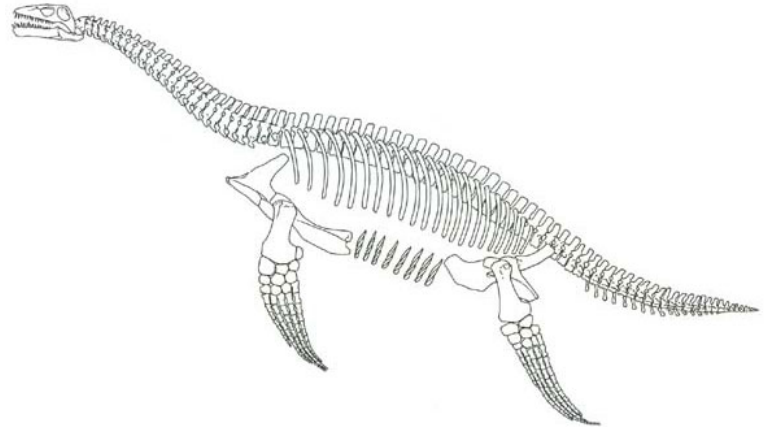


Why isn't a plesiosaur a dinosaur?

Although some people have a tendency to think that any large, extinct reptile is a dinosaur, true dinosaurs have a number of distinctive anatomical features that set them apart from other reptiles. Dinosaurs had a pair of holes in the skull in front of the eye sockets but behind the nostrils called antorbital fenestrae. Plesiosaurs lack these holes. Also, the head of a dinosaur's femur (thighbone) was not in line with the shaft, but instead deflected almost 90° inward. This arrangement allowed the dinosaur to hold its legs straight down underneath its body like a cow or an elephant. The head of a plesiosaur's femur was in line with the shaft so that its limbs stuck out to the sides, like the limbs of a sea turtle.



There were no ocean-going dinosaurs. If you look through a dinosaur book and see a picture of something swimming through the ocean with flippers, that's not a dinosaur. It might be a plesiosaur, or an ichthyosaur, or a marine lizard, but it's not a dinosaur. All the dinosaurs lived on the land.

