



State Fossils of the Northeast

The state fossils tell the geologic history of the Northeast in their own way (Figure 4.34). New York and Pennsylvania are dominated by Paleozoic sedimentary rocks from the inland ocean and their state fossils, a eurypterid and trilobite, reflect this history. Because of its preservation in only the salty shallow sea deposits of the Silurian, the eurypterid in particular is testimony to the rise and fall of sea level in the inland ocean during this time. Northern Maine, which was only weakly metamorphosed during the mountain-building events of the Paleozoic, preserves the Devonian fossil plant, *Pertica quadrifaria*. This rare fossil was first discovered in Maine and reflects the vascularization and diversification of plants during this period in geologic history. New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts all have dinosaur footprints as their state fossil. Not surprisingly, the rift basins of the Northeast that preserve Mesozoic sedimentary rock in which one might be able to find dinosaur fossils or traces, cut through each of these states. Cretaceous belemnites, the state fossil of Delaware, are preserved in abundance in Delaware Cretaceous sediments, indicative of the change in sea life since the Paleozoic. Gastropods from the Tertiary, found at the famous fossil-collecting location, Calvert Cliffs, Maryland, are the state fossil of Maryland. The beluga whale from late Pleistocene deposits of the Champlain seaway is the state fossil of Vermont. Buried in sediment when the ice sheet retreated and Lake Champlain was flooded by ocean water, the whale is a spectacular reminder of the relatively recent ice age history of the Northeast.



Figure 4.34: State fossils of the Northeast reflect the geology of the region.

