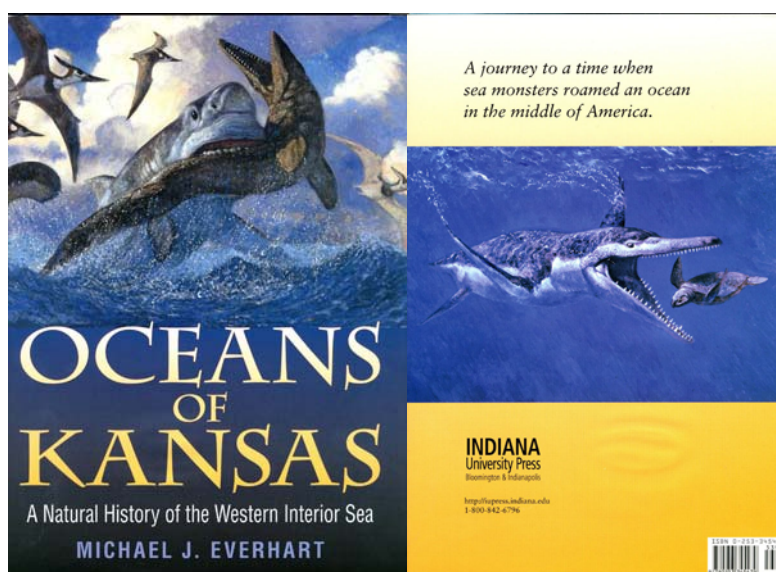


Everhart, M.J. 2005. Oceans of Kansas: A Natural History of the Western Interior Sea. – Bloomington, Indiana University Press

Book review by S. Sachs



Mike Everhart is Adjunct Curator of Paleontology at the Sternberg Museum of Natural History at Fort Hays State University and owner of the award winning homepage www.oceansofkansas.com. His book 'Oceans of Kansas' gives an overview of the Cretaceous of Kansas; including geology, taxonomy and history of the (mainly marine) fossils. The book is not a pure scientific book but rather written for the larger public; it has been named the featured book from Kansas for the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C.

Invertebrates and trace fossils are shortly introduced in chapter three (17 pages), whereas the rest of the book is focussing on vertebrates and especially reptiles. Many of the beautifully preserved specimens have been found during the past 150 years and were sent to collections all over the world. Each group is treated in a separate chapter: sharks (chapter four); other fishes (chapter five), turtles (chapter six), elasmosaurs (chapter seven), other plesiosaurs (chapter eight), mosasaurs (chapter nine), pterosaurs (chapter ten), birds (chapter 11) and dinosaurs (chapter 12). The chapters are well illustrated with photos or drawings and included in the book are twelve colour plates. Plate one is showing a geologic map of Kansas, the others are wonderful live reconstruction's made by the artist Dan Varner. At the end of the book you will find a most complete reference list of probably all papers written about Kansas Cretaceous vertebrates.

The history of the various fossil discoveries is an important aspect of the book. A prominent example is the famous story of the type specimen of the plesiosaur *Elasmosaurus platyurus*. The first parts of the specimen were found by the Army surgeon Dr. Turner in spring 1867. In the summer of the same year he gave three vertebrae to John LeConte who delivered them to Edward Drinker Cope in Philadelphia in the following November. Cope recognised them as plesiosaur bones and asked Turner to send the remainder parts to Philadelphia. Cope received the crates in March and, less than two weeks later, presented a report at a scientific meeting. At the same time he published a note and called the specimen *Elasmosaurus platyurus*. One year later, 1869, Cope published as a pre-print of the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society a description and restoration of *Elasmosaurus* with the head placed at the shorter tail which he thought was the neck. After the mistake was pointed out Cope immediately printed a notice for the receivers of the pre-print asking to send it back to Copes address and offering to replace the copy at his expense. A revised description was printed in 1870 (however with the original cover page dating the publication date as August 1869) (the entire story can be read on p.121–124). This is only one of many stories you can read in Mike Everhart's excellent book 'Oceans of Kansas'.

Those who are interested in vertebrate palaeontology or in the scientific history of the American mid-west should really get a copy. You will not be disappointed!

Everhart, M.J. 2005. Oceans of Kansas: A Natural History of the Western Interior Sea. – Bloomington, Indiana University Press. 321 pp. ISBN 0–253–34547–2. Price \$ 39.95 (hardback).