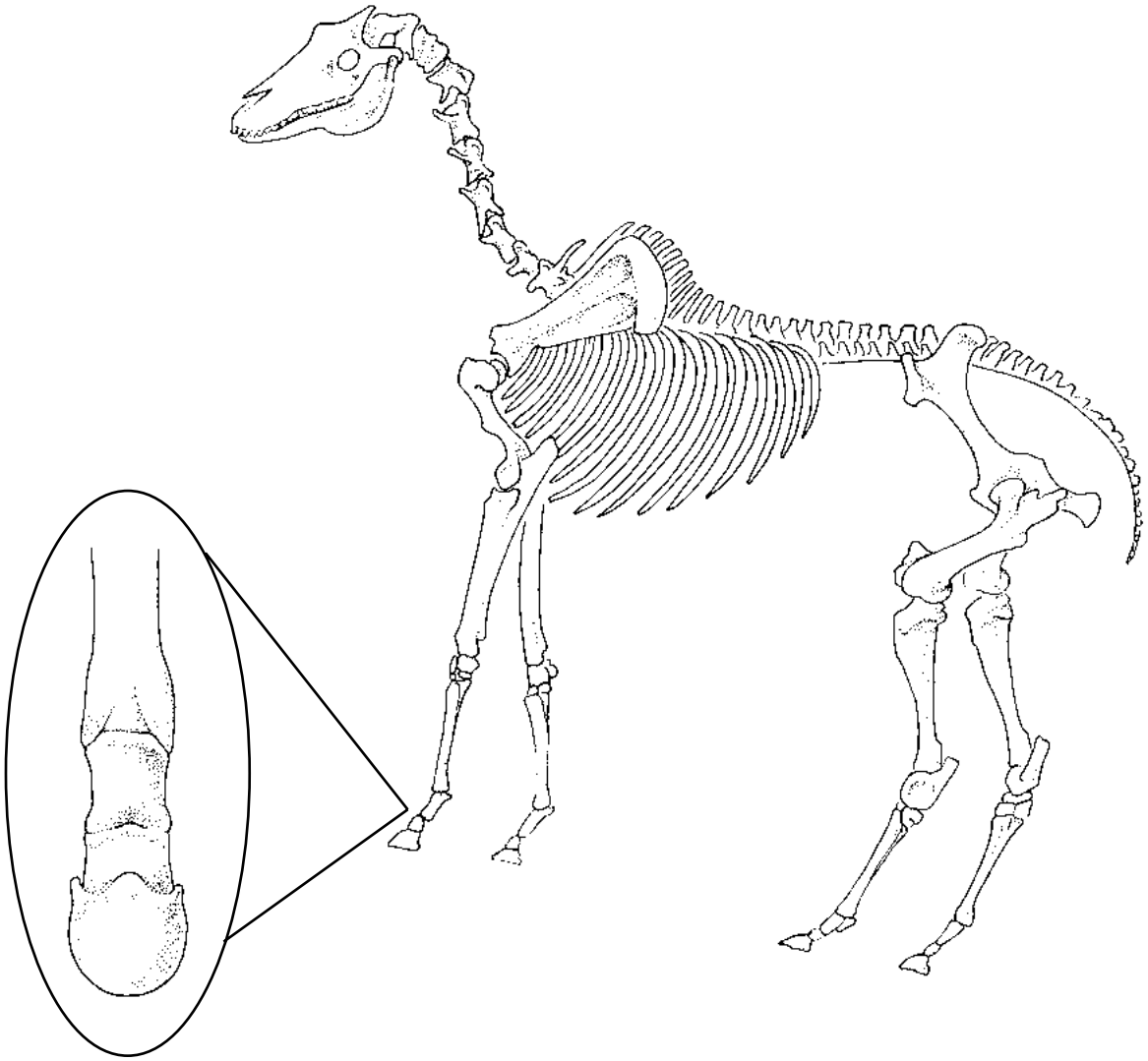
Explore/Explain: Evidence for Change across Time

Paleontologist Copymaster: *Equus*



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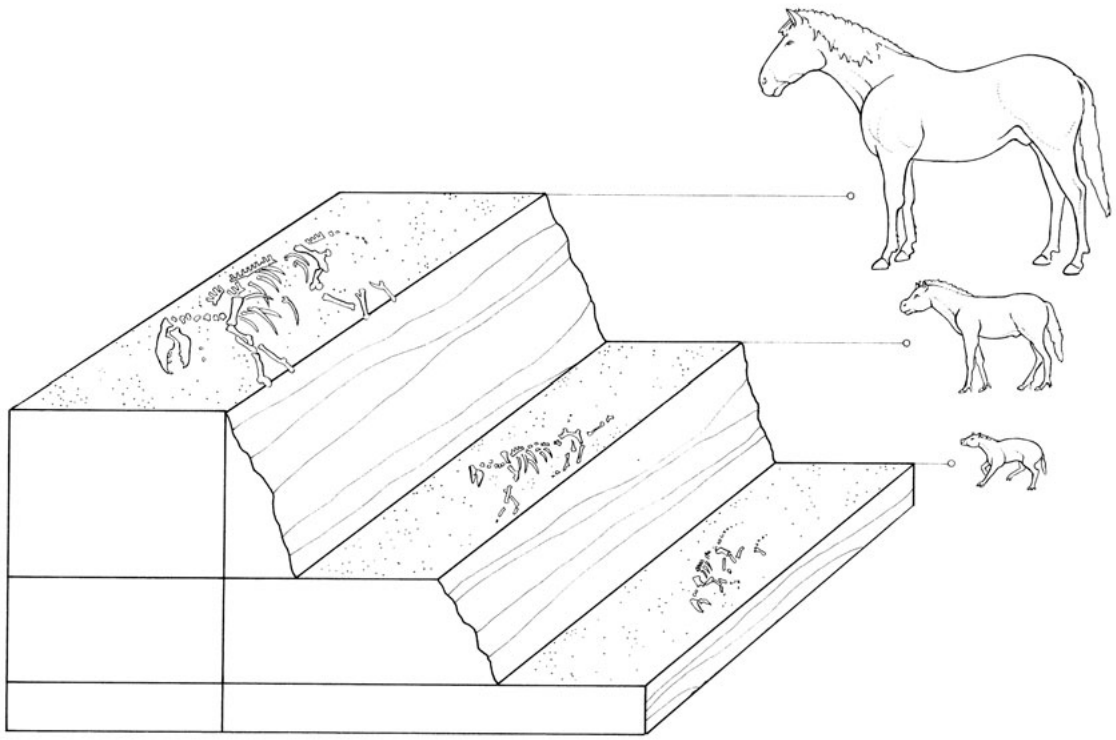
Explore/Explain: Evidence for Change across Time

Paleontologist Copymaster: Fossils in Strata



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