For over sixty million years during the Cretaceous Period, much of eastern Montana was underwater, covered by an vast inland sea. As the Rocky Mountains formed to the west, it created a broad, flat coastal plain that was home to many different species of dinosaurs. Indeed, the long life of the sea saw the rise and extinction of many dinosaur species until it finally receded from Montana about 65 million years ago at the end of the Cretaceous Period. The sediments deposited underwater or along the sea’s coast formed the spectacular sandstone rimrocks in the Yellowstone River valley between Columbus and Billings. The sea was shallow and warm, probably no more than a few hundred feet deep. But it was home to a wide variety of aquatic life. Oysters lived in dense banks along the shore, while tentacled ammonites fed on monster clams that lived in the shallow water offshore; sharks also cruised the shallows preying on whatever animals appeared tasty to them. For several million years, two predators, synonymous with prehistoric sea creatures, were at the top of the food chain in the sea: the long-necked Plesiosaurs and the snakelike Mosasaurs. Neither animals were dinosaurs, but were air-breathing reptiles who had adapted to living in the oceans. Both were carnivores that ate just about anything they could seize and swallow. Fossils of Plesiosaurs and Mosasaurs have been found throughout eastern Montana.

Geo-facts:
- The first Tyrannosaurus rex fossils were discovered in Montana by paleontologist Barnum Brown in 1902.
- Deinonychus was the model for the Velociraptors in the film Jurassic Park.
- Many believe Scotland’s Loch Ness Monster resembles a Plesiosaur.

Geo-activity:
- See if you can trace the route of the Yellowstone Trail as you drive through the Yellowstone Valley.
- Think of your favorite dinosaur. Have the people in your car ask you 10 questions to guess the dino you are thinking of!