

**M**Meet Robin O'Keefe, a paleontologist who's been studying plesiosaurs for the last 10 years! Dr. O'Keefe studies how plesiosaurs' bodies evolved over time to help them live in water. We caught up with him to ask a few questions on these ocean giants.

**Q** How did you get interested in plesiosaurs?

**A** I became interested in plesiosaurs because I've always liked marine animals (like whales) and because I've always liked dinosaurs. Even though they're not dinos, plesiosaurs let me study large reptiles and marine animals at the same time.

**Q** How do you study how plesiosaurs swam?

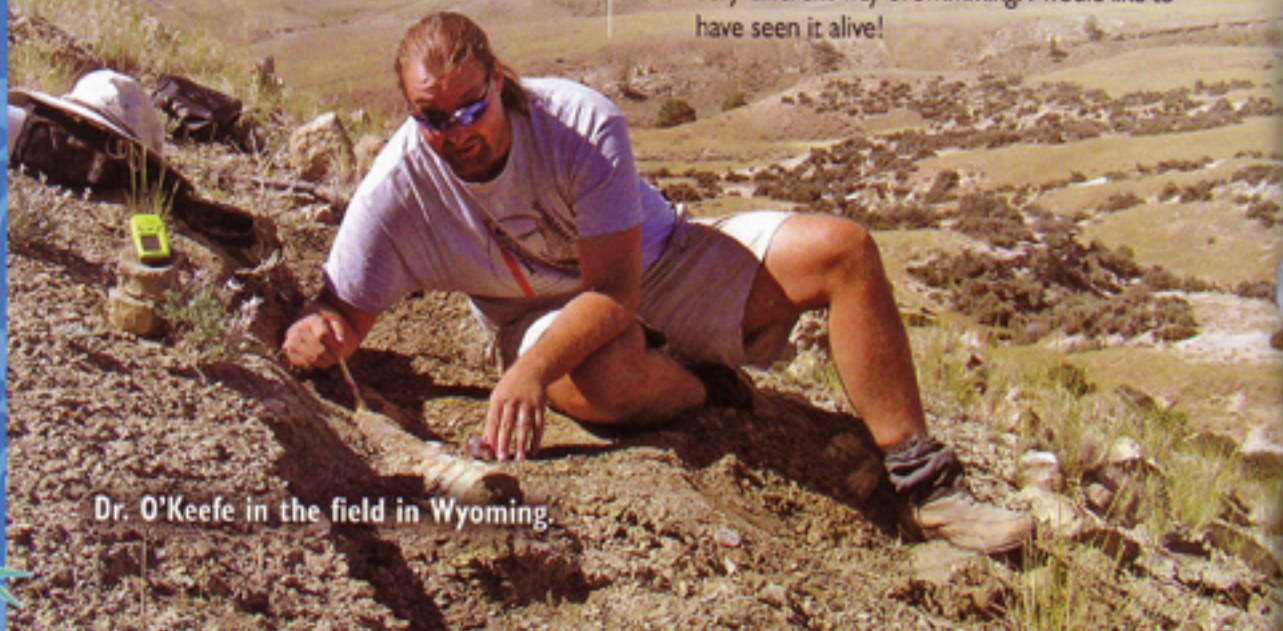
**A** Scientists can study how extinct animals moved in two ways. The first way is to study modern-day animals with the same body shape. Scientists think that plesiosaurs swam like sea lions, so we can learn things by watching those animals. The other way to study movement is to look at the shape of an animal. We know that animals that have one kind of body shape can move in some ways, but can't move in other ways.

**Q** What's the strangest plesiosaur you've ever studied?

**A** The strangest plesiosaur I've ever studied is **Aristonectes** (uh-RIST-toh-NECK-tees) from the Late Cretaceous of Antarctica. *Aristonectes* had a long neck, big flippers, and a large head with a hoop-shaped jaw full of tiny teeth. We think that it gulped in water and fish like a pelican, and then strained the water out through its teeth like a flamingo.

**Q** What's your favorite plesiosaur?

**A** That's hard to say. *Kronosaurus* was the nastiest one, while *Elasmosaurus* had the longest neck. I think that a small, short-necked animal from the Cretaceous of Kansas and Nebraska called **Dolichorhynchops** (DOH-lick-oh-RINK-ops) is probably my favorite. It has a very beautiful skull and was fast and very graceful, with a long snout, like a dolphin in some ways, but with a very different way of swimming. I would like to have seen it alive!



Dr. O'Keefe in the field in Wyoming.