These trilobites, collected from 420 million year old bedrock in Wauwatosa, are a type of fossil invertebrate.

Inland seas covered Wisconsin between 520 and 370 million years ago. The deposits of these ancient seas, which consist of beds of dolomite, limestone, sandstone and shale, form the bedrock that underlies much of Wisconsin.

Fossils are the remains of once-living organisms that are preserved in rocks.

Invertebrate refers to living and fossil animals that lack a backbone.

Geology Section of the
Milwaukee Public Museum
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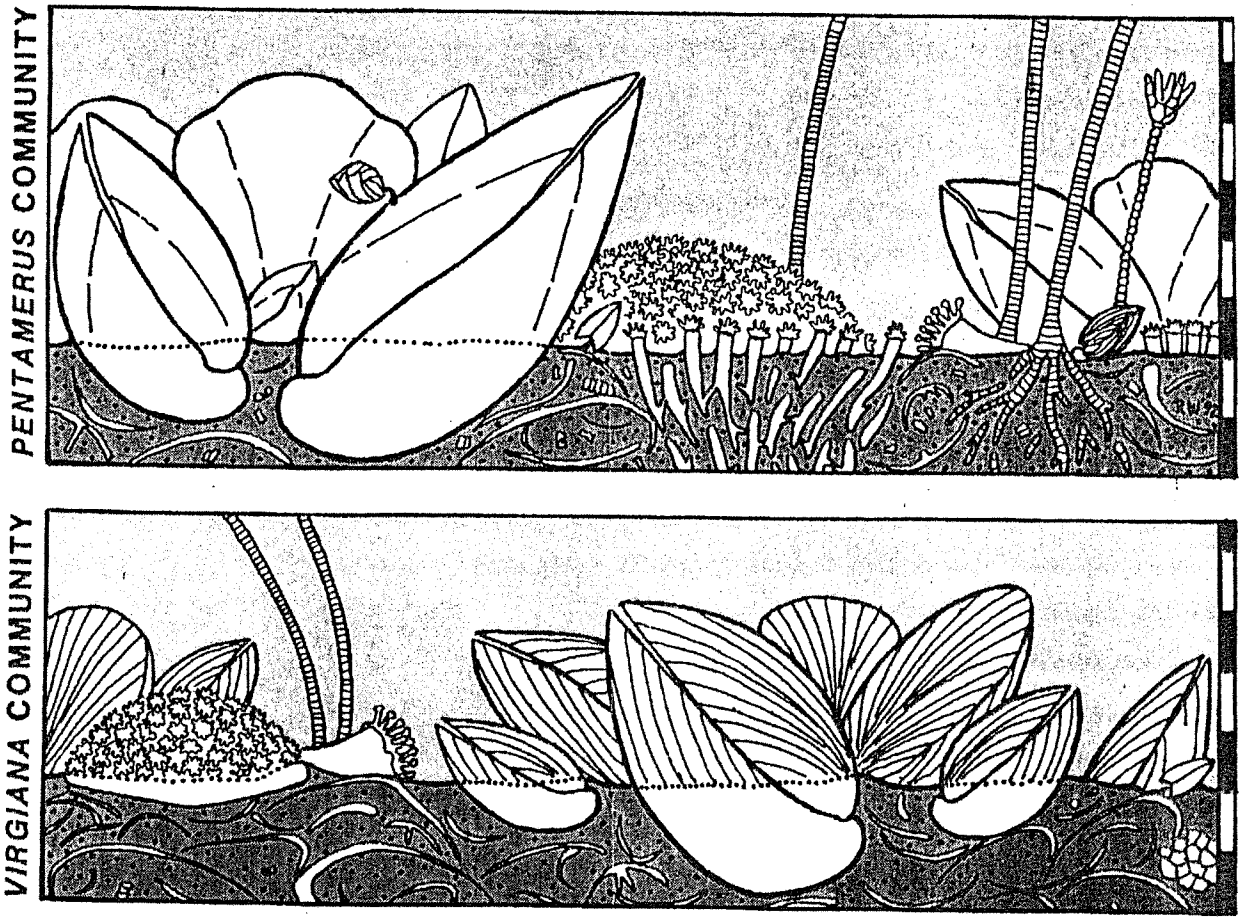
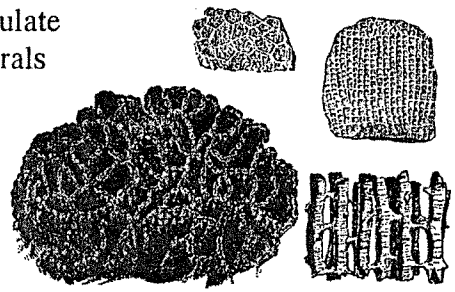
by Rodney Watkins, Patricia Coorough-Burke, and Paul Mayer; funding provided by CH2MHill

