

50 Years Since the Discovery of Futabasaurus Suzukii in Iwaki

This year not only marks 150 years since the Boshin War but also commemorates 50 years since the discovery of *Futabasaurus suzukii* in Iwaki. In October 1968, Tadashi Suzuki, who was at the time in his second year at Taira Technical High School, discovered the fossil in Ohisa within the Futaba strata of rock, which is also where part of the creature's name comes from.

Of course most lay people may assume that the *Futabasaurus* – like any other animal with “-saurus” attached to their name – is a

dinosaur, but this is incorrect. The *Futabasaurus* is in fact a plesiosaur or “marine reptile”. The pelvises of dinosaurs are structured differently to other reptiles, with their legs growing directly underneath the body. The legs of plesiosaurs such as *Futabasaurus* grow outwards from the body making it a separate type of reptile from their more well-known cousins. Another differing feature is that plesiosaurs don't have as many holes in their skull in comparison to dinosaurs.

The discovery of *F. suzukii* in Iwaki was major news at the time in Japan and is still considered a treasured specimen by palaeontologists today. The actual bones from the fossil are usually stored in the National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo; however, the specimen made a brief homecoming and was on display in the Iwaki Coal and Fossil Museum (Aka: Horuru) from July to October to commemorate this milestone anniversary.

Although the special exhibition will have concluded by the time of publishing this edition, you will still be greeted by a replica of the *F. suzukii* skeletal structure whenever you visit Horuru. There are also many other fossils and replicas of ancient life such as the Iwaki whale (and even some skeletal structures of true dinosaurs!) on permanent display at this facility.



Actual fossil of the *F. suzukii*'s right forelimb bones. The plesiosaur is believed to have lived around 85 million years ago during the Late Cretaceous Period.



Replica skeletal structure of the *F. suzukii* on display in Horuru. The actual fossils can be found at the National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo.

Another actual fossil of part of the *F. suzukii*'s spine. This vertebrae is from the sacral region of the spine which is located before the tail.



Statue depicting a life-size version of the *Futabasaurus* outside the entrance of Horuru.

