

Our Best Guess: Too Little Water—Then Too Much



Art by D. Henderson

Claim: _____

Evidence/Data: _____

Explanation/Justification: _____

Rebuttal/Counter Claim: _____

My Thoughts/Questions: _____

Many of the little dinosaurs die at the end of a dry season when the earth is baked and the water holes are dry. One day the *Coelophysis* that are still alive discover a few sickly fish swimming slowly back and forth in a puddle at the bottom of the riverbed. Other fish bodies have already sunk into the mud. When a sudden rainstorm breaks the drought, a surge of water and thick mud flows swiftly over the riverbanks and down the valley. *Coelophysis* and other predators are trapped in the flood and drown.

When the waters dry up, they leave behind both the dinosaurs that had died a few days earlier in the drought and the newly drowned dinosaurs. Some are dropped in tangles; some lie alone, stretched out on the mud. The ones that lie in puddles begin to separate. Those outside the puddles begin to dry and shrink. Soon fresh rains bring more mud. The dinosaurs are buried completely in a few days, and they stay that way for millions of years. They are not uncovered until erosion in a canyon removes their blanket of rock in 1947.

This is our best idea for what happened to *Coelophysis* on those fateful days over two hundred million years ago. We can't say for sure that it is the right answer - but it's the explanation that fits most of the clues Ned Colbert and other scientists have discovered so far. Could more information turn up that might point us toward a whole new scene? Of course, since the site is still being studied. Scientists are always ready to change their ideas to fit what they learn