Unit 11 GeoClip: Uncovering Fossils

We're heading into one of the famous locality areas at for paleontology at the Park.

Volcanic ash? Is that what you just said?

Yeah.

There is volcanic ash here.

It is. It's volcanic ash.

There's a big hole. See, so a lot of times when we find the bones, this is what you'll find. There's an accumulation, and it's rolled down the hill. And this is what happens to the bones when they sit on the surface for a long period of time. They basically break apart into smaller and smaller fragments, and at a point in time, it becomes impossible to put them back together. So all the bones at the bottom of the hill have basically come from these bones here.

So what we do is we dig in, and we see if we can uncover them. These little tools, like dental picks, and things like that, and brushes, and we slowly expose the bone. It's kind of hard to see at first, but once we get it cleaned off, you'll be able to see it a lot better. Yeah, everything you're seeing here that's dark colored is bone, and the gray is the rock that's surrounding it.

So what we would do next is we would come here and we'd excavate around this. And we kind of leave this suspended on a pedestal. And then we cover the bone and the surrounding rock and the pedestal with plaster. Generally, we take strips of burlap and plaster, and we'd cover it with a little separator in between, usually toilet paper or tissue paper, to keep the plaster from sticking to the actual bones.

And then, after we have it all pedestaled, and a plaster cap on top, we'd undercut it, flip it over, put plaster on the other side, and then that's basically a handy carrying case to bringing it back to the lab. And then once we had it in the lab, we'd open it up and remove all the rock, glue together all these broken cracks and stuff. And pretty much you'd end up with the whole element, just like you see in the museum.