Gideon Algernon Mantell Encyclopedia Article

Gideon Algernon Mantell

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Gideon Algernon Mantell

1790-1852

British surgeon and amateur naturalist who is credited with first discovering dinosaur fossils in 1822. According to the commonly held story, Mantell's wife, Mary Ann, discovered a fossil tooth in a rubble pile where a road crew was working near the Ouse River in England. Mantell later discovered similar teeth and bones in Sussex and came to the conclusion, despite the skepticism of the scientific establishment, that they were from a large ancient reptile. At the Hunterian Museum in London, medical student and iguana researcher Samuel Stutchbury told Mantell that the teeth reminded him of those of a marine iguana. Mantell thus named his fossil reptile *Iguanodon,* or iguana tooth. The group that the *Iguanodon* was part of was later christened the Dinosauria (terrible reptiles) by Richard Owen in 1841.