Ancient Sea Life of Wisconsin



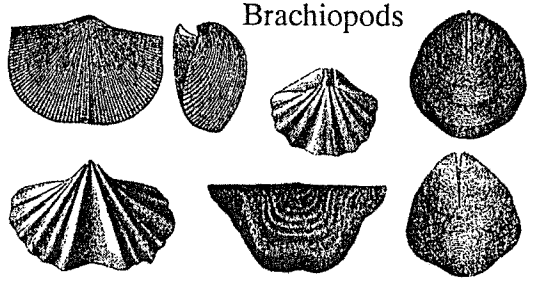
a guide to common invertebrate fossils found in Wisconsin bedrock

Tabulate Corals



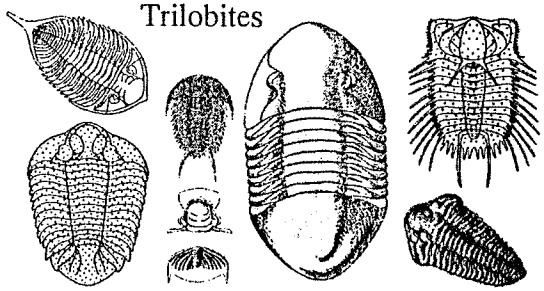
Tabulate corals are extinct. Like modern corals, all tabulate corals lived in sea water. Tabulate corals were colonial, which means that many individuals were connected together in a single skeleton. Each individual was like a tiny sea anemone, with tentacles to capture small bits of food. Common forms of tabulate coral colonies include chain, honeycomb, and organ-pipe shapes.

Brachiopods



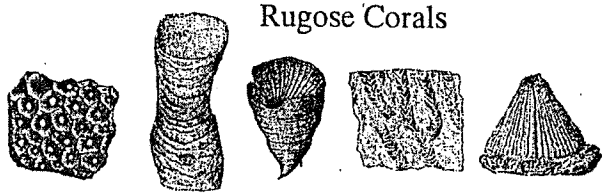
Brachiopods still live in modern seas but were much more abundant in the geologic past. The animal inside the shell filters tiny bits of food from the water. Brachiopods do not move very much. Some are held to the sea floor by a stalk, and others are free-lying.

Trilobites



Trilobites are extinct arthropods that are distantly related to crabs and shrimp. They had a head with eyes, a thorax, and a tail. Trilobite fossils often consist of parts of the body that separated after the animal died. In life, trilobites also had antennae and dozens of small walking legs. Trilobites crawled about the sea floor in search of food.

Rugose Corals

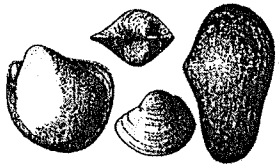


Rugose corals are another extinct group of corals that lived only in sea water. Rugose corals have radial partitions inside their skeletons. Some rugose corals were solitary individuals with a cup-shaped or horn-shaped skeleton. Others were colonial like tabulate corals, but with colonies that were formed by larger individuals.

Gastropods

Gastropods, or snails, have coiled shells. They live on land, in fresh water, and in the sea. Gastropods crawl about on a large, sticky foot. They include filter-feeders, herbivores and carnivores.

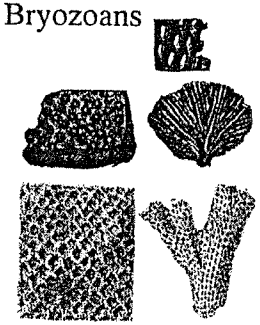
Bivalves



Bivalves live in fresh water or the sea and include clams, scallops and oysters. Bivalves feed on tiny bits of food in the water or sediment. Most bivalves are burrowers.

Bryozoans

Bryozoans live in sea water or fresh water and are sometimes called "moss animals." Bryozoans form colonies shaped like small sticks, fans or mats. Each colony is composed of hundreds to thousands of tiny individuals that filter food particles from the water with their tentacles. Tiny holes in fossil bryozoans mark the location of these individuals.



Cephalopods

Living cephalopods include squid, octopi and the pearly nautilus. Fossil cephalopods have straight or curved shells with internal chambers. Cephalopods are actively-swimming predators with good eyesight.

Crinoids

Crinoids live in modern seas but were much more abundant in the geologic past. They are related to starfish and sea urchins. Known as "sea lillies," crinoids have a stem that is attached to the seafloor and topped by a crown-shaped body with feathery arms. Crinoids are animals, and they use their arms to filter food particles from the water. The crinoid skeleton is composed of hundreds of tiny plates that usually fall apart when the animal dies.