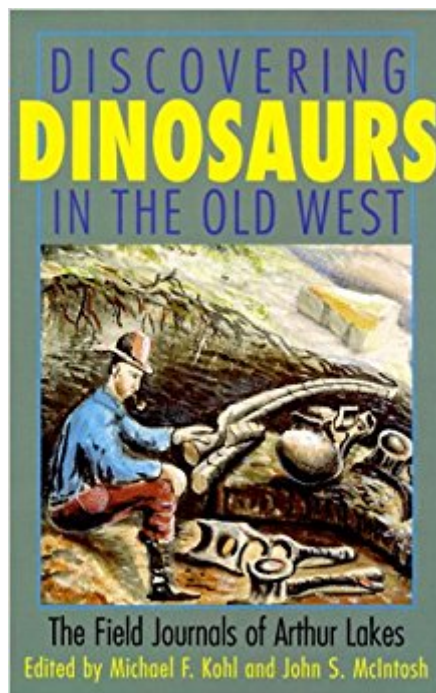




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# Discovering Dinosaurs In The Old West: The Field Journals Of Arthur Lakes



## Synopsis

Dominated by two talented and competitive scientists, O.C. Marsh and Edward Drinker Cope, by the late 1870s, the emerging field of vertebrate paleontology had become a race between their teams of collectors--one of which was headed by geologist Arthur Lakes. This facsimile edition of Lakes' journals recounts the dangers and hardships of scientific research during that exciting time. 13 photos. 24 drawings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Lakes (1844-1917), an Oxford University alumnus who taught geology at Colorado's School of Mines for more than 20 years, recorded in both words and sketches the discovery of major dinosaur fossils in the wilderness of Colorado and Wyoming between 1877 and 1880. Editor Kohl (special collections, Clemson Univ. Lib.) discovered Lakes's missing journals in the Smithsonian Institution Archives; along with McIntosh (emeritus, physics, Wesleyan Univ.), he aims here to bring the excitement of the discovery of dinosaur remains under rigorous conditions to the general reader of science. The text has been modernized, and maps and inset biographical summaries with portraits are used to clarify locations and persons mentioned in the journal entries. Some of Lakes's watercolors are included as well. Despite the editors' intention, the journals will appeal more to specialists than general readers, who will find John R. Horner and James Gorman's *Digging Dinosaurs* (LJ 1/89) more riveting and informative. —Edward K. Werner, St. Lucie Cty. Lib. System, Ft. Pierce, Fla. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In preparation for a recent Paleontological Adventure, this was one of the books on the suggested  
“to read” list. Because of work, other books and general living life, I did not get around to this gem until after my trip. There had been enough time between the dig and my picking the book up, that I was grieving the brevity of my experience “in the field.” Reading Mr. Lakes thoughts and day-by-day goings in the same region (the first journal) and in the same dirt (the second journal) helped me feel less distanced from a memorable trip.

Arthur Lakes was a teacher, writer, artist, ordained minister and was largely unknown until his journals were discovered in 1994. Before those writings were found, he was known as an important bone collector for O. C. Marsh and as the person who located the fossil riches at Dinosaur Ridge in Morrison, CO and Como Bluff, WY., then as a teacher at the Colorado School of Mines and for the U.S. Geological Survey. After his journals were read, his influence in the development of Paleontology in America was noted. From appearances, Mr. Lakes did not expect these journals to be read beyond as a source for his recall, therefore, he writes with a lack of ego or hyperbole but with a clarity and exactness of a scientist (his knowledge of Geology is remarkable) and the eye of an artist. When he is searching for dinosaur bones, he has the advantage of both disciplines, he can “read” the strata of the land better than most can read a book, “knowing” levels are likely to hold bones; after finding those bones, his eye for detail and talent for drawing enabled him to draw and paint the first images of the activity of digging for bones. (His water colors, drawings and other graphics are in the Smithsonian and the Peabody Museum of Yale University.)

Paleontology is taxing in practice. Crouching, kneeling, laying, to dig, load, carry, dump dirt, finally uncovering a bone repeatedly contorting one’s body to clear as much matrix from the specimen, then wrapping it sufficiently in hope of it reaching the lab in as few pieces as possible is exhausting. Modern machines (vehicles, better wheels and axles, etc.), conveniences (potable water, GPS, nearby shelter with running water, beds, etc.), better tools make the work easier, but not easy. When Mr. Lakes was digging, he stayed in a “dog tent” or a rail way station shack, ate what was available (usually the meat killed that day – antelope, deer, rabbit), packed the bones into the crates he built by hand and loaded them on the train with only the power of muscle to accomplish those tasks. The season, at least at Como, ends before the winter sets in. Mr. Lakes dug through the winter.

“February 12 (1880) Very cold, snow blowing into quarry. R[eed] froze his foot, had to make a fire to thaw him.”

“February 13 Still cold, 15 below zero.”

“February 14 Too cold to work, blowing with

blizzard. February 16 At [quarry no.] 12. Got a spine 5 feet below ischium. . .  
(p. 147). The people who dug during this time were tough, passionate and engaged about finding evidence of life millions of years old. Before I experienced the thrill of finding such evidence, going on a dig was interesting in the way something new and (somewhat) daring is. After I found a bone that became a fossil 80 million years before T-Rex walked the planet, I can understand how anyone would experience such hardship, isolation and lack of comfort. With each shovel full of dirt, there is the anticipation of seeing the color that indicates a fossil. Finding one only fires the imagination of what the animal was that once possessed this artifact; it also stokes the desire to find the rest of the bones to complete the skeleton. Mr. Lakes worked hard, as evidenced by the report of his journal, his words belied the fun he was having in such an endeavor. Reading his journal is a tour of history when train robbers were a threat, Indians were fighting back against an invading force and the weather was deadly. It is also a glimpse into the infatuation possessed by someone who has found a new love. The reader will not learn how to dig for fossils by reading this account, she/he will glimpse into why people become enthralled with hunting them.

This book is a compilation of the original field diary of The Reverend Professor Arthur Lakes, the 19th century naturalist and geologist in Colorado who discovered the first dinosaur fossil bones near Morrison Colorado in 1877 and literally triggered the famous "Dinosaur Wars" between two prominent paleontologists, Professors Marsh and Cope. The soft cover book arrived on schedule and in good condition. Good reading for anyone interested in the history of early geology and paleontology in the West in the late 19th century.

Discovering Dinosaurs In The Old West: The Field Journals Of Arthur Lakes, deftly edited by Michael F. Kohl (Amateur paleontologist, Head of Special Collections at the Clemson university Library, and the discovered of Lake's missing journals) and John S. McIntosh (Emeritus Professor of Physics, Wesleyan University and a paleontologist specializing in sauropods), is a unique presentation of the original journal entries from 1877 to 1880 by geologist Arthur Lakes and presented with numerous annotations, clarifications, maps, black-and-white photographs and a great deal more. Enhanced with an informative foreword by John Ostrom (Professor Emeritus of Geology and Geophysics, Yale University) Discovering Dinosaurs In The Old West is a superbly presented and invaluable addition to personal, professional, and academic paleontology supplemental reading lists and reference collections.

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