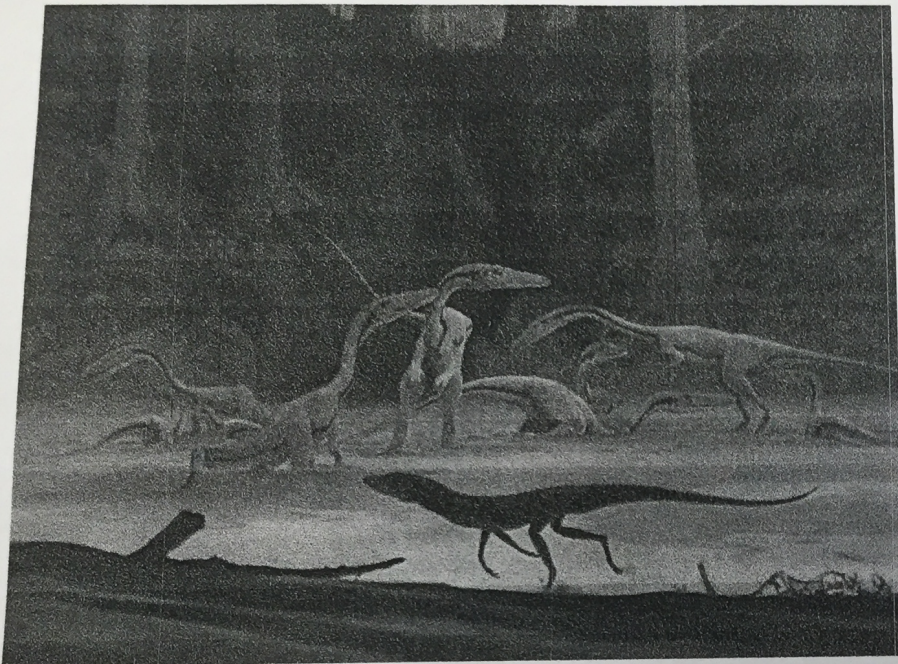


## Stuck in the Mud?



Art by D. Henderson

A *Coelophysis* steps to the river's edge, coming to feed on several fish that are splashing in a pool of water. The dinosaur's feet sink deep in the dark, sticky earth. Other dinosaurs gather, also attracted by the splashing fish, but they too are caught in the treacherous ground. No matter how hard they struggle, they are all trapped, young and old alike.

The La Brea tar pits in California were once the site of scenes like this one. Thousands of animals were trapped there in sticky

**Claim:** *The Coelophysis dinosaurs got stuck in soft mud at a river's edge and died.*

**Evidence/Data:** *Jumbled Bones of Coelophysis buried together. The bones were encased in red rock that was formed from mud typically found near river edges.*

**Explanation/Justification:** *Coelophysis come to river's edge to eat fish. As they step onto soft mud, they begin to sink. This is similar to an explanation of the collection of bones found at La Brea tar pits.*

**Rebuttal/Counter Claim:** *The orientation of the bones was not consistent with the explanation that the dinosaurs sank into the mud in a standing position.*

**My Thoughts/Questions:** *This explanation also doesn't account for why so many fish bones were also found at the site. Why would fish be on the mud?*

pools of black tar during the Ice Ages. Did a similar thing happen at Ghost Ranch?

Probably not. If the dinosaurs had been trapped in mud, as they struggled their heavier legs would be buried more deeply than their arms and heads, and their bodies would be upright. (This is what scientists believe happened to a Triassic dinosaur from Europe called *Plateosaurus* that died after being trapped in mud.) Since so many *Coelophysis* were found lying on their sides, most likely they didn't die this way.