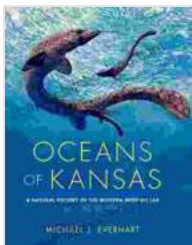


Natural History of the Western Interior Sea: Life of the Past



Oceans of Kansas: A Natural History of the Western Interior Sea (Life of the Past) by Michael J. Everhart

★★★★☆ 4.9 out of 5

Language : English

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Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting: Enabled
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The Western Interior Sea was a vast, shallow ocean that covered much of the central and western United States during the Cretaceous Period, about 100 to 66 million years ago. It was home to a rich and diverse ecosystem, filled with a wide variety of marine life.

This article will explore the natural history of the Western Interior Sea, highlighting some of the most fascinating creatures that inhabited its depths. We will examine the fossil record, learn about the environmental conditions of the sea, and discuss the role that it played in the evolution of life on Earth.

The Fossil Record

The Western Interior Sea has left behind an extensive fossil record, which has provided scientists with valuable insights into the life that thrived in this ancient ocean. Fossils have been found of a wide range of marine organisms, including:

- Fish, such as the paddlefish and sturgeon
- Sharks, such as the Cretoxyrhina and the Squalicorax
- Marine reptiles, such as the plesiosaurs and mosasaurs
- Invertebrates, such as ammonites, clams, and oysters

The fossil record also provides evidence of the changing environmental conditions of the Western Interior Sea over time. For example, the presence of certain types of fossils indicates that the sea was once much warmer than it is today.

Life in the Western Interior Sea

The Western Interior Sea was home to a diverse array of marine life, from tiny plankton to massive marine reptiles. The following are just a few of the most common and fascinating creatures that inhabited its depths:

- **Fish:** The Western Interior Sea was home to a wide variety of fish, including the paddlefish, sturgeon, and various types of sharks. These fish played an important role in the food chain, feeding on smaller organisms and in turn being preyed upon by larger predators.
- **Sharks:** The Western Interior Sea was home to a number of different types of sharks, including the *Cretoxyrhina* and the *Squalicorax*. These sharks were apex predators, feeding on other fish, marine reptiles, and even mammals. The *Cretoxyrhina* was one of the largest sharks that ever lived, reaching lengths of up to 40 feet.
- **Marine reptiles:** The Western Interior Sea was home to a number of different types of marine reptiles, including the plesiosaurs and mosasaurs. These reptiles were closely related to dinosaurs, and they shared many of their physical characteristics. Plesiosaurs were long-necked, fish-eating reptiles that resembled modern-day seals. Mosasaurs were massive, crocodile-like reptiles that were the top predators of the Western Interior Sea.
- **Invertebrates:** The Western Interior Sea was home to a variety of invertebrates, including ammonites, clams, and oysters. These

invertebrates played an important role in the food chain, providing a source of food for fish and other marine animals.

The End of the Western Interior Sea

The Western Interior Sea began to shrink about 100 million years ago, and it eventually disappeared completely about 66 million years ago. The exact cause of its demise is unknown, but it is thought to have been caused by a combination of factors, including the uplift of the Rocky Mountains and the decrease in sea level at the end of the Cretaceous Period.

The disappearance of the Western Interior Sea had a profound impact on the life of North America. It led to the extinction of many marine species and the emergence of new ecosystems. It also played a role in the evolution of dinosaurs and the rise of mammals.

The Legacy of the Western Interior Sea

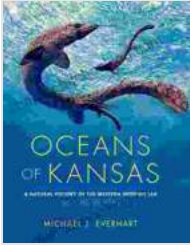
The Western Interior Sea may be long gone, but its legacy lives on today. The fossils that it has left behind provide scientists with valuable insights into the history of life on Earth. And the ecosystems that it once supported continue to thrive in the modern world.

The Western Interior Sea was a fascinating and diverse ecosystem, home to a wide variety of marine life. Its fossil record provides scientists with valuable insights into the history of life on Earth. And its legacy continues to live on today in the ecosystems that it once supported.

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